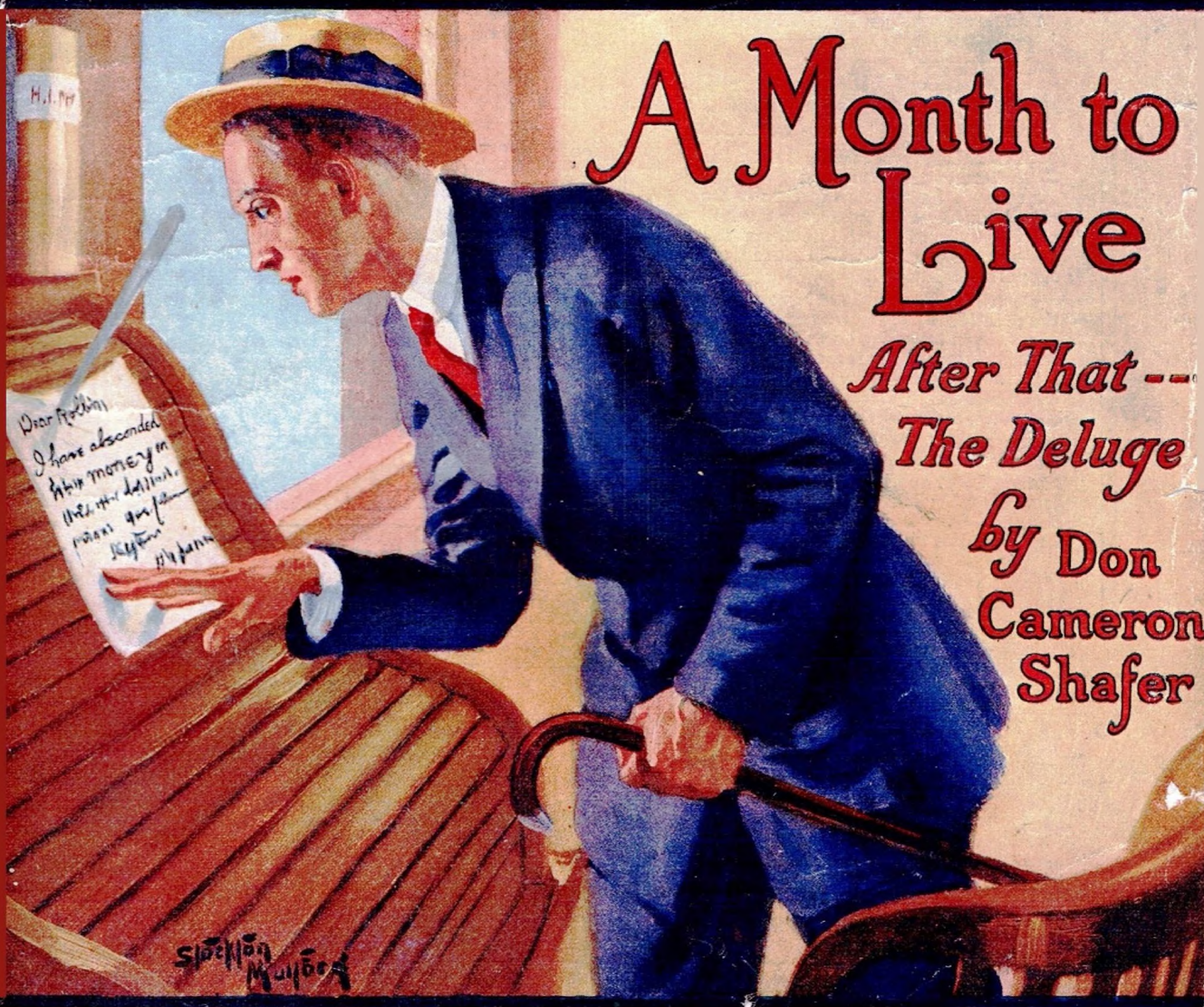
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



A Month to Live

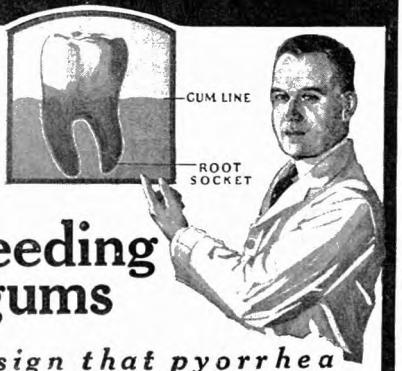
After That — The Deluge

by Don Cameron Shafer

10¢ PER COPY — SEPTEMBER 1 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

PYORRHOCIDE POWDER

keeps the gums healthy



Bleeding gums

A sign that pyorrhea threatens the root sockets

PYORRHEA works *under the gum line* where you cannot see it. From the gum tissue, the infection spreads to the root sockets which hold your teeth in place. Then the teeth loosen and fall out—or must be pulled—because their support is weakened.

Dental clinics since 1908 have proved the effectiveness of Pyorrhocide Powder as an aid in *correcting,* as well as in *preventing,* pyorrhea. It is medicated with Dentinol, a gum-tissue healing agent used by the dental profession in the treatment of pyorrhea at the dentist's chair.

Pyorrhocide Powder keeps the teeth white and clean. It has a tonic and healing effect upon the gums. It corrects bleeding gums—strengthens tender gums—hardens soft gums. It helps healthy gums to *keep* healthy.

Use this dentifrice daily—see your dentist regularly—and you can avoid pyorrhea. The economical dollar package contains six months' supply. At all druggists.

FREE SAMPLE

Write for free sample and booklet on causes, effects and prevention of pyorrhea.

The Dentinol & Pyorrhocide Co., Inc.
Sole Distributors
Dept. 35, 1480 Broadway
New York City

She is No Longer Fat

She found a way to reduce her fat. It was a way far more pleasant than dieting, exercising or the application of absurd greases and salves would have been. This new way allowed her to eat foods without danger of becoming fat again.

She found *Marmola Prescription Tablets.* They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They help Nature to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

Marmola Prescription Tablets are made from the famous Marmola Prescription. Thousands have found that these handy tablets give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

MARMOLA COMPANY
283 Garfield Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

Gibson Instruments

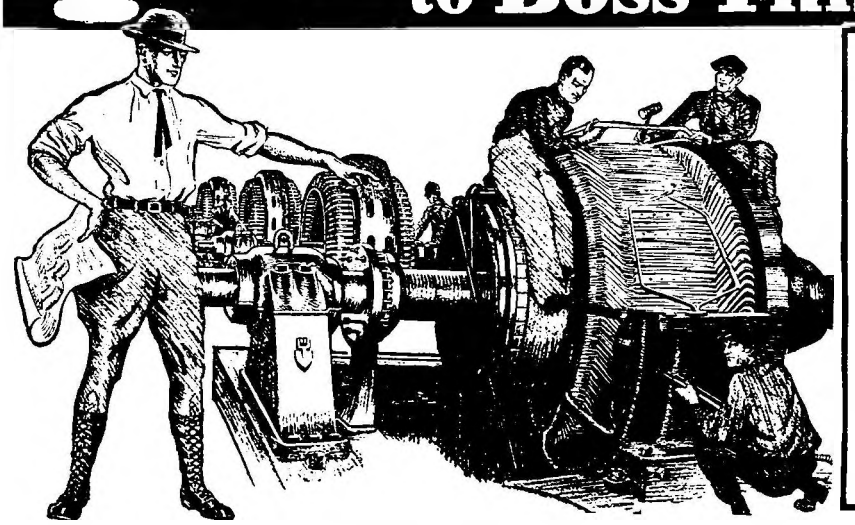
Mandolin, Mandola, Mando-Cello, Guitar, Tenor-Banjo, Mandolin-Banjo, Cello-Banjo, Guitar-Banjo, Harp-Guitar, Mando-Bass

Easy to Play Easy to Pay

Select your **Gibson** now. You can soon be playing the music of the day. Your friends will be surprised and delightfully entertained. Let us help you organize a **Gibson** Orchestra in your community. You can increase your popularity, income and pleasure by playing for Concerts, Entertainments, Church Affairs, etc. A small down payment and then $5 a month will soon pay for a **Gibson** and will furnish you with wholesome, year-round entertainment. If you have an old instrument, we will make liberal allowance on a Gibson. Write for Free Book, Catalog, Free Trial Offer, information about Wm. Place Jr. Book and Instrument you prefer.

GIBSON MANDOLIN GUITAR COMPANY
1049 Parsons Street Kalamazoo, Mich., U. S. A.

YOU Too, Can Learn to Boss This Job



EXTRA SPECIAL!

Radio Course FREE

An up-to-the-minute Home Study Course—the latest wireless developments—given free to all who enroll for my great Electrical Course **NOW.** Two courses for the price of one. Mail coupon for full particulars.

What's YOUR Future?

Today you are earning $20 to $30 a week. In the same six days as an Electrical Expert, you can make from $70 to $200, and make it easier—not work half so hard.

Then why remain in the "small pay" game—in a line of work that offers—No Big Promotion—No Big Income—No Big Future?

Fit yourself for a Big Job.

Your Success Is Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn electricity—so sure am I after studying with me, **you too** get in the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under Bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition if, when you have finished my Course you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

"Electrical Experts" Earn $12 to $30 a Day

Be an Electrical Expert

Today even the ordinary electrician—the "screw-driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary electricians—to boss the big jobs—the jobs that pay **$3,500 to $10,000 a Year.** Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs" by enrolling now for my easily-learned, quickly-grasped, right-up-to-the-minute Spare Time Home Study Course in Practical Electricity.

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. My Course in Electricity is the most simple, thorough and successful in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

I Give You a Real Training

As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to enable him to get and hold good positions, and to earn big pay. I not only know, but I give you that training—I will train you as I have trained thousands of other men who, today, are holding splendid electrical positions, or are in business for themselves as Electrical Contractors.

FREE ELECTRICAL Working Outfit With me you do PRACTICAL work—at HOME. You start right in after the first few lessons to WORK AT YOUR PROFESSION in a practical way. For this you need apparatus, **and I give it to you ABSOLUTELY FREE.** For a limited period, besides making a slashing cut in the cost of my tuition, I will GIVE each new student ABSOLUTELY FREE OF COST, a complete Electrical Working Outfit, consisting of Voltmeter, Ammeter, Electric Motor, Bells, Wire Gauge, Wire for Wiring, Tools, etc., for home and construction work.

But You Must Act Today

This offer is positively limited, and may shortly be withdrawn. Fill in and send me the coupon, or drop me a post-card, giving me your full name and address, and receive full particulars of this great offer. But do it NOW—TODAY—before it is too late.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer
CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS
Dept. 176, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer
Chicago Engineering Works
Dept. 176, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:—Send at once Sample Lessons, your Big Book, and full particulars of your Free Outfit and the two Home Study Courses—all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name.....

Address.....

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLIV CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 1, 1923 NUMBER 1

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

COMING NEXT WEEK—A New Isabel Ostrander Novel

DUST TO DUST

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ASHES TO ASHES"

THE truth was too hard to tell. But the falsehood that took its place brought Claudia Langham into the very shadow of doom. This is not a detective story, but a heart-stirring tale of a girl who finds herself clutched by the unrelenting tentacles of the law.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1923

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WE MANUFACTURE AN ARTICLE OF WEARING apparel that can be sold in most every home by men or women agents. Enormous demand and no competition. No other firm is selling same article direct to consumers. Prices 50% less than retail stores. Our agents make big profits and get them in advance. We deliver and collect. No experience necessary. Full instructions accompany handsome selling outfit—FREE. We can use part or full time workers. If you want a big money-making proposition—easy sales and no competition—write at once for full details. WRIGHT & CO., CONGRESS, THROOP & HARRISON STREETS, Dept. B-50, Chicago.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 118 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.

TAILORING SALESMEN. $50.00 EXTRA PROFIT GUARANTEED. Sell Wright's men's suits and overcoats made-to-measure $23.50—$26.50—$29.50—retail—BOYS' SUITS TOO! Lowest prices—biggest money-making line in America. Every sale boy's suit gives you live prospect for man's suit. Women buy too. You double your sales and profits. You get your profit in advance—we deliver and collect. Large samples men and boys clothes in handsome carrying case—Free. Write for full particulars. WRIGHT & CO., Congress, Throop & Harrison Sts., Dept. C-50, Chicago.

$5 TO $15 DAILY EASY—Introducing New Style Guaranteed Hosiery. Must wear or replaced free. No capital or experience required. Just show samples, write orders. Your pay in advance. We deliver and collect. Elegant outfit furnished, all colors and grades including silks, wool and heathers. Mac-O-Chee Mills Co., Desk 27016, Cincinnati, O.

Tailoring Salesmen; who will appreciate snappiest **"Direct To Wearer"** line on earth **"Virgin Wool"** custom tailored suits and overcoats $28.00. Big advance commissions. Representatives furnished a high grade tailoring shop in one elaborate case. HOUSE OF CAMPBELL, State at Congress St., Chicago.

SELL SOMETHING NINE OUT OF TEN WOMEN WILL BUY because it saves double its cost the day it is bought. 50c each. $2.00 profit on $3.00 sales. PREMIER MFG. CO., Dept. 811, Detroit, Mich.

MEN'S SHIRTS. EASY TO SELL. BIG DEMAND EVERYWHERE. Make $15.00 daily. Undersell stores. Complete line. Exclusive patterns. Free Samples. CHICAGO SHIRT MANUFACTURERS, 241 W. Van Buren St., Factory 145, Chicago.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

MAKE $75.00 A WEEK AND UP, selling our fine made-to-measure, all-wool suits, direct to wearer. Biggest values—positively sell on sight. Biggest commissions, paid in advance. We attend to delivery and collections. 6 x 9 swatch samples—all one price—furnished FREE. Part or full time men write W. Z. GIBSON, INC., 161 W. Harrison St., Dept. 47, Chicago.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—Toilet articles, perfumes and specialties. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

WANTED—Tailoring salesmen, make $60 to $125 per week. Biggest merchants in many towns have started with our lines. We are the largest made-to-measure tailoring house in the country, furnishing elaborate sample equipments, including 500 all wool fabrics and guarantee absolute satisfaction, perfect fit, best workmanship, or no sales. Write me for line and all accessories to be sent free. Tell us all about yourself. ADDRESS C. D. ALLEN, SALES MANAGER, BOX 483, CHICAGO, ILL.

AGENTS—$6 to $12 a Day. Take orders for Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Brand new. We deliver and collect. Pay you daily. Sample to workers. JENNINGS MFG. COMPANY, Dept. 1709, Dayton, Ohio.

Agents—Portraits, photo pillow tops, frames, sheet pictures, medallions, merchant's signs, waterproof and tea aprons, guaranteed hose, toilet requisites, luminous crucifixes, catalog 50 specialties free. 30 days credit. Jas. C. Bailey Co., Desk H-9, Chicago.

AGENTS—$75.00 TO $100.00 WEEKLY taking orders for our high-grade union made specially priced raincoats. $3.95 direct from factory. CONSUMERS MFG. CO., Dept. M, 720 W. Roosevelt Rd. Chicago.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write LITERARY BUREAU, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

GO INTO the Crispette business. Everybody likes Crispettes. You can make a lot of money. We start you. Write for facts. LONG EAKINS, 1951 High St., Springfield, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD FARM LANDS! Near hustling city in lower Mich.; 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts; only $10 to $50 down; bal. long time. Write today for free illustrated booklet. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING SALESMEN. MAKE $10.00 PROFIT ON SALE. Get our outfit made-to-measure suits. 160 fabrics. Six prices $18.00 to $30.00. Finest goods. Union made. Fix your own selling prices. Make all the profit you want. Undersell all competition. Lower prices than any other line—you get big profits in advance. We deliver and collect. Guaranteed quality by firm established 1880. Write for full particulars. FRED KAUFFMANN, The American Tailor, 1300 W. Harrison St., Dept. E-50, Chicago.

AGENTS—$6 TO $12 A DAY EASY. 250 lightweight, fast selling, popular priced necessities, food flavors, perfumes, soaps, toilet preparations, etc. Agent's outfit free. Write today—quick—now. AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO., 8496 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

WONDERFUL INVENTION—Eliminates all needles for phonographs. Saves time and annoyance. Preserves records. Lasts for years. 12,000,000 prospects. $15.00 daily. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 912, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

$60—$200 WEEK. Genuine Gold Letters for store windows. Easily applied. Liberal offer to general agents. METALLIC LETTER CO., 427-A, N. Clark, Chicago.

AGENTS EARN $100 WEEKLY. I WANT YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN TO MAKE AND SELL THIS HOUSEHOLD NECESSITY. So simple a child can make it. Made in two minutes, sold in less. Can be made for 5c, sold for 50c. Two to four orders to a house. Sample, plan and full directions on request. $2.50 in the United States. This is a money maker. HURRY. L. M. LONG, 138 WINBOURNE RD., ROCHESTER, NEW YORK.

MEN & WOMEN—Everywhere make $15 daily and more! Sell well known product in every household. Pkge. $1. Full or part time. Sample Free. Attractive proposition. Quick sales. Write Wm. G. Judd & Co., 4835 Wellington Ave., Chicago, Ill.

REPRESENTATIVES WANTED—four pair ladies silk hose $5.00, silk and wool heather sport hosiery and other numbers, over 60% commission, no delivery. THE LEXINGTON CO., Desk 32, Lexington, Ky.

MAKE $75 A WEEK SELLING OUR STRICTLY ALL-WOOL MADE-TO-MEASURE suits all at one amazing low price. You collect profits in advance and keep them. We supply finest selling outfit in America. Many exclusive money-making features. Tailoring, raincoat and side-line men, part or full time, get in touch with us immediately. GOODWEAR CHICAGO, Inc., Dept. 549, Chicago.

Agents: C. T. A. prices lower than ever. Suits $18.00 made to order, any size or style. Orders easy to get. Big profits. Agents outfit free. Sample suit at cost. Write CHICAGO TAILORS ASS'N, Dept. 397, Sta. C, Chicago.

AGENTS: MY PRICES LOWEST EVER. GOOD SUITS $18 UP. MAKE $5 TO $25 DAILY. START IN SPARE TIME. My free suit offer is a wonder. Send postal to R. A. ALLEN, 202 S. GREEN, DEPT. 1821, CHICAGO, FOR SPECIAL OFFER TO AGENTS.

Men & Women—Everywhere make $3 per hour and more!! Sell Iron Board Covers, Rubber Aprons, Shopping Bags, Embroidered Aprons, Sateen Coverall Dresses. Free Sample offer! American Braiding Co., Dept. A, 329 W. Monroe, Chicago.

HERE'S A BUSINESS—Requires only table room. We start and help build business. Work for us painting Landscape photo print pictures. No experience; outfit furnished. Free literature. TANGLEY COMPANY, 193 Main, Muscatine, Iowa.

$15.00 A DAY TO AGENTS, taking orders during spare time, from friends and neighbors, for our fine made-to-measure clothes. You get your own clothes at inside wholesale prices. Write today for BIG FREE SAMPLE OUTFIT. Full details will be sent at once FREE. WASHINGTON TAILORING CO., Dept. W-304, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

$50,000 PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN MADE TAKING ORDERS. Beginners can make $100.00 weekly with my canvassing spiel, experienced men make more. Free circular "Profits in Portraits" explains. Samples free. PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN, Dept. A, 673 Madison, Chicago.

HIGH GRADE SALESMEN WANTED

SELL COAL IN CARLOAD LOTS at big saving to consumer. Side or main line. Experience unnecessary. Earn week's pay in an hour. WASHINGTON COAL COMPANY, Dept. T, Stock Yards Station, Chicago.

POST CARDS

30 BEAUTIFULLY COLORED POST CARDS, New York Views 25c stamps. Colored Post Cards to order for Hotels, Restaurants, Mercantile Houses to advertise business. E. B. TROTT CO., 253 Broadway, New York.

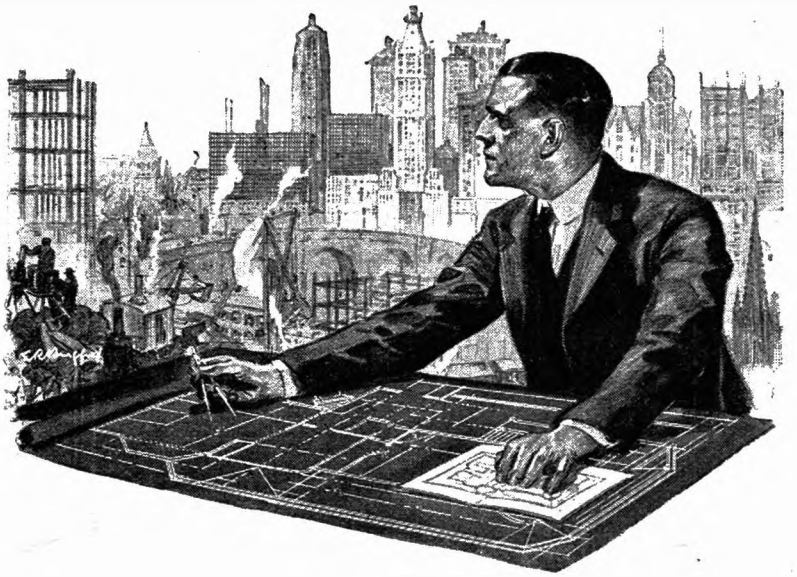
SONG POEMS WANTED

POEMS WANTED—Sell your song-verses for cash. Submit Mss. at once or write NEW ERA MUSIC COMPANY, 122, St. Louis, Mo.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403-E Romax Building, New York.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

BUILDING TRADES NEED TRAINED MEN!



Thousands of good positions at good salaries

THE building trades are still booming. Trained men are in demand at good salaries. Government experts estimate that more than four billion dollars will be spent for construction this year. *And that is only a start!*

"It will take us 12 years, working 25 per cent above normal," says John Ihlder, Manager of the Civic Development Department of the United States Chamber of Commerce, "to provide as adequately for our population as before the war."

To-day the most vital need of this great building program is men—trained men—men who can step right in and do the skilled work that building construction requires.

There is a simple, easy, fascinating way by which you can prepare for a good position, at a good salary. You can do it right at home, in spare time, no matter where you live, through the International Correspondence Schools.

There is no question—no doubt about this. For 31 years the I. C. S. has been training men for advancement in the building trades and in many other business and technical subjects.

A recent investigation of 13,298 students enrolled in I. C. S. Building Trades Courses showed that 1291 had become Architects; 246 had become Designers; 494 had become Chief Draftsmen; 2827 had become Draftsmen; 1845 had become Contractors; 211 had become Assistant Foremen; 4030 had become Foremen; 2354 had become Superintendents.

IN every instance these students reported salaries or independent incomes far greater than when they took up their studies. Many have shown increases of 300% to 500%. Some have incomes as high as $25,000 per year.

You, too, can have the position you want in the work you like best, an income that will give you and your family the home, the comforts, the luxuries you would like them to have. No matter what your age, your present occupation, or your means, you can do it!

All we ask is the chance to prove it. That's fair, isn't it? Then mark and mail this coupon.

— — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — —

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2206-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ Blue Print Reading	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Building Foreman	☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Plumber and Steam Fitter
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Plumbing Inspector
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Foreman Plumber
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Heating and Ventilation
☐ Electrician	☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Steam Engineer
☐ Electrical Contractor	☐ Railroad Positions
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ Chemistry
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Pharmacy
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Metallurgy
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Mining Engineer
☐ Toolmaker	☐ Navigation
☐ Civil Engineering	☐ Mathematics ☐ Radio

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Foreign Trade
☐ Business Law	☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Accountancy (Including C.P.A.)	☐ Teacher
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Civil Service
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Business English	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Business Spanish	☐ Illustrating
	☐ Cartooning
	☐ French

Name.....

Street Address.....

City ..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—AS A Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for TEMPORARY offer. INTERNATIONAL STUDIOS, Dept. 2366, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

BE A DETECTIVE—Earn Big Money. Great demand everywhere. Travel. Fascinating work. Make secret investigations. Experience unnecessary. Write. GEORGE WAGNER, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. WILSON METHODS, LTD., Dept. G, Toronto, Canada.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan 301, payment after securing position. C. J. O., 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. LUDWIG, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. POSITIONS GUARANTEED AFTER 3 MONTHS' SPARE TIME STUDY OR MONEY REFUNDED. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30, STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

RELIABLE MEN AND YOUNG MEN WANTED Everywhere to distribute free samples and almanacs, etc. No selling or soliciting. No experience or capital needed. Permanent business opportunity at big pay. Do not fail to write us AT ONCE for contracts and details. AMERICAN ADVERTISING ASSOCIATION, File B2, 6930 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

EARN MONEY AT HOME during spare time painting lamp shades, pillow tops for us. No canvassing. Easy and interesting work. Experience unnecessary. NILEART COMPANY, 2235, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

HELP WANTED—GENERAL

EARN UP TO $400 MONTHLY, LIVING EXPENSES PAID. WE PLACE MEN AND WOMEN; TRAINED IN SPARE TIME AT HOME FOR HOTEL EXECUTIVE POSITIONS. EASY TERMS. FREE BOOKLET. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE, 200 CARLTON COURT, BUFFALO, N. Y.

FOR SALE

FOR SALE—Argosy-Allstory Weekly, Nov. 1917 to July 1922, 18c copy. Western Story Magazine, March 1920 to March 1922, 20c copy. LONNIE JONES, Duvall, Ky.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

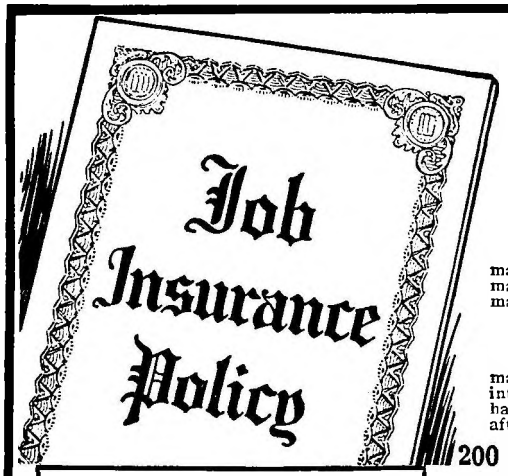
PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY. WATSON E. COLEMAN, 624 F ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

TRADE SCHOOLS

EARN $10 TO $15 PER DAY. Learn Sign and Pictorial Painting, Showcard Writing, Auto Painting, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining and Marbling. Catalogue Free. Chicago Painting School, 152 West Austin Ave., Chicago, Ill.



Insure Your Job

You can insure your house against fire. Your health against sickness or accident. Your valuables against theft. Now you can insure your job against loss—and better still you can with this Insurance get a bigger job and better pay.

Let Out

Whenever it is necessary to cut down the force—the untrained man is the first to go. Trained men—foremen, superintendents, managers, etc.—keep their jobs, but the untrained man—the man who can easily be replaced—is sure to be let out.

Where Do You Stand?

Were you ever let out? Is your job permanent? If it is not, make it so. Take out one of our Job Insurance Policies. Get into the Big Pay Class. Be a trained man yourself. It isn't hard—you can do it in your spare time. A few minutes each day after supper will do the trick.

12 Policies for Job Insurance —Which One Fits You?

1. Automobile Engineers, Mechanics, Repair Men, Garage Men, Auto Owners, Chauffeurs, Taxi Men and Students. *Automobile Engineering*—6 volumes, 2600 pages, 2300 pictures, diagrams, blue prints, etc. Was $45.00. Now $21.80—easy terms.

2. Carpenters, Contractors, Estimators, Builders, Architects, Concrete Men, Bricklayers, Structural Iron Men, Foundation Men and Students. *Carpentry and Contracting*—5 volumes, 2138 pages, 1000 pictures. Was $37.50. Now $19.80—easy terms.

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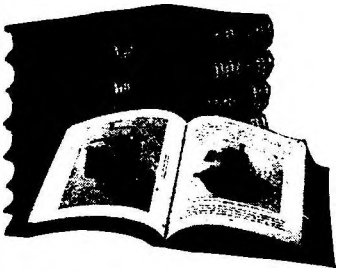

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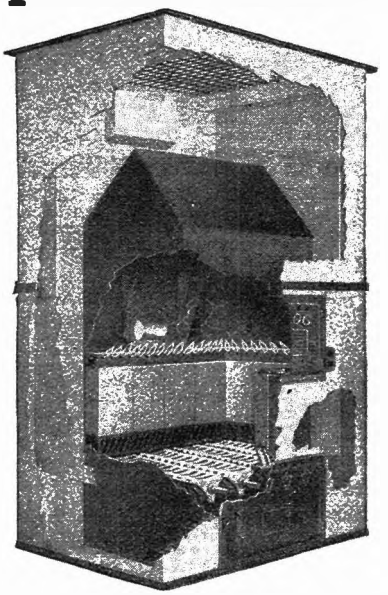

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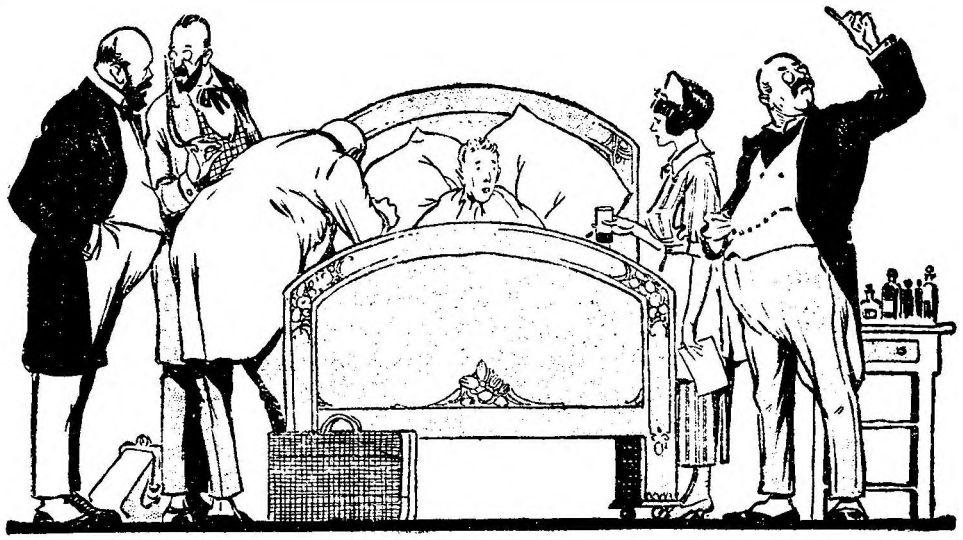


A Month to Live

By DON CAMERON SHAFER

CHAPTER I.

A MEAL AND AN INTERRUPTION.

HOW Rollin Ross Foster Livingston, all that so much name implies, but a few days before dining sumptuously and expensively in an ultrafashionable restaurant, came to be concocting a meager supper in a tomato can on the right-of-way of the R. and V., in the questionable company of Shivver Slater, is an insignificant fact—but thereby hangs this tale.

Howbeit, seated he was, in a little wooded dell on a bank of the tiniest of brooklets, where crooked birches cast their friendly shade across a shallow, stony pool. And the savory odor of something cooking floated in the evening air—perhaps to his undoing.

Alas, almost everything this young man did of late seemed to his undoing!

At this point the R. and V. reaches its greatest elevation in crossing the water shed through the Narrows. And the steepness of the grade makes it easy for certain wayfarers to board the noisy, slow moving freight trains as they labor up the hill. The ravine was gray with ashes and littered with smoke-blackened camp fire stones, proving it a favorite camping place for such migrants as the two bivouacking there.

Rollin Ross Foster Livingston, in his middle thirties, needs little description other than his full name. From this alone almost any one would correctly guess him to be tall and thin. Reddish beard on bony cheeks and angular chin is a full two weeks old, nondescript clothing is but rags and tatters. Pointed toed low shoes, curled up and broken, were never designed for tramping. Tattered silk socks hang in shreds about his thin, bony ankles. Hat has he none and his wavy brown hair is tossed and tangled as though glad to escape the routine of brush and comb.

Now Shivver Slater, his nomadic companion, is dirty with the accumulation of years. Dust is grimed right into his skin; thousands of black points are in the pores of his face, thousands of dark lines deep in the folding wrinkles of his neck but his clothing is not so ragged. Perhaps the very grease and dirt embedded in the fabric helps to preserve it. Shivver is a short, thickset, pussy fellow, with a bloated, gray and black whiskered face and little ratlike faded blue eyes. He is a professional Bolshevik. He bears no evidence of having recently fallen from grace like his companion. He is the natural born enemy of society, teaching the thin young novice how to live off the country without cost and minus the physical agony of actual work.

A little above this tiny camp is a narrow, bush-grown country road all too evidently not a main highway. A screen of blackberries purpling to ripeness hide the ravine from the road.

The tall, thin one was about to call his comrade to supper, or whatever they called it, when his ears caught the swelling purr of a light car rapidly approaching on the old road above. Fear of law and order already instilled by his outlawed companion, Rollin hastily set up a flat stone so the blazing fire could not be seen from the road and crouched low to the ground.

In spite of all these precautions the automobile stopped just above them, and two large, healthy looking young men came sliding down the steep bank. The first was tall and shapely, a bit over strong in sweat-stained blue shirt and worn corduroy trousers tucked into high lace boots. He was bareheaded, with tousled yellow hair, his large, red-lipped mouth smiling over strong white teeth. His companion was shorter, but wider, and fully as heavy; a cold, dark young man with a long, handsome face. Eyebrows and lashes were as ink—his cheeks were russet. He was in blue overalls, and the inevitable vest worn solely for the sake of its pockets. The sleeves of his worn cotton shirt had been cut off well above his elbows, displaying hairy forearms that would have been a credit to a gorilla.

The smiling young blond giant addressed himself to the wayfarers:

"O-ho!" said he.

"O-ha!" answered Rollin, in no friendly voice. "O-he! O-hum!"

"Greetings," the other began anew.

"Hail," answered Rollin. "Well met! Ava! I give you good morrow, sir."

This pleasantry, smacking of sarcasm as it did, left the first visitor nonplused for a moment.

"Your tickets—ah—allow a stopover for refreshments?" questioned the blond one.

"Our tickets," answered Rollin in the way he once had been accustomed to addressing ordinary people, "permit us to do pretty much as we darned well please."

"Such as trespassing upon the right-of-way—"

"Ah, I had no idea this was your railroad!"

The blond one grinned weakly, sniffing at the air.

"Rabbits shall not be killed, caught or possessed between the 15th of December and the 15th of September"—sniffing again.

"Ground hog," corrected Rollin. "I appreciate your—ah—concern. Doubtless you feel—ah—a certain family loss."

The face of the blond giant flushed a bright pink.

"Oh, Ed-dee"—he turned to his saturnine companion sorrowfully—"isn't it pitiful—strong men eating ground hog?"

Ed-dee nodded that it was very sad.

"You wouldn't believe it," smiled Rollin. "It actually has been worse—sometimes we do not eat at all!"

The blond one turned to his silent, stern-faced, icy companion and spoke sharply.

"Stop blubbering!" he commanded.

" Don't let your soft heart overcome your manhood in the presence of human suffering."

" Huh!" grunted the dark one in derision. " Huh!"

" I yield to your pleading, Ed-dee. You've touched my heart. Your charming eloquence, though somewhat wordy, convinces me that we should do something to relieve th' pitiful sufferings of these victims of a cruel social order. We must provide them with food, a place to sleep, shelter—work!"

" Work!" echoed the dark one. " Oh, yes, plenty of work!"

The spokesman turned again to the wayfarers.

" Have courage, comrades, there probably isn't another ranch between th' Great River an' th' Wide Ocean with so much work an' so few to do it."

" To labor? To toil and sweat?" questioned R. R. F. Livingston, who had never done this. " While I appreciate your humanitarian interest in our behalf, let me say that it is precisely to escape those disagreeable things that we are here."

" Cease! Cease!" commanded the blond visitor. " Do not beg an' plead. Work you shall have, unto th' *n*th degree. It shall begin early an' last late, an' progress throughout th' daylight hours without ceasing."

" If I have been ambiguous and cryptic," explained Livingston, " let me repeat in simple words and shorter, that my—er—companion, Comrade Slater, and myself scorn the use of our hands, a slave to toil."

" But, listen, the golden grain is calling!"

" I don't hear it."

" Oh, Ed-dee, th' poor fellow's deef!"

" Huh!"

" A terrible affliction for one so young."

Ed-dee " huh-ed " again.

" Probably he won't be able t' hear th' dinner call."

" You leave us be," growled Comrade Slater. " We don't want work."

" Oh," said the blond one. " Not?"

" Not-no-never," answered Rollin.

" Perhaps we ought not to do this, Ed-dee! Many a poor young fellow has worked a little, just t' help out in harvest, only to find th' terrible habit fixed upon him for life—draggin' him down t' th' grave."

" I'm getting rid of habits now," said Rollin.

" Duty calls and you must go," said the blond one. " Th' toiling thousands in mills an' factories—if they happen t' be workin' just now—must have bread. Come!"

The blond giant reached out a threatening hand. Weak and exhausted as he was, Rollin Ross Foster Livingston was not going to be enslaved without a struggle. He raised his thin arms.

He with the blond hair, bulking a full two hundred and ten pounds of brawn, stepped back in well feigned terror.

" Ed-dee—help!"

" Don't let it bite you, Charlie."

" Take a pair of tweezers an' hold it!"

" Gee—afraid I'll break him."

Sick, weak, and, if doctors can be believed, with only a few more weeks to live, Rollin Ross Foster Livingston did not hesitate at suicide. He struck this big, husky blond countryman on the nose, actually bringing a drop or two of blood. But feeble as the effort was, Rollin crumpled up with the effort and wilted down all in a heap.

The dark visaged Ed-dee reached out a gorilla arm and grabbed Shivver by the greasy coat collar, hustling him up the bank. His companion bundled the unconscious Rollin in his strong arms and carried him to the waiting car.

CHAPTER II.

BAD NEWS.

IT is necessary to go back a few days and review the unusual events that have transpired to reduce the principal character of this story to such strange and lowly circumstances.

We found him bivouacking with a tramp beside a railroad. We left him being shanghaied to a labor camp.

And, only a few days ago, the very name of Rollin R. F. Livingston was synonymous with quality and gentility. He was the last of the Western branch of an old and distinguished and wealthy American family. He was a conspicuous part of the ultra-

fashionable world in a large Midwestern city.

And now he is—nothing!

Without going any farther into his past than the preceding Friday week, or into any greater detail, we will know all that is necessary about the young man in question.

In that short length of time this social butterfly metamorphosed into a lowly worm.

I do not mean to imply that Rollin had a past. He did not—absolutely not! He did not fall from grace—it was snatched right out from under him. His history, up to the time this story begins, had been a drab thing, painful to recall. His days were all like so many plain beads upon a string. The only excitement possible was now that the string threatened to break! When a young society bachelor has passed the first flush of exuberant youth, and entered upon the middle thirties, he begins to discover that a world of continuous and unlimited rest and play can become very dull, even to the great folk of considerable wealth and envied social position.

Now Rollin lived the ruttiest kind of a routine. He had never done anything out of the ordinary, and nothing had ever done anything to him. He of the soft ways and softer living just sat down in easy chairs in the most comfortable places in the world while the manhood within him withered up and died.

Rollin had, seemingly, always been tall and thin—the delight of expensive tailors. He was one of the few men in the whole world to resemble a magazine illustrator's idea of a young society blade. Actually, he was just that tall and thin! Immaculate, neat, tubbed, manicured, done to the last button; suave and highly cultured, schooled in all the horrible details of social etiquette. He had a rare good sense of humor that made him a very likable fellow, but he had no business, no occupation, nor any desire for such. He didn't even maintain an office down town where he could pretend to be busy. He admitted that such things bored him to madness.

Perhaps this was due to the fact that he had never been well. Long years ago it had become a fixed habit to look upon Rollin as an amateur invalid, but a remarkably cheerful one. This had grown upon him with his years until now he was a professional invalid—and not so cheerful. Just lately four doctors of international repute had agreed that he could not live three months—and two months were already gone. They did not agree as to just what was the matter with him.

Indeed, they held four distinct and separate views, with equally long names, which the patient could not remember and was glad of it. He only knew that he could not sleep; that he had no appetite; that he seemed weak all over; that he could not possibly be any thinner and have room inside for all his aches and pains. He was dizzy in the morning and feverish at night, which only varied when his dizziness overtook him at night to leave him feverish in the morn. He was disgusted with himself and the whole order of things, and thirty days seemed a long time to wait.

Unquestionably there was something radically the matter with him physically, but all the doctors in the land couldn't tell him what it was.

They doctored him.

They dieted him.

They X-rayed him.

They shipped him away to sanatoriums and health resorts.

One of the new school tried to find a reactionary complex in his subconscious mind which could be identified as the source of his trouble. He couldn't find it.

Another told him to repeat slowly, every few minutes, a certain self-convincing phrase, and he would soon make himself believe that he felt better and better. This talking the same thing to himself all day near drove him frantic.

Others brought him new cults and new thoughts.

About this time Rollin decided that if he had to die in a few weeks he would do so in comfort and not be pounded to death by chiropractors or bored to death by searchers for complexes and new cult propagandists.

So, on Friday morning, Rollin had sneaked away from a sanatorium and re-

turned to his home, quite out of funds, a common habit, I assure you. He might be a failure in everything, including health, but he was eminently successful in the spending of money.

Rollin went straightway to the office of his attorney to have this little matter of finances adjusted. Now, Allan K. MacKintyre, an old fashioned counsellor at law, of Scottish descent, had handled the Livingston affairs as long as Rollin could remember. He had been an old and trusted friend for so many years that he was given a free hand with everything and ran things about as he pleased. Indeed, this last Livingston left everything to Attorney Mac, and freely spent every cent he could wheedle out of the old man, laughing at verbose lectures on economy. And, like so many of his kind, Rollin seemed to think that the supply of money was endless and that Attorney Mac would take care of him for the rest of his natural life.

You shall learn how he was rudely awakened on this eventful Friday!

Attorney MacKintyre almost belonged to the Livingston family. He had never done anything else but manage the Livingston affairs. As a clerk with Phinister Abrams he had shepherded the Livingston fortune and down through the years he had grown to be a wizened, bony faced, white haired custodian of the property, with a special duty to prevent the last Livingston from spending every cent and ending his days in the almshouse.

Mac loved Rollin like his own son. He knew how desperately ill the boy was. He realized that it was a time for desperate remedies. As soon as Rollin wired that he was coming home Attorney MacKintyre set about doing the thing he had long planned to do—but, heretofore, had lacked the courage to carry through.

Mac's office was unlocked, but Rollin's cheerful " Hello " was lost on the emptiness within.

Instead of the immaculate and orderly office which Rollin had always known, this was chaos. There was a litter of papers on the floor. Drawers and empty boxes were scattered about over dusty desks and chairs. All was disorder and neglect. The one conspicuous thing about the room was a sheet of letter paper pinned to the top of the ancient desk with a steel letter opener. As though drawn thither by some unknown magnetic force, Rollin waded through the scattered papers and read what was scrawled thereon in the old attorney's shaking fist.

It was addressed to him.

It merely stated in few and simple words that Attorney Allan K. MacKintyre had at last succumbed to the dire temptation that had assailed him all these years and run away with the remnant of the Livingston fortune. It was obvious that if he ever wanted to steal anything from the Livingston funds he had to do it quick.

" You poor old fool!" ejaculated Rollin; " you silly old dolt! In a couple of months you could have had everything and welcome without all this bother!"

He read the notice again.

" Poor Mac!" said he. " I'm sorry it wasn't more!"

Upon the desk lay a folded bit of paper addressed to him, which Rollin opened. It was an exact inventory of what Mac had taken. It totaled, at market prices, about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He was surprised at the way he had run through the family fortune. There wasn't much for Mac to steal. All that was left for Rollin to do was to notify the police and motor to the poorhouse. Mac was always so thorough and damnably accurate. Trust him not to skip anything. With full power of attorney he had made a good job of it. Absolutely nothing remained but—

Hold!

Rollin Ross Foster Livingston laughed aloud. He read the list of stolen property again. There was one thing Attorney Mac had evidently overlooked.

" Probably he couldn't find a buyer," laughed he.

This was the old Livingston homestead ranch, long abandoned, in a near-by Northern State, kept on the books for purely sentimental reasons. Rollin had not seen it in twenty-five years, or since his father died. This, and only this, was left him—and it was enough. When a man has but a few more days of life his requirements are

few. He did not even mourn the loss of his money, because he knew, as so many do not, that he couldn't take it with him where he was going.

Rollin drove his fine sport car up the avenue to his apartment.

But he did not enter. The key did not fit. He was forced to ring the bell. Even this did not bring the familiar old housekeeper to the door. A strange maid answered the bell, and gruffly asked him what he wanted.

"I—er—that is—I want to get in, don't you know."

She would have shut the door in his face, but an immaculately booted foot shot into the crevice.

"Go away!"

"But I live here."

"Did," answered the sour face.

"Do," corrected he.

"Not," she shook her head. "We don't know you."

"You will!" promised he.

It was destined to be a long time before he could make good on this promise!

There was no doubt that Mac had done a good job of it!

Anyway, Rollin determined not to bother the police about it. He had only a few more days to live. Mac was welcome to what was left. Why indulge in a public scandal about money he could not possibly use in the four brief weeks of life remaining?

CHAPTER III.

MORE TROUBLE.

ALMOST any other man, in the same extenuating circumstances, would have thrown himself on the mercy of friends and quietly ended his few remaining days on borrowed money in a good hospital. Rollin had plenty of such friends, from whom he could have borrowed any reasonable amount, even if they knew he never could pay it back. But there still lingered, deep within, a bit of the old Livingston pride which would not permit this. And perhaps there was also an atom of an older and more primitive instinct, awakened into life by the recent crisis, which bade him seek some remote, secret place for death. He had an unexplainable horror of dying in a hospital.

The ranch certainly was a fine place to hide—and die.

Anyway, in half a minute he had fully determined not to borrow a cent from his friends, not to impose upon them in any way. He would die, if die he must, in the house where he was born, or in the comfortable embrace of his favorite car while getting there, and not in a hard hospital bed with a hard hearted nurse nodding at the footboard and coolly awaiting either the end of her night trick or another victim.

There still remained of worldly goods the car, a well filled traveling bag, a few personal trifles such as a gold cigarette case, a ring or two—sufficient, if sold, to keep him the remainder of his allotted days. He would go back to the old and all but forgotten Livingston homestead ranch, from whence his grandfather had come to the great city when the city was not.

There he would die as befitting one of the family.

Rollin Ross Foster Livingston had never had a single worth-while adventure in his life. Absolutely nothing but the dullest commonplaces had ever happened his way. Carefully guarded all his youth, with a retinue of servants always and ever about to look after every imaginable want, he had never had the opportunity for adventure. He had traveled safely and comfortably; he had watched races, the popular college games, driven a perfectly safe car on perfectly safe roads, and done the safely usual days without end. Once or twice he had drunk too much, but not much too much. Once or twice he had been out with sporty parties, but no harm done, and after all, very commonplace and unexciting.

But now the Great Adventure lay but a few weeks ahead, and much was destined to happen in the days between. The wheel of Fortune had begun to turn, and everything was changing.

To-morrow morning there would be no one to lay out his clothes for him, to select his tie and socks. His prescribed breakfast, if any breakfast at all, with

calories and vitamines nicely calculated, would not be so carefully served to tempt his recreant appetite. No faithful servant would shave him. He who had always had everything now had nothing, and would soon have even less!

All the adventurous, tingling, exciting events he had missed, after five and thirty years of commonplace, were now about to happen! The things he had never done before he was destined to do, and things he had always done as a matter of course he would never do again.

How much all this worried the young man is attested by the cheerful air he hummed—something to do with going back to the farm—as he sank safely back in the cushions of his car. You wouldn't think a young man pronounced as good as dead, so newly robbed of all, could be that merry; but he was.

He even thought it a fine, humorous touch of fate that a wizened, white whiskered old man, driving an old white mare hitched to a closed cart, should go by at this very time, bawling in a cracked voice: "Ol' clothes—I cash ol' clothes!"

There is an old proverb to the effect that the longest way round is often the shortest. True enough, I grant you, and yet people in this hurlyburly age are always and forever taking short cuts. Who pays any attention to proverbs, anyway? Rollin would have gone back to his ancestral home and never run a wheel off the macadam road. But this would mean a three hundred mile trip. Whereas a shorter cut, with only a few miles of good dirt road, would save him more than fifty miles.

The macadam road was like any other macadam road—crowded with cars and devoid of human interest. Every strategic point had its signboards. With devilish ingenuity the road always kept out of view of the best scenery. But macadam has little to do with adventure. You've got to seek that in the paths and country roads. It was not until Rollin came to the dirt road that the Fates took an active interest in his changing career.

The dirt road climbed easily up a long grade. It was not a bad road, as dirt roads go, but it would not permit any speed. It wound along the base of wooded hills, close to noisy streams, in narrow valleys. It was guarded by old fences and tangled brush. Strange birds flitted back and forth in front of the car or called at him from the thicket. Once a rabbit hopped along in front of him until threatened by the wheels. There were steep pitches and thank-ye-marms, little level stretches, but always reaching for the heights above. At last the car topped the rise to where a great expanse of country rolled before the eyes.

Here the low wooded hills were clothed in varying greens and a few tilled fields of the narrow valleys took on the golden brown of ripening grain. And the heavy gossamer mists of late summer were already veiling the higher hilltops beyond. Houses were few and scarce—a few weatherbeaten little homes and gray barns on the lower slopes; a few tiny white single story frame houses in the narrow valleys.

The scenery from this height was wonderful, but Rollin did not see it. His eyes were fixed on the narrow road, and just where the view could be seen at its best a front tire blew out with a resounding reverberation.

Rollin's lips moved, but he was actually too weak and tired to curse. He had been driving hours and hours. He climbed slowly out and walked around to the flat tire. It was not until then that he noticed the big chested drover standing beside the road, a long whip in his hairy right fist.

"Oh, hello," greeted Rollin. "Beastly old tire—"

He was not a very amiable drover. He drew down his bushy black brows over little black eyes, and his heavy black mustache dropped at the curled ends into a belligerent mask. He was big, but not fat, a great bulk of a man with grimy hands like red cheeses.

"Stand!" commanded the stranger.

"Barely able," answered Rollin feebly, but pleasantly, clutching at the car.

"Deliver!" thundered the drover.

"Extra charge of ten cents, sir."

"No funny stuff now—business," growled the drover.

"Total strangers—business and I."

"Suspect 's much. Will introduce you. I've no time to waste. Dig!"

"Dig?"

"Yes—dig!"

"Dig what?"

"Dig down!" threatened he. "Shell out—give up—pass over your valuables."

"Well, well," gasped Rollin, "am I being robbed—again?"

"Again—heh?"

"Just robbed—thoroughly—this A.M."

"If you've got anythin' left worth takin', pass it out."

"Well, I knew that sooner or later you holdup men would have to work in two shifts."

The drover's heavy eyebrows fluttered up and down menacingly. He succeeded in looking very frightful and scary, but all was lost on Rollin, too tired to note these little details.

"You don't seem to use much tact—"

"Tacks—a paper o' 'em!"

"So that explains the puncture?" smiled Rollin.

"Explains the one in your tire, but not th' ones you'll get in your skin if you don't hand over that sparkler."

Had this happened a year before Rollin would have laughed off the highway robbery as a good joke. But now it was different. The few dollars he had in his pocket, the few valuable things he had to sell, represented his entire fortune, and quite naturally he was loath to part with them. His courage was greater than his discretion as he reached for a large wrench that lay on the floor of his car as the only weapon at hand.

Not until then did Rollin realize that the burly ruffian carried a long whip familiarly known as a "mule skinner." The whip cracked like a pistol and the leather tip bit through Rollin's trousers, through his tender skin and seemed to explode right among the nerve centers of his left leg.

"None o' that!" commanded the highwayman as Rollin straightened up with a spasmodic jerk and smothered a scream of pain. "Lively now!"

The long whip cracked within an inch of Rollin's nose.

"Hand over that sparkler!"

The whip touched him on the arm like a burning flame.

Rollin had never been beaten. He had never been forced to do anything he did not want to do. He had never felt the sting of whips. In his weakened condition he could not defend himself. There was no one there to help.

He drew off the ring and tossed it into the road. The traveling bag, his watch and money followed. He even threw out his fountain pen and a folding pocket toothbrush.

"Hell!" grunted the robber, looking at the folding brush. "Ain't that cute? Me with a teethbrush! Next thing you know I'll be takin' some one's garters and white choker! Is this all?"

"It is," confessed Rollin, sick with pain. "You—you were a bit late."

"Late!" growled his highwayman, throwing the "teethbrush" in the road. "I've been waitin' three hours!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE THIRD JOLT.

IF our Rollin had been poor but proud a few minutes before he was even poorer now and properly humbled.

A trusted friend and employee had robbed him of home and fortune. And now a burly highwayman, masquerading in the guise of a drover, armed with a whip and a paper of tacks, had removed from him every last cent and thing of value except his clothing and the sport car.

But he did not sigh. When a man has already lost a comfortable fortune and is also about to lose his life little things like disks of hard metal and bright stones do not matter. There was a spare tire on the back of the car. There was still gas in the tank. With a handful of brush he swept the tacks from the road and changed tires. This operation took about all his remaining strength, but he succeeded and climbed back in the car.

Once more he was speeding on his way northward, smiling bravely in the face of adversity.

Now as evening crept down from the

wooded hills and the cool flush of night settled into the narrow valleys; as the bull-bats cried out overhead and joyous thrushes began their evening requiem, there stirred deep within the tortured vitals of Rollin Ross Foster Livingston a new and totally strange sensation. This was alarming. When one is satisfied that one has all the pains and symptoms available a new sensation is disquieting. It was like unto nothing Rollin had ever experienced before. It was not a pain nor yet an ache, but a mysterious something that seemed to be clutching at his very vitals, feeling around in his middle for the sources of life in order to strangle it. At first he thought it might be the Thing various doctors had prophesied might steal upon him unawares at any time. A cold sweat started out on his bony brow, his hands trembled so he was barely able to keep the car into the narrow road.

At this critical moment, with a prayer of relief on his thin lips, he rolled into the shaded street of a tiny village and almost of its own accord the car slowed down and stopped before a little tavern of ancient days.

Perhaps there was a doctor here.

It was a tiny village, with less than fifty little houses clustering close to the shaded highway under the spread of giant elms and maples. The tavern was a two story, high pillared old white hostelry with a double decked, wide veranda and a homelike hospitable atmosphere.

But in all that village there was hardly a sign of life. The forge was dead in the blackened interior of the open blacksmith shop. The hammer was silent in the old wood colored cooper shop. There was no one on the street, no faces at the windows. It was like the abandoned village of some fairy tale. A yellow cat lay sleeping on a white fence. A shepherd dog lay open-eyed, but too lazy to move, by a damp well curb.

The magic of this is easily explained.

The villagers were all at supper.

A rich aromatic fragrance floated on the still air—the delicate odor of a fat steak being pan-broiled.

It was then that the strange sensation racking the body of the young man in the sport car, which had nearly scared him to death, was properly diagnosed to his numb senses.

He was hungry!

Yes, sir! Laugh if you want to—but Rollin had never been hungry before! He didn't recognize the sensation at all. He had sensed the faint desire for food, but never the acute need of it.

Rollin turned the car in beside the tavern porch and got out hurriedly. Then quite as quickly he crawled weakly back. He realized that to purchase food in a strange place money is necessary and he had not a cent. And now that he had not the means of satisfying the cravings of hunger, like the fiend it was, the gnawing mounted swiftly to new agonies. He knew now how the starving explorer must feel—why the shipwrecked sailor goes mad!

And then, good Lord! It occurred to him that not only was he starving without the means to secure food, but that he was actually forbidden to eat. He was on the strictest kind of a diet.

This was complicated.

The first whisper of rebellion voiced itself deep within. Those damned doctors—he wondered if they had ever been hungry—actually hungry?

Never before had Rollin had to think about where his next meal was coming from or how he would pay for it. Now he had to consider both, and he did some heavy cogitation in a very few minutes.

He unstrapped the punctured tire from the back of his car, hooked it on his thin arm and advanced into the hotel. It was deserted. He threw the tire on the little counter near the cigar case, making as much noise as he could.

His ruse was successful. In a minute or two a pudgy little old proprietor appeared, swallowing the last morsel of his supper. He was a smiling, pleasant-faced, rotund, little old man in his shirt sleeves and faded blue galluses, a rim of white whisker fringing his face.

"Drive right in and hitch!" scowled he, glaring at the tire.

"I'd like to," sighed Rollin. "Do you think the rest of the car will be safe out there?"

"Safe?"

" Free from the annoying familiarities of strangers with innate desire for other people's property and instincts for moving it swiftly away from here?"

" You mean stole?"

" 'Tis a hard and bitter word, but even so."

" Ain't nothin' been stole around here since Ezra Twilliger's horse was took 'way back in '87."

" Oh, yes, there has!" corrected Rollin.

" Has?"

" Eh-huh!" nodded Rollins. " Several things have been took, pilfered, purloined, stolen—right off my delicate person—a watch, a ring—"

" Oh, my goodness grief!"

" Which advances the criminal record thirty-six years."

" I'll call up the sheriff—"

" No, no," protested Rollin. " Call a second-hand man."

" A wot?"

" An uncle—a rags-and-o' iron man—a junk dealer."

" Fer wot?"

" I wish to negotiate a barter, an exchange, a bit of premoney purchasing when men swapped this for that. Now here is an automobile tire, not new, but still worth, let us say, the price of a supper."

" Oh," smiled the proprietor. " You want to eat."

" Such a little word can hardly express it. Such is my beastly craving for gross food that I cannot think of a solitary thing on earth good to eat that I don't like and only yesterday I had trouble finding anything that appealed to my taste on a menu two feet long."

" Hungry folks don't need anything but an appetite to eat here."

" Then I qualify. I've got all the appetite I should have had scattered over thirty-five years."

The proprietor called loudly down the hall to wife and daughter:

" Cynthia—Cynthia—a guest, an' a mighty hungry one, too. Rosella, set a place fer a delegate from starving India."

" Wait," begged Rollin. " It's only fair to tell you in advance that I have no money."

" I kin remember when nobody had any money in these parts."

" But I'm as hungry as seven years of famine and as dry as an old boot in a dusty garret."

" Ah—dry, eh?"

The proprietor pulled a long face at this and rocked slowly back and forth on his two feet, glaring at the newcomer.

" Take off your disguise! I know ye!" he cried suddenly. " You're a rev-a-noo officer!"

" No," said Rollin. " I'm only one of the hundred million common criminals."

The proprietor was still glaring.

" A couple of rev-a-noo officers dropped in town last spring."

" Did?"

" Uh-huh. One dropped in front of the post office an' t'other farther up th' street."

" Oh," said Rollin. " You can tell by the honest look in my eye that I'm not a revenue officer."

" Then how much is it a case?"

" An empty pocket is proof enough that I am not a bootlegger."

" Then," said the old man, " that leaves me one more guess—you're a customer."

" I am. My craving just now," said Rollin, " is for sustenance."

" Oh, hell, you can eat anywhere, any time, but you can drink only when you get a chance!"

" I'm not taking any chances."

The old fellow shook his head sadly

" I'll believe this is prohibition," said he, " when I see another feller refuse a good drink."

" Tempt me with food!"

" We all have our little weaknesses. If yours is th' fleshpots, come on."

It was just the kind of a supper the doctors say is bad for the human interior—and, therefore, just the kind that all of us enjoy best. There were hot biscuits and raspberry honey; cold roast pork and creamed potatoes; a pitcher of rich cream; sweet preserves and sour pickles and peppery things that do taste so good. Pie—two kinds—a plate of rich cake—coffee!

If Rollin had ever eaten such a meal in the presence of his physicians they would have reduced his time on earth to hours in-

stead of weeks, and perhaps even to minutes. They would have expected him to curl right up and die. But, strange as it may seem, he never felt more content, more physically fit than he did when he had thus recklessly eaten all he could possibly hold of forbidden things and pushed back from the table to await the first symptoms of disaster.

And the best of it all was, he didn't care if it did kill him! He was going to do just as he darned well pleased these next few weeks.

Nothing happened.

Beyond the surprise to his interior he felt no alarming symptoms. Probably with a little practice, he reflected, he could eat more next time! He lighted a cigarette and walked out of the dining room to the porch—only to stop there in amazement.

The cigarette dropped from his open lips; his eyes bulged. The sport car had disappeared!

CHAPTER V.

ROLLIN OVERDOES.

THIS country tavern, true to type, was nothing more than a comfortable club for the men of the village where they played pool and seven-up, smoked, and visited. It was dry.

A suspicious looking stranger couldn't buy a liquid thing there. But the local residents didn't seem to notice that it was any more arid in that section of the country than it had been since the first white trader swapped a bottle of let-down rum for a package of beaver skins.

The average visitor leaned up against the bar and ordered a sandwich. The proprietor sat up a dirty plate holding a dark object that looked like something left behind by the Cliff Dwellers and only recently discovered. Then he opened a cool bottle. A foamy substance ran out of it—and the sandwich was forgotten. A quarter rang in the till. The dusty, thumb-marked plate with its prehistoric relic disappeared below until next time.

Now and then some one asked for a cigar, closing the right eye, and a coverless cigar box was passed out from which he selected a dark, dry cylinder, that had been previously manhandled. He threw down fifty cents. Immediately a small glass appeared, holding a fiery amber fluid. Sometimes the customer threw the cigar back in the box, as often as not on the floor, but he never attempted to smoke it. These decoys were never lost.

It was while the ancient sandwich was hopping on and off the bar, like a Mexican jumping bean, that the proprietor told of Rollin's misfortune.

" An' he was held up this afternoon by a robber and robbed," announced the proprietor. " Big feller in a black mustache—took everything he had right down to his toothbrush."

" An' now some pesky varmint has took his car—"

" It was right there when he went in to supper—an' now she's gone—slick an' clean."

" Well," grinned Rollin, " if I am at all careful of my clothes, and sleep in them from now on, this ought to be the end of robbing me."

When they tried to notify the county sheriff by the rural telephone the line was dead, and not until the next day did they discover that the clever thieves had cut the wires on both sides of the village.

All Rollin had left in the world, besides the clothes he stood there in, was the punctured tire. And no one could agree as to how much this tire was worth, as it could not be used on any of the light and lighter cars of the neighborhood. The smith allowed it was worth three dollars of any man's money, but he was naturally prejudiced against automobiles. Other figures varied from five to eight dollars, but no one offered to buy it at any price. Even the proprietor refused to accept it in payment for the supper.

" The devastation was awful," said he, " but I guess I can stand th' loss."

" Now, if there was only a tin peddler—"

Rare as this species of junk dealer has become, almost as extinct as the prairie schooner, the words were no sooner spoken than what should come poking over the top

of the hill into town but an old white and rawboned nag drawing a faded red cart. Bent over the worn dashboard, the leather lines dangling loosely in his knotted hands, was a little, waspish, bewhiskered old fellow, the tin peddler himself.

The horse stopped of its own accord before the ancient hostelry. The peddler clapped a red handkerchief to his face and blew his nose long and noisily.

"Kin you put me up?" he mumbled with toothless, shrunken jaws.

"I kin," nodded the proprietor.

"Cash or trade?"

"Cash—not fer no tin wash basins."

"Rates?"

"A dollar an' a half."

"Horse included?"

"Say," said the proprietor, "you ought to make a big success at peddlin'."

"Hope so."

"Do you—er—buy old rubber?" asked Rollin anxiously.

"Sometimes?"

"How much will you give me for this tire?"

"Where's the rest of your car?"

"Some one stole it—just a few minutes ago."

"Oh, stole it!"

"It certainly disappeared."

The tin peddler man examined the tire carefully.

"Two cake tins an' a bucket," offered he.

"What in bloomin' blue blazes do I want with tinware?"

"Sorry—force of habit. Old rubber is 'way off now. How about a dollar ninety-five?"

"I'll look the other way and you steal it," grinned Rollin.

"If you want me to give you some money, ask right out fer it."

"I don't want you to give me anything but a square deal."

In the end the tire sold for four dollars and a quarter.

And with the proceeds of this sale Rollin exercised the trained sandwich for all hands and retired to sleep in a soft bed.

To-morrow was another day.

He did not worry.

The next morning he continued his journey northward afoot.

The aforementioned doctors had specifically stated that the patient should be very careful and not overdo—not, not that they ever imagined that any such advice was necessary.

Their patient, as they well knew, had never overdone, and probably he never would.

Rollin was supposed to drop right down in his tracks if he should happen to overdo the slightest bit.

He was also cautioned to keep out of the hot sun, on account of a threatening cerebral congestion. He was to avoid all excitement because of his nerves.

And here we find him in the middle of a hot morning overdoing at the rate of three miles an hour! But you can rest assured that in his present plight he is giving never a thought to the advice of his physicians. What need for a man to worry about dropping down dead if he knows he hasn't a cent and will starve to death anyway in a day or two?

Rollin had eaten another of those heavy meals well calculated to destroy the weak and ailing.

Never before in all his life had he been able to eat more for breakfast than a few swallows of orange juice and a carefully poached egg. And, as often as not he left half of the egg.

Now as he walked along in the cool of the August morning, over the narrow roadway yellow with soft dust, he was sustained and strengthened with the comfortable feeling of a well filled stomach and the pleasurable sense of inward security and content. He has eaten a large dish of berries drowned in cream, a large blue bowl of oatmeal and more cream. He has actually devoured seven brown buckwheat cakes, two thick pieces of ham, two fresh eggs, and two cups of black coffee.

The frontier has slipped away into history; the great wilderness has been crowded back to the very ends of the earth; the Wild West lives only on the screen; but adventure is not dead. Something is just bound to happen to a thin young man walking along a country road in the cool of

the morning, without a cent in the world, without family, without purpose other than to seek a suitable place to die.

Impossible as it may seem in this day and age of automobiles this appeared to be a flivverless road. Not one came huffing and puffing up behind to offer the young man a lift and keep him from overdoing. The road was strangely deserted that morning; once or twice a horseman rode by, and now and then a heavy freight wagon passed him going in the wrong direction.

Rollin was already tired. His shoes bit at his heels. His thin legs were beginning to wabble just the least bit. For the first time he could remember he felt moisture trickling down between his sharp shoulder blades.

He was actually perspiring. Worse, he was positively sweating!

It was about this time he came to a little wild meadow beside the road, where cottonwood trees grouped to form a green canopy over a gypsy encampment.

CHAPTER VI.

MORE OVEREXERTION.

NO horses were tearing at the sweet grass by the roadside. No gayly painted covered wagons were parked along the green arches of the trees. This was a modern gypsy camp.

The tents were pitched among the gasoline cars. Plunder and tents, wee ones and all, were gathered about a large camp fire. There was the scent of burning weed in the air, the sharp crackle of flaming logs, the chatter of women and children.

Once, years ago, Rollin had seen a gypsy encampment near his ancestral home, but never such a camp as this. It looked more like a traveling junk heap. The horse traders were no more. The gas traders had taken their place. No longer do they deal in questionable horseflesh, but in more questionable second hand cars! Otherwise the band had not changed the slightest in looks or manner of deportment. They merely smelled of gasoline instead of horse.

A dazzling flutter of brilliant dirty rags ran out to meet Rollin.

"Come, my lad," the gypsy woman called. "Cross my palm with silver and I will look into thy future."

"My future," said Rollin, lingering in the shade, "can be seen with the naked eye because it is limited to a matter of about three weeks."

"Much may happen, sir."

"You frighten me!"

"And not all of it good, either."

"I should be astounded if it were."

"A bit of silver, sir!" she pleaded.

Rollin looked at the hand.

"A bit of soap would be more appropriate."

"You will have bad luck!"

"Ah, you're no fortune teller—you're an historian!"

Another woman came and Rollin was soon surrounded by bright colors until he looked like a May pole. They were all talking, pulling him by the arms, by the coat. Soon Rollin felt a deft hand in his pocket.

"I, too, am a fortune teller," grinned he. "You are going to meet with a great disappointment."

And they did.

Rollin noticed the long string of automobiles parked under the trees. And, like every automobile owner in the world, he looked them over with a critical eye, identifying the brands and the vintages. It was then he noticed his own speed boat standing behind a screen of alder bushes, all a-glisten in a new coat of paint. But it was his car for all of that. He knew it like a brother.

"There are better times ahead," cackled one witch.

"So far ahead I would need that fast car to catch it," laughed Rollin.

She called her man, saying that here was a gilly to rook and a hard-faced, black-whiskered old gypsy came from a dirty tent. The old chief had but recently fallen upon evil days. His own fortune tellers had failed to warn him. Late in life he had seen his business wither up and die. He was discouraged, desperate—almost compelled to go to work and earn an honest living. This imported horse jockey had been left with a long string of horseflesh on his hands just at the very time when the automobile reached the ranch. So, one dark night, with

tears in his eyes, he abandoned all these old horses by the roadside, including one that was almost a good horse. Then he made the women rip up the lining of their seventeen petticoats each and produce the wealth of the tribe. An old man, he began to learn a new trade. The grye-femmler became a gas-femmler. Being an apt pupil, and not at all particular as to the origin and history of a car, it was not long before he had accumulated a string of nondescript automobiles fully as long as his famous string of horses.

Rollin walked over to his own car and examined it closely.

"How much?" he asked.

"Thousand dollars"—beginning high enough to permit of a discount if necessary. "It's a ver' fine car.

"Oh, yes," said Rollin. "It always ran remarkably well."

"Got nice engine."

"Where'd you get it?"

"Bought it—farmer—long way north of here."

As the chief reviewed the title Rollin sensed that the fellow hadn't stolen that car—at least, not from Rollin. Otherwise the band would not have lingered in the vicinity. But there was evidently some suspicion that all was not well or the car would not be resplendent in quick drying paint.

Rollin bethought him of going back to the village and notifying the county authorities—but it was a long, weary tramp back and he was tired and his heels were barked. Yet he wanted that car. It was his car, and he was going to have it. But how? Then old man Adventure nudged him, whispering: "Take it!" Why not? True, he was alone and there were any number of these dark complexioned highway pirates in the offing; but to steal that car—to get away with it—that would be adventure!

"Go on and do it!" Another nudge.

By crackie, he would!

He looked at the tires, he inspected this and that, all the time planning the details of his get-away. He climbed in the seat and tried the cushions. He took hold of the wheel.

"It fits fairly well," said he.

"Made for you," nodded the gypsy, speaking the truth by accident for the first time in a deal.

"It was," said Rollin. "Mind if I start the engine?"

The old chief had been in busfness a long time. He never let a stranger mount a horse unless he held the bridle, or one of his comrades was near by mounted on a better horse. He looked at the alder brush ahead of the car—he gave an imperceptible signal to his fellow conspirators.

"Start her up," said he.

Two tribesmen sauntered carelessly toward a big car and sat down in the front seat.

"It sounds good," said Rollin.

The gypsy began to tell what a good engine it really was, what it could do, how powerful, how wonderful, how well equipped—and being naturally reckless and careless with the truth he really went further than the manufacturer had dared in his advertising.

Rollin backed the car up a few yards—he ran it ahead a few yards—just as though he was only testing it out.

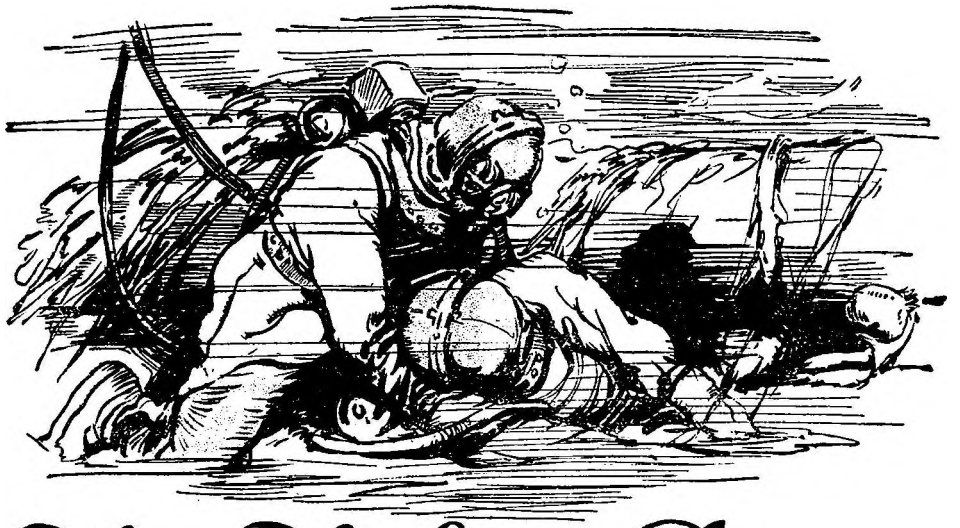
"I'll take eight hundred for it," said the gypsy.

"I'll give you," said Rollin, "a race for it!"

He threw in the clutch and the car leaped like an antelope at the bushes, charged through them, and dashed for the road. The old chief was spry for his age and he made the running board, but the swishing alder saplings brushed him off like a fly from a stampeding steer.

Right then Rollin started something besides the car. Its given name was trouble.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Ten Fathoms Down

By LIEUTENANT C. DONALD FEAK

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

BILL DUNN, skipper, filibuster, gun-runner, was walking slowly down the main street of Colon. Close at his heels, followed his Chinese servant, Ah Jung, who was, so to speak, covering up the rear. Dunn himself shot rapid glances ahead at the swarm of curious tourists who were gazing in rapturous unbelief at Oriental silks, Panama hats, ivory fans—made in Jersey City, U. S. A.

Dunn was still on the sunny side of thirty. His face was tanned and seamed by tropical suns, and trade-wind-driven salt spray. A straw hat, a Palm Beach suit much the worse for wear, and a pair of white shoes completed his outward appearance.

Ah Jung, on the other hand, might have been anywhere from thirty to eighty. In spite of several years' association with his beloved Cap'n Bill, he still clung to his native garb, and his pigtail. That in itself caused him to look like any other countryman of his.

Dunn, dejected, and evidently about ready to enter into the brotherhood of the tropical beach comber, let his eyes rove around the street and its flowing mass of white-clad men and women. The hot, bright sun accentuated the whiteness of their garments which blinded; accounting, perhaps, for the sudden swoop of two of its members on Dunn and Ah Jung, despite their watchfulness for such a calamity.

"Bill Dunn, by all that's holy!"

Dunn felt a sudden grasp on his shoulder, and swung about to meet the eyes of an old friend, Dewey FitzGerald.

"Fitz!" Dunn ejaculated, returning the violent handshake. "What brings you here?"

"A love stricken father, and his yacht, Olympia," Fitz answered, laughingly. His large, round face reflected his honest joy at finding Billy Dunn. FitzGerald was fair, fat and thirty. His beaming, good-natured face served as a warning to all obese people

to shun the tropics. It was streaked with perspiration. His rotund stomach struggled with an enormous belt, and his collar had long since wilted.

" Billy, for the love of mud, let's get out of this! I'm slowly frying in my own grease. Whoa! Wait a minute. This is sis."

Florence FitzGerald held out a slim hand. In spite of the heat, Dunn found it pleasingly cool and holdable. She smiled her welcome from clear hazel eyes. Dunn suddenly felt his shabby Palm Beach suit which had heretofore been good enough, shrink to his knees, and split up the back. He stammered his welcome and pleasure. Jerry interrupted Dunn's mental torture with an invitation to join them in a drink at the hotel, which lay three blocks distant.

Florence seconded the invitation. " Yes, do come, we've been looking for excitement. We are here for pleasure alone. I am beginning to doubt the tropics, and their capabilities for adventure. So far, we've only had the ship's cook to furnish us with thrills. We've just bailed him out of jail."

" I wish I could come wtih you; fact is, I have an appointment down the street," Dunn said. " Maybe some time later."

FitzGerald accepted the refusal good naturedly, and gave Bill Dunn his hotel address, and literally swamped him with invitations, all of which Dunn refused, not without genuine regret. The sore spot in his scheme of things was indeed sore. It was lack of finances and a wherewithal to silence the inner man.

Dunn had said nothing of his recent run of hard luck. It was like him to keep his troubles to himself. He shared them with Ah Jung, however; Ah Jung saw to that. He watched the two forms of his friends disappear down the street, then turned and walked away, followed by the faithful Jung.

When he reached the sea wall, he stopped and sat down. Curiously enough, his thoughts were mixed with hazel-eyed girls, and the vast necessity of procuring a roof for himself and Ah Jung.

Some weeks before he had been making the run from Para on the Amazon River to Colon in his own schooner, the Defender, and had struck an uncharted reef. They had been picked up and deposited in Colon. After paying off the crew, Dunn found himself on the ragged edge. Now, his money belt and the vessel's log were the sole articles remaining from the wreck. His crew had drifted away to ship under other flags, all but Ah Jung. Ah Jung was Chinese to the core, which accounted for his loyalty to his captain. His wide, yellow face was gravely turned toward Dunn. He sat a few feet away, calmly watching Cap'n Bill trying to arrive at a decision. He had, an hour previous, warned Bill that the hotel proprietor had been hinting at payment in advance for their single room. Their rent would expire at noon.

In spite of the tremendous necessity of concentrated thought, the white man found his mental machinery all out of gear. A moment's struggle, and he discovered a pair of hazel eyes, and an invitation to tea. With a sudden effort he shook off the thought and tried to blackjack his mind into an effort toward the solution of his problem.

Jung had a moment before spoken of the dire necessity of Cap'n Bill snapping out of it. He had hinted that an undercurrent of gossip had reached his ears. It persisted in Bill Dunn's mind.

Ah Jung's statements were not to be disregarded. Many times the yellow man's hunches had been instrumental in saving his neck.

Ah Jung looked deeper than the surface; his Oriental mind turned things over and over before dropping them. Evidently the sinking of the Defender had puzzled him. Dunn had attached the blame to a sunken reef, and let it go at that. Not so Jung. There was a Chinaman in the wood pile to him. He had puzzled and torn the thing to shreds. That, coupled as it was with frequent and complex mutterings, had awakened a germ in Ah Jung's mind. He heard the currents of gossip on the water front that missed Bill Dunn. The wreck of the Defender, and the consequent stir of news had not died as it should have, in a region where wrecks are accepted at their minimum value; rather, it had persisted. This, then, was the germ that Ah Jung's receptive mind had assimilated.

Jung had said that he thought it damn funny that a rock should hop about all over the ocean. He suggested that they go take a look-see. He had called attention to a schooner, the Moon Glow, that had sunk under similar circumstances some years before.

What was it that was eluding Dunn's memory? Something was dancing temptingly out of reach, elusive and desirable. There was a connection some place.

" My ambitions, Jung, right now, are to get good and drunk, and then go over to Coconut Grove and help the rest of the bums raise the roof!"

Ah Jung looked at him and announced finally: " Velly good, Cap'n Bill, catchee num 'ah one ship."

Dunn eyed the smooth-skinned Celestial a moment, then added wearily: " Yes, I guess you're right, Jung; I can't even corrupt you."

Ah Jung was the throttle on Bill Dunn's many sided moods. It was Jung that shouldered the heaviest burdens—not because Dunn was shirking, but because Ah Jung had a manner of stepping into it and gently relieving his master of many troubles. He seemed to take a huge delight in worrying over Cap'n Bill's money matters. So smoothly and cleverly did Jung rule Dunn that the white man was hardly aware of it. These lectures on respectability were many and frequent. Dunn took them from Jung as a matter of course. Jung acted as a conscience to him when his indolent mind refused to worry over trifles.

The Chinaman made Dunn feel that he was vastly inferior to him. And Dunn was forced to bolster up his own courage to remain a little higher than his servant. Occasionally Jung raised his own standard and Bill Dunn was forced to do likewise.

Dunn began a systematic search for the elusive something that escaped him. He recalled that the Moon Glow had sunk off the Guiana coast after striking a reef. But where was the something? If she had been loaded to the guards with gold and diamonds, perhaps there would be—

" Holy Moses!" he yelled and jumped to his feet. " I have it! I have it! Jung, you yellow ape! Ivory! The Moon Glow had a shipment of it below decks when she sank! I've—maybe we've found the reef she piled up on. The lost reef. I have the position that we struck in. It's in the log. The log is in the hotel. Excitement. Zowie! Chop-chop back to that hotel and get the logbook before the proprietor bends a preventer-lashing on it." He was shaking the yellow man excitedly. He continued to speak jerkily of the Moon Glow and her treasure. No wonder tongues had been wagging. " Make it snappy, Jung!"

But Jung had already disappeared and was slipping rapidly up the street, his body bent forward, and his feet working like snowshoes in the dust.

Dunn hesitated only long enough to straighten up his worn clothes, then darted away on a rapid walk for the Avalon Hotel. His mind was in the skies. What luck! Fitz had asked him to take a cruise with them. Here was a ship—a quest that pointed straight toward wealth, and several weeks' companionship with a girl that strangely lured him. He collided several times with pedestrians, each time mumbling an apology distractedly. Forgotten were his dreams of raising roofs in Colon's tenderloin Coconut Grove.

II.

BILLY DUNN found Fitz about to expire with the heat. He sat on a cane chair on the veranda, glowering moodily out over the hot, sun-baked approach to the hotel. A drink stood at his elbow, with tiny beads of perspiration on the glass. He had defied convention and taken off his coat. A native bell hop lolled lazily in the shade of the building.

Fitz managed to squeeze a smile for Dunn and sufficient effort to hold out his hand. " You're a Trojan, Bill. How the deuce do you stand this heat? Florence is in her room panting, while I haven't enough pep left to pant. I'm slowly melting away."

Dunn dropped into a chair and wiped his forehead. " Listen, Fitz; you asked me to take a cruise with you. Well, here I am; let's go!"

"Not so fast, Bill—what's the hurry? Canal police after you?" Fitz exhibited for the moment a surprising amount of energy by sitting erect.

"No, nothing like that. Listen, and I'll give you the whole story." Dunn drew his chair closer.

"Bill, if you have any regard for me, don't ask me to do anything else but listen." Fitz murmured and slumped back again.

"Shut up! About ten years ago, before the Canal was open, a schooner was bound for Colon. Her name was the Moon Glow. The skipper of the craft was a no-good square-head named Hansen. He neglected to take his position as he should have—too much Bicardi, I suppose. Well, he piled up on a reef on the Dutch Guiana coast and sank. He and his crew escaped with their lives. When he was picked up, he had absolutely no idea of the position of his ship when she struck. Now, here is where I come in. About three weeks ago, I too hit a reef and foundered, in what I believe is the same position. I have the geographical position of the reef that *I* struck. There aren't many reefs uncharted; that is what I am pinning my fate on. It has just occurred to me that that perhaps is the same reef which the Moon Glow struck, with a shipment of elephant ivory in her. In other words, we may have the position of a good many thousand dollars' worth of ivory, all for the taking. Maybe you think it strange that an old hay-pile like the Moon Glow should have a shipment of ivory in her. It is, I'll admit; the explanation that came out, if I remember it right, was: she had taken the shipment from a steamer that had grounded and was transshipping it to Colon, where one of the liners was to take it to New York. Now, Fitz, here is some excitement all handmade for you."

Dunn gave his order to a sleepy eyed waiter and mopped his brow again.

Fitz sat erect once more, and finished his drink before speaking. "You mean to say we can go treasure hunting?" he gulped. "After *real* treasure? Boy, I've been reading about it for years. Have you got the map drawn in blood, with skulls and compass directions? If it ain't, it's a fake. All treasure hunts have 'em. I'm from Missouri. It's got to be in a desert cave or I don't bite."

"Shut up!" Dunn snapped. "This is the real thing. We've got to shake it up and get there without any monkey business, too, Fitz; Jung said something about the news going the rounds. Tell your sister I'm inviting myself for dinner, and then come with me. I'll have to ask you to lend me enough money to finance my half of the trip. Fact is, Fitz, I'm stony broke."

FitzGerald rose to his feet. "Do you mean to sit there, Bill Dunn, and tell me you're flat? And me sitting here with a flock of the old man's money in travelers' checks. You're a plain jackass. Bring on the treasure!"

"Oh, I don't owe any one any money, Fitz. Pinched a trifle, you see—"

"Yes," interrupted Fitz, "I see. You're a blasted liar, Bill Dunn. You and that Chink of yours are dead broke."

Dunn flushed a trifle. Fitz saw it, and hastened to ease him. "Remember the time you pulled me out of that scrape at college? You don't? Bill, you're a fool! I remember it as plain as if it had happened yesterday."

"Cherubic liar," Dunn said, smiling—"same old Fitz. Shake it up and tell Miss FitzGerald we'll be back in time for dinner. Ah Jung is at the hotel trying to snake my logbook out before the hotel proprietor gets his hands on it."

"Well, anyway, Bill, we'll go fifty-fifty on this, and I'll advance the money, and we'll have the fun anyhow. Wait a minute," and Fitz disappeared into the interior of the hotel. When he returned a moment later his lethargy of a few minutes before had vanished, and they hastened off.

"Bill," Fitz panted after five minutes of walking, "heave to a minute. I've got sand in my condenser. Nobody knows of your logbook, do they? What's the hurry?"

Dunn slowed his pace before answering. "Sure! That's what awakened the suspicions of Ah Jung. He heard a rumor. Anybody that remembered the Moon Glow's sinking, and had a grain of sense, could get the connection in short order."

Their walk had drawn them into the cheaper quarter of the town. Squalid buildings squatted on deep-driven piles. A host of native children shrieked and screamed at play. The native tomtoms had begun their evening racket. They were in the heart of the neighborhood before Dunn turned to the right and halted before an unimposing structure of two stories. A sign, printed in Spanish, told the weary wayfarer that it was the home of honesty and fair play, good will and righteousness. The building itself seemed to shout a denial. The children that played about the door resembled small editions of satanic deviltry.

A sharp-eyed Spanish woman glanced at them suspiciously. When Dunn and Fitz had disappeared up the rickety stairs, she scuttled rapidly to the rear and hissed something at two men. Chairs scraped—a curse sounded in English, and a door opened and closed silently. Two men faded into the gathering dusk.

Dunn led the way toward his room. The door stood open a trifle. He strode inside.

Crumpled against the bed lay the still form of Ah Jung, a deep gash along the side of his head. His hand grasped the empty leather cover of the logbook.

"Quick, Fitz—help me lift him up." Dunn grasped Jung's head and shoulders in his arms. Fitz assisted, and they put the Chinaman on the straw-covered bed. A pitcher yielded water; FitzGerald's white shirt served as a bandage, and in a few minutes Ah Jung was sitting erect.

"What happened, Jung?" Dunn queried, holding aloft the empty cover of the logbook. "Who attacked you? The log is gone."

Ah Jung essayed a foot on the floor before speaking. "Plenty devil knockem hell slam bang! Logbook fly away plenty quick!" He steadied himself.

"And that puts the kibosh on my little scheme," Dunn added gloomily. "I can't remember the position to save my life. As usual, I get the muddy end of the stick."

"Plenty mo' sticks, Cap'n Bill," Jung said philosophically. "Me catchem look-see that damn t'ief man. You an' Missa FitzGe'ld get all fixee. Ah Jung see Wing Lo, all same tong man. That t'ief man make monkey business wit' buzzsaw. Goo'-by!"

With that, calm, imperturbable Ah Jung turned and slipped noiselessly down the stairs. When Dunn and FitzGerald got below, he had disappeared.

"Funny Chink," Fitz commented. "I'll bet the thief will think he fell into a buzzsaw before Jung gets through with him. Strikes me he has a tremendous amount of self-reliance."

"He has," Dunn put in. "I don't know what I would do without him. You know, Fitz, that yellow-skinned heathen possesses something that I lack. Somehow or other, he seems to drive me on, like a gasoline engine. It wasn't three years ago that I met him in the New Hebrides. I was in a blue funk, ready to become a tramp, a dope fiend, when he jolted me out of it. Since then he has always been behind me, driving me on. I think he would tackle the whole Panama police force, machine guns and all, if it would help me any. Black-water fever got me once, and when I got out of it I found Ah Jung at my side, delirious himself. Every one else had fled. That yellow, godless Chink stuck it out with me. Somehow, the feeling that has grown up between us is bigger than just brotherhood. He's been a pal—everything that a lot of white men I know couldn't be." Dunn stopped speaking, and they walked on in silence toward the hotel and dinner.

Somehow, FitzGerald felt that he knew this impulsive, free-hearted man alongside of him better. He felt a little better himself—as if a mental weight had been lifted from his mind. He resolved to tell Florence of it. His sister, he knew, would understand it better than he.

Yet Fitz thought that Dunn relied too much on his Chinese servant. In spite of his adventurous calling of filibustering and gun running, Dunn still depended on Ah Jung for things that should have been natural for him to do alone. Dunn was the sort of chap that needed some one to give him a shove now and then; lacking this, his type went to the gutter. His nature was loving; his natural caution hidden in a blaze of belief in his fellow creatures.

An idealist, a dreamer, and a doer—only with a momentum from the outside. It was not in him to worry; his happy-go-lucky code had no room for it.

Dunn let FitzGerald lead him to his room, where he struggled into a clean shirt and collar; size was managed by numerous pins. A razor smoothed his cheeks, and when he returned to the restaurant, Florence was agreeably surprised. During the meal, neither Fitz nor Dunn spoke of the impending cruise.

They were sitting on the hotel veranda when Ah Jung returned. His face wore a smile, but his lips were grimly silent. From under his spacious blouse he drew the log-book. Dunn held it to the light, running rapidly through its pages. Each day of the month was marked with a separate page, telling hourly the direction of the wind; the force of the current, the condition of the sky, its forms of clouds, and at last, he found the page showing the last entry.

"Here it is, Fitz, I was just about to write down the nine o'clock readings, when we piled up. See, here is the eight o'clock position. From that position I ran for a distance of eight miles on a true course of three hundred and ten degrees, and after making the eight miles from this position, I struck. It's simple navigation, by dead reckoning, and we should come within a square mile of what I have a hunch is the resting place of the Moon Glow."

Dunn was tracing the course with his finger.

"You can see," he continued, "the value of the log now. Here is the coast of Dutch Guiana. Here is Port of Spain, where I was heading. And here—yes, here is where our robber friend copied the position and the course, so he, too, could find the Moon Glow." Bill Dunn pointed to an ink smudge across the white page. Turning to Ah Jung, he asked:

"Where did you find it, Jung? You haven't taken much time."

Ah Jung stood in the shadow and said: "Wing Low, fixee plenty quick. Mo' bettah Cap'n Bill get plenty wiggle on. All same belay chin-chin to-mollow."

"There you are, Bill," Fitz put in, "waiting for your dynamite to awaken you. Let's go down and break out Solomon. He's the ship chandler, and is never closed."

They secured their hats and walked rapidly away. Dunn called to Ah Jung to get his dinner and wait for them there.

Bill Dunn spoke a bit regretfully. "I suppose, Fitz, you think I am rather a black sheep, don't you?" Without waiting for a reply, he continued a little defiantly: "Well, maybe I am. I chose the sea when I left college. I was sick of the commercialism of life ashore. Some folks tell me politely that I am indolent, and I guess that's true, too. If it wasn't for Jung I guess I'd be a beach comber by now. Once we were on the beach together—flat broke. I managed to hock my watch, then I headed for a hop joint. I was disgusted, and ready to quit. I was in the wooden bunk with the pill all cooked by the Chink proprietor when Ah Jung came in. What he didn't do to that place isn't worth mentioning. Anyway, he dragged me out of the wreck, and saved my bacon. Always he has been sort of a spur to me—sort of a force for good. He makes me think I am better than he is, and then he sets his own standard, and I must live above that. He insists on the supremacy of the white race, in my case." Dunn fell silent.

"I understand, Bill; forget it," Fitz answered impulsively. They passed the edge of the water front. A schooner was getting under way. Lights flashed, and voices shouted. Dunn thought it a noisy ship. Aft, he could hear the skipper shouting insanely.

They reached the ship chandler's, and Dunn pounded on the door for admittance. A faint light showed in the back room, the rays visible through the dirty window. The barred door was opened, and Dunn found himself staring at an old man wearing a skull cap.

Dunn explained that he wanted to purchase a diving outfit and gear. The door swung open, and they entered the musty interior. From overhead swung strings of garlic, small boat anchors, sledge hammers, marlin spikes; the floor was littered with a dozen sizes of manila line, shackles, an-

chor chains, carpenter tools, and medicine chests. The shelves sagged with all manner of gear that a ship and a crew might need. Over the counter, Dunn explained that he needed the suit immediately. The old man led them to a corner, and pointed. "There's an outfit, all ready for service. For vat should you vant it? Eh?"

Dunn ignored the question, and pulled forth a diving helmet. It was made of heavy brass and copper. Three windows of half-inch glass would furnish eye holes for the diver. The suit was made of heavy rubberized canvas. The wrists closed with vulcanized rubber ends that gripped the flesh as a garter might, and kept the water out. There was a pair of leather shoes with wooden soles, the wood covered with great, heavy lead plates to enable the diver to overcome his own buoyancy caused by the air inflating his suit.

"But I want at least two suits," Dunn said. "I'll hook up two air lines to the one pump."

The chandler led them to another corner. With unerring precision, he found what he sought out of the clutter of a thousand odds and ends. "Dis is all I haff. To-night I haff sold more diving suits than in two years. Vy? Vy is vat I vant to know?" He raised his shoulders, the palms of his hands flying outward.

"You did?" Fitz whirled on him. "To whom?" The Jew was startled by the sudden attention shown him.

"I never seen dot feller before," Solomon hunched his shoulders. "He said to deliver dem to de schooner Mary right avay."

"And you did?" prompted Dunn.

"Sure, bizzness iss bizzness." Again he raised his torso. "Vun hour ago I break out mine boys undt deliver dem."

"Then break them out again and send these two suits complete, and that pump to the yacht Olympia immediately," Fitz ordered. "We sail in an hour. Never mind the gaskets, we'll put them in ourselves. Just throw in a few extras. Here's a hundred dollars now; the rest if you get them to the ship on time."

Hurriedly they left the chandler, and walked rapidly back to the hotel. It was nearly midnight when they reached it. Fitz was thanking his lucky stars that he had restricted his crew to the ship for trying to wipe Coconut Grove from the map the night before. But he wondered why he had not thought of sending word to the chief engineer to raise steam.

They found Ah Jung sitting on the steps, defying the native manager to oust him. His mainstay in the argument was that Cap'n Bill had told him to wait there for him, and there he was going to wait, though the heavens fell.

The manager retired when Fitz appeared. After Jung, seldom angered, had cooled down, Fitz told him to get a boat, and notify the engineer to raise steam. Ah Jung answered pridefully. "Me tellum all'eady. All fixee. Missy all'eady, too. Velly good make chop-chop."

"Right you are, Jung," Dunn said, already halfway into the hotel, "chop-chop it is. I'll get Miss Florence and part of the luggage. Fitz, you and Jung hike for the water front, and hail the Olympia."

Bill Dunn met Florence at the foot of the stairs.

"What is all the excitement about?" she asked. "Your servant had me called, and then piled all my baggage into the hall. I'm all flustered. I dressed so hurriedly, I feel like a reputation fresh from an old woman's sewing circle, all picked to pieces."

"Didn't you ask for excitement?" Dunn queried, a smile on his face. "Well, here it is. The Olympia sails in an hour or two, for Treasure Isle. Fitz has gone on down to the dock."

He collected her luggage, piled Fitz's on a house boy, and started for the water front. There were no carriages available, and the trip occupied five minutes. When they arrived, Fitz had hailed the Olympia, and the dory had come out for them.

The Olympia belonged to Fitz's father. FitzGerald, Sr, according to Fitz, had his eye fixed on a widow, and not wanting his children to criticize his method of approach, had sent them off on a cruise.

The Olympia was painted white. Two masts raked aft. A clipper bow and a single funnel, coupled with a clean sheer-strake, gave her the appearance of a whippet.

As Dunn passed her engine room, he glanced below. A beautiful triple expansion engine filled his seaman's eye. Her brass work and steel were clean and shining. He could hear the *whirr* of the dynamo, and the regular *thump-thump* of the sanitary pump. Above it all sounded the rapid buzz of the racing blowers.

After Florence had gone below, Fitz led Dunn about the decks.

"She'll do eleven knots, Bill, not much, but enough to get anywhere I want to go. You must meet my chief engineer. Splendid old cuss!" Fitz thrust his head down the skylight and shouted.

The old chief, Murphy, came up, wiping his hands on a piece of waste. "We'll be ready below in about two hours," Murphy reported. "Would have been sooner, but a couple of the coal passers jumped ship, and we're short handed. Unexpected, isn't it?" The old chief cocked his eye at Fitz.

"Yes, it is," Fitz answered. "As a matter of fact, Murph, we're after treasure. You'll have to hook her up after we get outside the breakwater, because some one else is also headed that way, and the first man wins."

"She's running like a watch, sir," Murphy announced. "I'll warm her up in an hour. I must go below now and keep an eye open." He disappeared down a steel-runged ladder. "Splendid old chap there, Bill," Fitz said. "There isn't a better engineer afloat or ashore. After we get out, you must cultivate his friendship. His favorite amusements are: whisky, music, and more whisky. The old cuss goes to church regularly, just to hear the organ."

Slowly, the steam pressure rose; the ship chandler's boat came out with four sleepy-eyed native boys, and the two diving suits. A tackle had been rigged by the deck force, and the heavy air pump was hoisted aboard. Murphy was turning his engine over slowly. First a few revolutions ahead, and then a few in reverse. The hiss of the anchor windlass, the clank of the chain, as it came over the controller, the shout of the bo'sun, as he reported the tend of the chain, and at last the shout: "Anchor aweigh, sir!" floated to the bridge, and Fitz rang slow ahead on the engine room annunciator.

Past the quiet ships swinging at anchor, their lights glowing in the night, past the breakwater, and then into the Caribbean Sea, where Fitz set the course approximating northeast.

"I've just looked the Mary up in the register," Dunn said, as Fitz came back from the bridge and into the chart room. "She's under the American flag, and has an auxiliary kicker in her. She has a fair wind, and I judge is making a clean ten knots. We'll have to overtake her before she makes the reef."

"We'll do it," Fitz declared confidently. "The Olympia can do eleven knots at a pinch. The Mary has, perhaps, a forty mile start on us. She cannot keep up her present pace if the wind fails. Besides, we simply must get there first. There's the price of a new schooner among the Moon Glow's bones, plus a pretty bank account on the side."

They conversed a while on the night's work, and then Dunn bade Fitz good night, and went below. The steady rhythm of the revolving screw lulled him to sleep in surroundings that were the height of luxury.

When he awoke it was broad daylight. One of the ship's stewards was knocking on his door. A quick bath, clean linen, and a suit of white duck which the steward had produced from an abandoned linen locker, and which fitted Dunn perfectly, completed his transformation.

The beautiful tropical morning started with a perfect breakfast, and Dunn went on deck with a new feeling of elation. Point Draquie had disappeared in the haze that covered the horizon. The sea, a sheet of turquoise blue, seemed to wash the hull of the Olympia with a soft velvety sound—low and distinct. Overhead, floated a mass of cirro-cumulus, faintly tinged with pink.

The lookout had not sighted the Mary as yet, although he scanned the unbroken line of the horizon continuously.

They spent the morning shooting at bottles thrown into the water. Dunn took it upon himself to teach Florence the art. From the bridge Fitz glanced aft, and saw Bill with his arm around her shoulders, holding her rifle steady, and giving her instructions. Bill Dunn, he knew of old.

Wild, easy going, generous—it had been a hard job at college to get him to buckle down to work. Some part of this indifference was due to the accomplished wiles of a chorus girl. Bill had fallen madly in love with her, swore to marry her on his graduation day, and in the meantime, to work like blazes to finish. His infatuation died, fortunately, just before the last days of his senior year. Fitz did not know whether he wanted his sister to become interested in Dunn or not. After a minute's cogitation he smiled. His likes and dislikes were of small moment to her. After all, he thought, all Bill Dunn needed was some one to work for. Something to add an impetus to his indolent nature; and judging from the way Bill was teaching a certain young lady to shoot, Florence was just that impetus.

Fitz was thirty—five years older than Florence. His life, since attaining his majority, had been one long pursuit by cap-setting women. All with an eye on the immense fortune of the FitzGeralds. He had no fears that Bill Dunn was fortune hunting. Bill had lost several fortunes buying champagne at a hundred dollars a bottle in the Klondike, purchasing gold bricks in New York, and showing a lot of Kanaka kids in Honolulu a good time diving for gold pieces. No, Bill was totally blind when it came to wealth. Bill, Fitz could plainly see, was more in need of long, manly arms just at present—two didn't seem to be enough.

Bill's attention was distracted by the sudden and wild appearance of the Olympia's Chinese steward, Joy Ling, who came fleeing and yelling down the deck. That hatch at Dunn's elbow disgorged the savage, disheveled form of Ah Jung in deadly pursuit. Dunn sprinted and caught the enraged Jung by the collar and demanded an explanation. Jung reluctantly submitted to being led aft before speaking.

"Him"—Jung pointed at the cringing form of Joy Ling in Fitz's grasp—"him pigtailed chink—make monkey business wit' Cap'n Bill's l'oom. Him plenty say no my business to fixee yo' clothes. Say no my business fixee yo' razoh." Jung's manner was most dramatic, as if he was denouncing a traitor, exposing a murderer. Ah Jung did not understand. This base son of a flower boat keeper, this offspring of a sampan coolie had defiled his Cap'n Bill's clothes by touching them. This wart, and son of a wart, had interfered with his—Jung's—most solemn duty—that of cleaning his Cap'n Bill's razor. For such, Jung recommended that he be boiled in oil, hamstrung, bastinadoed, and then hung on the foretruck for the gulls to pick.

Dunn, with a well hidden grin, solemnly warned both miscreants that a second row between them would result in both of them being expelled to the depths of the ship to shovel coal.

They returned below, casting black looks at each other.

Further complications threatened to develop at luncheon, when one of the Chinese boys tried to remove Dunn's plate. This, Jung had always done when the finances of this curious pair permitted. No base interloper was going to interfere. Even Dunn's most glassy stare failed to affect the angered Jung. He wished it to be known that he was the slave of Cap'n Bill Dunn.

This, then, was Ah Jung's method of forcing the indolent, easy going Bill Dunn toward better things. The force that kept him from the gutter. By debasing himself, Ah Jung forced Dunn to keep himself above the level of his servant. Dunn's checkered career lay before his meeting with the cunning Ah Jung, the servant who loved his master enough to debase himself to make a scaffold of his own life so that his Cap'n Bill might rise to better things.

When temptation came to Dunn, Ah Jung was there, a living question mark, a torch that showed the way. Jung made it his business to see that he was present. Dunn took a watch that afternoon and spent it on the bridge gazing aft at a cool, slim figure under the awning in a steamer chair, instead of looking dead ahead as all wide-awake watch officers should do. He felt rather ashamed of himself. His mind, in spite of him, went back to the days before he met Ah Jung.

He tried to bury his thoughts in a longitude problem by Marcq. St. Hilaire. After a fruitless hour's mental anguish, he found

an altitude difference of several hundred miles—a ridiculous figure. He gave it up and returned to hang over the rail in an effort to catch a glimpse of this amazing girl, who professed ignorance of firearms, yet shot too well for an amateur.

His thoughts were abruptly broken by the engine room annunciator ringing violently. Then he felt the engine vibration slow and stop. Over the voice tube from the engine room he heard Murphy raving. Dunn sent the helmsman aft to take in the patent log, supposing it a warm bearing. Soon he heard a thumping and stamping. Turning, he saw Murphy coming toward the bridge, his face covered with grease and oil.

"The dirty bla'guards! The low down dock wallopers! Some snake has been fooling with the lubricating system," he burst out from the foot of the ladder. "Mr. Dunn, we've a spy aboard! Me engine's cryin' fer oil. Some dirty low life has plugged the lubricating system, and nearly burned me engine bearings out."

"Maybe it was dirt," Dunn suggested.

"Dirt?" Murphy shrieked. "Dirt? In my engine room? No! 'Twas a handful o' emery dust! Oh, my eye, I'll have his blood for it!"

Dunn watched him go below, swearing vengeance. Soon after he felt the engines take up their song again. Fitz came up on the bridge.

"What's the trouble, Bill?" he asked.

Dunn explained.

"Looks darned funny," Fitz said. "How did the spy, if there is one, get aboard? None of my men can be bribed. They've been with me for years. I haven't seen a strange face either. Murphy is dreaming. Those things happen occasionally."

"But you forget it was emery dust," Dunn reminded him; "it is possible that a bit of dirt might have crept in, but emery dust—never."

"That's so, too," Fitz admitted. "We must investigate."

"Looks that way," Dunn agreed. "If we don't get him now, he'll probably hit the nail on the head next time."

They called the second mate, and Dunn turned the watch over to him.

He and Fitz combed the ship from stem to stern, from truck to keelson. The lifeboats, chain locker, storerooms, the crew's quarters—all to no avail. The engineer's force swore fiercely that emery dust wasn't thrown in oil lines by spooks.

The new menace offered meat for much thought. It was like the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads. They sent another search party through the ship. It was unsuccessful.

"If it was anything but emery dust I'd say it was an accident," Dunn declared. "This is some of the Mary's doing. How the deuce did they find out the Olympia was going to take me along?"

Much mystified, Fitz organized a roving patrol to continue the search every hour of the day. He took two men to a watch, and had them stay on duty four hours, always on the move throughout the ship. One of them carried a shotgun. The other a flashlight.

"That's all we can do, Bill," he said helplessly. "Some one on board is intent on trouble. You and I will have to keep a watch ourselves." Murphy, with vile curses, cleaned his engine bearings, oil lines, tank, and put in new, clean oil. It took a solid ten hours' steady labor for all hands.

Bill went back to the bridge and took over the watch again. He spent the rest of his duty pummeling his brains for an answer to the problem. The spy might scuttle the ship from under them. He hardly thought he would do that, however; it would expose him. He rather thought the fellow would damage them to such an extent as to prevent them from reaching the reef ahead of the Mary. Luckily Murphy had found the emery dust in time.

The next morning, when eight bells struck, the chief mate came up to relieve him, and he turned over the course. When he reached the after deck, he found Fitz stretched out in Florence's chair.

"Sis has a headache, Bill; gone below out of the glare. This tropical sun on the sea when it is near the prime vertical raises the deuce with her. Sit down: I want to talk to you."

Dunn crossed his legs, and sat down on the deck.

"How much water do you suppose we will have to work in?" Fitz began. "I am asking under the supposition that our friend the spy doesn't get us first."

"Probably not more than ten fathoms; thirty-five fathoms is about the limit for a human being. The sea pressure is about one hundred pounds to the square inch at that depth. It takes a good strong man to go thirty-five fathoms down. I imagine the reason that the former salvage companies did not find a wreck was because it slid off on to a shelf, or disappeared altogether in water too deep for diving."

"And you think you can find it?"

"Yes, I think so; I'll rig a drag of a wire cable. This, you know, Fitz, is all in case we overtake the Mary. She is a fast schooner, with a clean pair of heels. Still, if the wind backs on her we won't be long overhauling her. That gasoline kicker of hers doesn't add more than five knots to a sailing speed. Let's hope she gets a head wind before morning."

Fitz seconded the motion fervently. He had vistas of Bill Dunn with a new-found wealth. Fitz did not know how he was going to make Dunn accept all the money accruing from the Moon Glow's cargo.

The pulsing throb of the triple expansion engines, and the occasional clang of shovel on steel deck plates came through the ventilators, entertaining Dunn after Fitz had disappeared below. He was dilly-dallying with an alluring thought. For the first time in his life he wished that they might be wrecked on a tropical island. The possibilities were unlimited. Here was a girl, a delightful lack of eligible suitors, and an indulgent brother. In his mind's eye he saw himself slaying a bloodthirsty leopard, and laying its carcass before her with a gesture of nonchalance. He even rehearsed the necessary pooh-pooh with which to silence her grateful appreciation. He visioned night attacks of savage peoples, with himself as the only available lattice work for clinging vines to drape themselves to.

Joy Ling interrupted his thoughts with the announcement that dinner was served. It promised to be a peaceful affair, until Murphy burst into the cabin, his face white with rage.

"They're at it again!" he yelled. "They've been foolin' around the safety valve this time. They broke the lock on the thing, and set the adjusting head to four hundred pounds pressure! They plugged the gauges with waste so's it wouldn't show the right pressure."

Fitz looked at Dunn, his face bespeaking his worry.

"Enough to blow the boilers to Kingdom Come," he admitted.

"It's a dirty, scurvy trick," Murphy bawled, pounding emphasis with his wrench. "It's enough to wreck us so's we'll never get started again. Oh, the villain! Me poor boilers; they was ready to hop out of their rockers. Bad cess to the divvil!" The Irishman was raging mad.

When Murphy had gone, Fitz shook his head. "What will the fiend do next? We've got to stop him, Bill. We simply *must* find that man. Twice we've foiled him. The third time we may not be so lucky. We'll have to start another search and keep it up until we are successful."

Dinner remained neglected. They turned over plan after plan. At last they decided that each would take charge of a search party, and each start from one end of the ship. Fitz called the crew to quarters immediately, and organized the search. He started aft and Bill Dunn took the forward end of the vessel.

Ah Jung was doing a little detective work of his own. He stood for a moment after the two parties had gone, leisurely rubbing his shaven head. Then he went below, and hid himself away in the center of the ship. This position developing into nothing, he drew out the keys to the storeroom doors and entered with much fuss and noise. He switched on the lights and shook a flour barrel lustily, whistling the while. He selected a can of tomatoes, and turned off the light, reducing the storeroom to darkness. He jumped to the door, opened it, and then slammed it shut, remaining poised on his toes *inside*, hardly daring to breathe.

As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he noticed a faint patch of light on the deck; above it, he saw the opening of a ventilator leading out on the upper deck. Mysteriously enough, the patch sud-

never think of speaking to Miss Flo'ence.

To all of which Dunn listened with an even greater amount of surprise and dumfounded unbelief and went away muttering something about: "Cheek! The monumental gall—"

The rest of the afternoon Dunn and Fitz spent forward, regasketing the air-pump, overhauling the air-lines, rigging the life-lines for the divers, and oiling the bayonet joints.

One device which interested Dunn was an automatic cut-off so arranged that should the air supply of the diver be interfered with, say, by an attacking shark, or a broken hose, the automatic cut-off functioned and closed the inlet in the suit to prevent the water from entering, thus allowing the diver a very few minutes to get himself to the surface and into new air. They renewed the straps on the heavy lead-soled shoes and finally tested the entire outfit by a dress rehearsal. Several of the crew were called upon to turn the pump while Dunn helped Fitz into the suit and fastened the helmet in place.

Each part functioned beautifully. All except Fitz; he came out of the stifling hot apparatus, swimming in perspiration. Dunn tried the second suit. They attached twenty-five fathoms of three-inch Manila line to each suit, to serve as a life-line in case of trouble, then put the suits away and went aft.

The day before their expected arrival at the reef Dunn caught Ah Jung just leaving Florence at the stern.

"Jung," Dunn hissed in his ears, "if you don't stop that lying about me, so help me Hannah, I'll hamstring you!"

"No," Jung protested. "No lie, Cap'n Bill. Tell 'um alla time plenty tluth. T'ly fo' fixee ma'llage; tell Missee Flo'ence damn plenty topside skippah. Tell yo' velly good man."

"All the same, Jung, you let me do my own talking. If you don't"—Dunn stopped impressively—"I'll take Joy Ling as my servant."

The threat had the desired effect. More so than Dunn had intended. Ah Jung's mind refused to encompass such a thing. It was impossible! He went below to think it over. He crouched down against Cap'n Bill's bunk in a litter of shoes, his mind a chaos. This was the first time Cap'n Bill had ever said anything like that. Jung had always associated Cap'n Bill with himself.

"Maybe," Jung's mind whispered—"maybe Joy Ling can whiten shoes better than you. Maybe his fingers are more nimble than yours."

Ah Jung went to his room, just astern of Dunn's, and he took out his god. An hour went by and still he remained bent before the stone image. He was praying, praying that Cap'n Bill would forget, that Ah Jung's fingers would regain some of their old time nimbleness. Incense burned slowly, and when he arose it was again to remove Cap'n Bill's shoes and rewhiten them, in a pitiful attempt to do even better.

That night when Dunn, securely ensconced in the stern, noticed Ah Jung hovering about him, he suddenly realized what he had said, and what it must have meant to Ah, the faithful Celestial. It made him miserable, and he flung his cigar over the rail into the sea.

"Jung," he called softly, "come here, old timer." He grasped the hand of the old Chinaman tightly. "Don't worry, Jung; I haven't forgotten. You may tell Joy Ling for me that I think he is a fool—a fool thrice born of a fool! Now, you old fraud, go to bed."

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IV.

It was seven days after the hurried departure from Colon that Dunn decided he was approaching the locality of the lost reef. At noon he took his meridian altitude of the sun. The resultant computations gave him his latitude. He advanced his line of position from ten o'clock, and secured his local apparent noon latitude and longitude.

He had carefully marked the position of the Defender, which he secured from the logbook, then computed the position of the run in miles along his true course, then cir-

Later, the Mary's decks showed life in the form of three figures standing aft near the taffrail. They were on converging courses, and the sharp bow of the Olympia was drawing nearer and nearer to the schooner, which was now under sail alone.

"Guess she's had hard luck with her gasoline kicker," Dunn suggested. "Don't see the puff of her exhaust or hear it. They know we are after the old Moon Glow's cargo, too. Must be exasperating," he chuckled.

A gentle wind, no doubt nerve rasping to the Mary's skipper, gently fanned her flapping sails. The sea was almost like glass—pure turquoise that flashed brilliantly as the cut-water of the Olympia slashed through it. The yacht passed the schooner with all eyes turned in inspection on each other. When they answered the breakfast call, the Mary was a tiny spot on the horizon to the rear.

"Guess they'll be some mad when they reach the reef and find the Olympia anchored over the Moon Glow," Fitz chuckled. "And her bones picked clean. My, my, but I wouldn't be surprised to see a load of buckshot fly in our direction. Any one that will cold-cock Ah Jung for a log isn't going merely to make faces at us in revenge."

"Yes," agreed Dunn, "and any one that cold-cocks Jung has a fly in his ointment. What have you aboard in the line of weapons? Mine is in the hock-shop in Colon."

"Nothing much," Fitz answered ruefully. "There's a twenty-gauge shotgun that Florence uses, and a twelve-gauge of mine. Then, I still have a little thirty-two-forty rifle tucked away for a surprise. Pistols?" he asked in response to one of Dunn's questions. "No! I couldn't hit a flock of office buildings with one. I'm like an Eskimo with a pair of chopsticks when I have one in my hand."

When breakfast was over, Dunn and Fitz retired to the deck above with several choice Havana cigars burning well. A peaceful contentment settled over them both.

They sat in silence, too engrossed with their own bodily pleasure to notice Ah Jung climb up the ladder and then pick a spot on the quarter-deck to whiten Cap'n Bill's shoes, a thing forbidden. A few moments later Florence came up, and not noticing the silent men on the opposite side of the hatch, who were invisible from where she stood, dropped into a chair near the industrious Ah Jung.

The almond-eyed Celestial was a master hand at craftiness. He polished intently—so intently that Florence spoke to him, which was exactly the situation for which Ah Jung had planned.

"Do you whiten your master's shoes because you are a good workman, or because they belong to Captain Dunn?"

Ah Jung spoke in a tone that was oily. "Shua! Cap'n Bill, damn plenty—fine man! Velly much topside skippah! No good fo' wea'h shoe plenty bum."

Ah Jung began to warm up. He dropped the shoe, and began to crouch at her feet. He extolled the virtues of a saint, an Apollo, an Adonis, and then deftly hooked Captain Bill's name to the entire eulogy. He elaborated on the fact that he was an excellent specimen of manhood, entirely fitted for the task of fathering many men children, which was Ah Jung's idea of a perfect family. He declared him to be the summit and culmination of what the cat dragged in. In fact, Ah Jung said, as he warmed up, Cap'n Bill was a damn good man for a damn good woman, and then fired his amazing whizz-bang with a gentle hint that he, Ah Jung, thought she was that woman.

When Ah Jung had finished the shoes, he went below, his face serenely content, leaving on both sides of the canvas hatch covering a startled group of human beings: Fitz doubled up with mirth, Florence wondering, and Bill Dunn confused and flushed. Ah Jung himself thought he had done a pretty neat job.

He remained discreetly out of the immediate vicinity of Dunn's presence until the latter's wrath had cooled. When he did make his appearance he was innocent and astonished at his master's outburst. He seemed the very personification of surprise and reproof, making it known to Dunn, in his peculiar way, that he would never—no,

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He had carefully marked the position of the Defender, which he secured from the logbook, then computed the position of the run in miles along his true course, then cir-

cled the resultant spot with a pencil mark; that marking the approximate position of what Dunn believed to be the lost reef.

He found the Olympia a matter of twenty miles northwest of the desired position, and then ordered the course changed and headed for the spot. He reckoned his arrival at two o'clock local apparent time. Fitz had temporarily stepped out of command until Dunn had found the reef.

In the stern of the Olympia lay a long coil of manila line. Two motor boats in their davits were being tested. Dunn planned to attach each end of the line to the sterns of the motor boats and drag the bight through the water, properly weighted to cause it to sink, and thus try to locate the reef which was not more than twelve feet under water.

He felt a trifle uneasy at approaching the spot too closely, perhaps occasioned by the loss of the Defender. Navigational positions from the deck of a moving ship are inclined to vary, often a matter of several miles, all depending upon the personal error of the navigator and the error of his instruments. Perfectly aware of this, Dunn rang " slow " on the engine room annunciator, and the Olympia lost way gradually. A leadsman was in the chains, his singsong voice reporting bottom at twenty fathoms; there were two lookouts in the bow, all searching for the ripple that would reveal the treacherous reef.

At last, unable to overcome the natural caution of a navigator, Dunn ordered the anchor let go. He veered chain to seventy fathoms and immediately jumped into the boat to determine whether or not the arc of the Olympia's swing from her anchor would intercept the reef. He returned a little later, well satisfied that the latter was not in dangerous proximity.

" This is the spot," Dunn reported to Fitz, as he mounted the sea ladder; " somewhere in a two-mile circle, if our supposition is correct, lies a fortune, waiting for a claimant. It is salvage, and all ready for whoever takes it. Crawl into your dungarees, Fitz; we're off in the boat."

Fitz and Ah Jung were in the first boat, Dunn and Murphy in the second. With the bight of the line trailing over the stern the search began. Using the anchorage of the Olympia as a point of departure, Dunn tried to retain some knowledge as to the area already traversed.

They ran along slowly, Dunn and Fitz with their hands on the line, waiting for the tug that would tell them of something below the surface hooked on the bight.

They had weighted the middle of the line with several chunks of sheet lead procured from Murphy's storeroom.

Once, both Fitz and Dunn sang out to the engineer to stop. Inspection revealed an enormous mass of seaweed tangled in the line, which Fitz cut away with much verbal advice hurled by both Murphy and Dunn.

Back and forth they played their search, several times hoping that the inevitable snag was the topmasts of the Defender, or what was left standing of them.

" Bill," Fitz sang out, " I think your reef of ivory was a pipe dream. We've gone over this neighborhood with a fine-tooth comb—" The rest was lost; Fitz's dory stopped suddenly. The manila line astern tautened and quivered with the strain. Fitz disappeared headlong in the bottom of the boat with the arrested momentum.

" Pipe dream, hell!" Dunn was shouting at the top of his lungs. " That's something solid this time!"

Murphy threw the motor into reverse and eased the strain; carefully hauling in the slack, both boats approached the snagged bight of the line.

" The way I hit the bottom of that boat made me think we'd hooked a new continent, Bill," Fitz remarked, rubbing an oily patch of dirt on his forehead.

They reached the point where the line ran straight up and down. Dunn peered over the side, striving to discover something that would corroborate his statements. Beyond the point where the line disappeared from sight he found it impossible to see anything.

" Buoy it," Fitz counseled. " Here's an empty gasoline can with a sealed top. I'll take the drag and make it fast to the can; you find something for an anchor."

The sun was drawing close to the prime vertical, and would soon set. Nothing could be done until the following day. Then they

would have time to put over the divers for a trip of inspection. Dunn found the dory's small anchor and they anchored the buoy over the spot. They tested it to make sure that the swift current that came up the coast of Brazil did not displace it, and then headed for the Olympia, a mile distant. Fitz's wildly waving arm told Florence of the success of the search long before they reached the side of the yacht.

" Bill is now a recognized member of the idle rich," Fitz told his sister. " The ivory king, ladies and gentlemen!"

They laughed at Fitz's sally, and after they had retired to the stern she wondered just what would happen to wild Bill Dunn when he coupled his new-found fortune with his apron-string will power. The combination did not appeal to her. It offered too many gutters, this shining road; too many pitfalls to trap his unwary feet.

They spent the greater part of the evening sitting out under the awning on the quarter-deck, dreaming of the future. Florence reveled in the romance of it, Fitz wondered how he was going to dispose of the share that he knew Dunn would insist upon him taking. Profuse explanations that he was already neck deep in coupon clipping would avail him nothing.

Ah Jung had crept up to be near Cap'n Bill; he crouched in the shadow on the opposite side of the deck, silent, content. Joy Ling was a fool, a fool thrice born of a fool. His own Cap'n Bill had said so. Damn! Who could question now?

The shining path of light cast by the tropical moon across the water added to the beauty of the scene. Forward, sounded the tinkle of a mandolin, mingled with the stolid plunk-plank of a banjo, and the clear tenor voice of one of the crew humming and singing alternately.

" The sort of a night," Fitz said dreamily, " that a fellow thinks of a girl, a canoe, and music, isn't it?" The question was directed at no one in particular, and no one answered it. Possibly because both Florence and Dunn flushed guiltily.

At dawn next day Dunn went forward to direct the moving of the ship closer to the reef, while Fitz took the bridge. The anchor came up with much hissing and the Olympia forged ahead slowly. A large motor sailer was being rigged for service. The air-pump had been placed in it with all the gear, suits, air-lines, signal-ropes, and life-lines. The boat was used while the vessel was in port for carrying stores. It was fifty feet in length with a ten foot beam, and would afford the divers a steady platform to work from. Over her stern had been lashed a section of the ladder for the divers to lower themselves clear before letting go and sinking to the bottom. A rifle with cartridges, the 32-40 that Fitz had spoken of, a first-aid chest, and a lunch were put in last. The rifle was intended for roving sharks, should one of them approach.

The Olympia moved so cautiously under Dunn's coaching from the bow that it was well past breakfast time before they arrived at a safe point and let go the anchor again.

The glint of the sun on the floating gasoline can winked a welcome to Dunn as he made his way aft. He glanced over the side and noted that the brilliant morning sun, coupled with the clear water, would make working below the surface easier.

Breakfast over, Florence appeared attired in a cast-off suit of Fitz's old clothes. A pair of high-topped boots and an old felt hat completed her appearance.

" Where," asked Fitz with brotherly sarcasm, " where does my beloved sister think she's going? Women haven't any business in that boat; I'm going down after Bill and Jung come up, and I don't want any women around if I have a mind to say what I think of diving. I warn you, you'll have to stick your fingers in your ears."

" Mr. Dunn invited me to go along," she answered spiritedly. " Besides, I don't need a brother to tell me what I shall and shall not do."

Dunn appeared rather taken back at that. He had not invited her, although he had hoped fervently that she would be of the party. He rather liked to have her near him.

Eight men of the yacht's crew, Dunn, Fitz, Ah Jung and the girl, with Murphy to act as engineer and general mechanic, completed the boat's crew. The motor-sailer had been fitted with several small

boat anchors to prevent her from shifting while the divers were below. These they placed out carefully, gradually letting the boat assume a position near the floating can that had acted as a buoy during the night.

Several of the men were assisting Dunn and Ah Jung into their suits. They had decided Ah Jung was to accompany Dunn on the first trip down, as he had had much experience of the sort.

The diving suit consisted of a waterproof garment fitted at the neck with a metal breastplate; the breastplate had a segmental-screw bayonet joint to which the helmet was attached with one-eighth of a turn. Air was supplied with a flexible tube, one end at the air pump, and the other attached to the helmet. To allow for the escape of the used air, another flexible tube led to the surface of the water; in some cases it merely exhausted out into the latter. A line was fastened about the waist, affording a means of signaling to the attendants on the surface. From the wrist swung a short, wicked knife, intended for defense. Heavy, lead-soled, specially constructed shoes would drag the diver down and thus overcome the buoyancy occasioned by the air in his suit.

In unknown waters, the divers wear a stout life-line fastened about his waist; in case of trouble he can be hoisted to the surface by the attendants.

The helmet is usually made of tinned copper and fitted with three windows, secured in brass frames. The experienced diver will sponge the interior of his windows with vinegar before diving, as it prevents moisture from gathering and thus blinding him.

They lowered the lead line and found the depth to be but ten fathoms, sixty feet.

"Easy," Dunn commented; "use the signals on that brass plate on the air-pump; they'll do for now. All right, put on the helmet." He was sitting aft near the ladder that hung down into the water. The men lifted the copper headpiece preparatory to lowering it over Dunn's head, when he suddenly stopped them. His eyes had wandered off across the water.

"Look!" He pointed to the clearly distinct horizon. Barely visible showed the masts of a ship. "I wonder if that's the Mary? It can't be unless they've fixed their kicker. Blast it! Help me take this suit off. If that's the Mary, we can figure on a battle, and there's no use diving for something until we settle the ownership of it."

After several minutes of trying, Florence found the faintly visible object that had attracted Dunn's attention, more by the rupture of the clean line of the horizon, rather than by the object itself. They then picked up the anchors and began making a hurried way back to the Olympia.

"Hard luck!" Fitz said morosely. "I thought we'd lost that jinx until we had had time to recover the ivory, providing, of course, we found the right spot. I have a hunch somebody's going to get a handful of buckshot in his hide before the day is over. I think I have a box of it for the twelve-gauge shotgun that I had saved from a goose hunt last fall."

Dunn admitted they would at least have an argument; any one that would steal a logbook wouldn't thumb his nose and then go away empty-handed.

By the time the motor-sailer had returned to the ship and tied up astern with the contents covered with a tarpaulin, the masts of the strange vessel had grown into sails, the hull barely visible. She was headed straight for the Olympia. No doubt remained but that it was the Mary, looking for trouble. Her skipper had not chosen this particular spot for a water regatta. He had long since sighted the hull and spars of the yacht, and probably had a well founded suspicion that the Olympia was there for the same reason that he was.

Fitz returned and called the crew aft. He told them in straightforward language that he knew he had not hired them to fight his battles, but that he was going to ask them to help, should the occasion arise. He explained the reason for the warlike preparations and offered a bonus for those who volunteered. One old salt stepped forward, moving his wad of tobacco aside for speech with a deft shift of his tongue.

"Mr. FitzGerald," he said, "we ain't fergot the days ye bin payin' us fer lyin' around doin' nothin'; neither have we fergot

the Christmas presents ye gave us, or the time ye helped Andy Wigg when his wife died. All them things ain't in the articles, neither. I speak fer the whole crew; we're wit' yer, an' I kin lick the scut that says he ain't!" He swung around and faced the men behind him. What he saw caused him to face about again. "Yer see? Half o' them guys has belayin' pins already." He returned to his place in the group, adding: "Yer draws a hell of a lot of water wit' us!"

The men nodded forcibly, a few glanced around for weapons. Fitz smiled at their show of loyalty and ordered them to stand by, but to wait for his orders.

The schooner had been positively identified as the Mary by Dunn. They saw her heave to a scant half mile away and a boatload of men leave the side and head toward the Olympia.

"Hell of a big crew for that boat," Dunn commented. "Looks like a Tipperary christening. Give me that megaphon, Fitz. Miss Florence, please go below. There'll be a lot of fo'c's'le language flying around here in a minute."

They watched the boat forge nearer and nearer. In the stern sheets sat the skipper with the tiller in his left hand; his right was hidden below a piece of canvas thrown carelessly against his leg. Neither Fitz nor Dunn had ever seen his disreputable looking face before. It was a succession of lumps and ridges, cracks and valleys, with black hair sprouting all over it. A suit of duck, once white but now spotted with dirt and tobacco juice, covered his huge fat frame. He was barefooted, with his trouser bottoms rolled up carelessly. Dunn counted twelve men, too many for a vessel the size of the Mary; they were in various stages of undress; but all qualified by their dissolute faces for a life membership in a standard penitentiary.

When they were within hailing distance Dunn lifted the megaphone to his lips.

"Ahoy there! What do you want?" The hail affected the skipper of the boat not at all. The men continued to pull with unabated rhythm. "In the boat! What do you want?" Dunn shouted again.

The boat was drawing alongside of the gangway. Dunn signaled to the men to step aside while he went to the top of the ladder. The boat crew had inboarded their oars; the skipper was standing erect. He answered the last hail.

"If ye don't mind, I'd like to come aboard and have a chin-chin with the master."

The distrust in Dunn's mind caused him to answer: "I'm the master; what do you want?"

"Ross 's me name," the evil looking skipper went on, "an' I want to know what you people is doin' here. If ye is after salvage, ye might as well pick up yer mud hook and beat it. I bought what was left o' the schooner Defender, an' I ain't gonna let any one play in me back yard. I thought I'd tell ye, so's they wouldn't be any rumpus when I puts over my divers."

"The devil you say!" Dunn ejaculated. "You bought the Defender, did you? Well, Mr. Ross, you're a damn liar! I own the Defender; I've always owned her. This may be your back yard, but the Defender's mine! Don't forget it! If you're looking for an argument, well, I'll give you a belly full. I'll hammer the head off the bunch of you! I was raised in the middle of one continuous battle and I haven't forgotten what I learned. Now shove off, while you're all in one piece. We'll chop you up and feed you to the canaries."

From the corner of his eye Dunn saw the men in the boat nonchalantly shift their positions. The bluff had failed. Ross, he felt sure, was sparring for time. The fellow did not resent his epithet, but glanced at his men as if communicating with them.

Dunn stripped off his coat; his shirt followed rapidly, revealing an enormous pair of shoulders that bulged with muscle and solid meat.

His arms looked like pistons on a steam locomotive.

The low side of the Olympia offered a splendid chance for a boarding party, Dunn thought suddenly and at this point Ross gave a bellow: "At 'em, boys! Over ye go!"

Before Fitz could fire, before any one could make a move, the low rail of the Olympia was covered with black forms.

They came crawling over at every conceivable place, armed with short billets of wood. Dunn grappled with the foremost, shoved him back an arm's length, and then shot out a full swing square into the puffed face. The man's heels flew upward as if shot by a spring and he slumped into a senseless heap against the bulwarks.

The sudden, terrific smack of fist on flesh drew a cry from Florence in the stern. Dunn glimpsed a look of wonderment on her face.

Fitz, finding he could not fire the shotgun without injuring his own people, hurriedly dropped it behind a hatch and leaped forward. The boarding party was now entirely lost to view in the shuffle. Dunn selected another opponent. One tremendous blow and the fellow went to his knees like a pole-axed ox.

Ross plunged up the gangway, and in spite of his apparent weight, reached the top before any one could oppose him. Dunn waded into the mêlée and jerked his victims up and out of the scuffle, poised them a minute and then stunned them with his enormous fist. A club had opened a wound on his forehead and the blood dripped down over his eyes and into his mouth. A well aimed clip on the ear roused all the berserk fury in him and he slipped through, beating and flinging aside the struggling men like chaff.

His eye was fixed on Ross on the farther side of the battle. When he gained this point, Ross closed on him with a clinch. His arm held a heavy weapon aloft; it came down as Dunn slipped and the blow fell on his shoulder. In exchange there came a stinging blow to Ross's hairy cheek that rocked his head on the brawny shoulders.

Fists smacked and crunched against flesh. The wooden billets were lost in the fury of the conflict. Curses, wheezes, grunts came from the struggling men on deck.

Here one man had another in the waterway, pounding his head against the steel angle iron. Another pair had lost all human shape in a tangle of legs and arms, revolving rapidly with the force of conflict, like a human gyro from a mad world. Like beasts they growled and fought. Blood marked faces leered in victory, only to bury themselves in the deck when a blow fell on unprotected heads. Fists rose, hesitated, then fell. The scrambling mass of men clawing and biting, snapping and snarling tumbled over and over in a mad galaxy of superhuman viciousness.

They gouged and bit, kicked, punched and wrestled. Human endurance began to give out. Only Dunn seemed tireless. His arms swung back and forth, dealing out stunning blows. His shirt hung in tatters about his waist. Blood streamed down his naked torso and disappeared in the tangle of rags at his waist. Here and there a still form twitched or rolled loggily over when a foot sought a hold in the abdomen.

Ah Jung, for some mysterious reason, remained out of the conflict. He darted in occasionally like an avenging wasp. In his right hand he held a long, black cotton sock, weighted at the bottom with a door knob. Like a furious fate he picked out an enemy and administered a gentle tap on the skull. He had disposed of three of the boarders when his almond eyes saw a stealthy shape, well clear of the battle, hurrying away. Quickly he glanced around, saw that his Cap'n Bill was still upright, dropped the sock into his pocket and followed. The two forms, pursuer and pursued, disappeared around the hatch top.

Dunn had disposed of Ross, who lay panting in against the bulwark. Fitz was prone on his back a dozen yards away. The crew of the Olympia were slowly gaining the upper hand. At last the remaining men, four in number, were set upon by seven of the yacht's crew. They fled for the gangway, but the boat had drifted away, so they turned like cornered rats and snarled, ready to fight again. Dunn staggered weakly toward them. The remainder of the Mary's crew and sixty per cent of the Olympia were either senseless or groaning miserably.

"Say 'when' you crimps and dock wallopers."

One, evidently the leader, spoke: "We knows when we's licked," he growled out surlily. "On'y me bucko, we ain't licked yet!" He glanced up at Dunn, cunningly. "They's an Irish pennant in the stew, Mr. Skipper."

"Then line up aft here. What's that?" Dunn shot the words at him. "What do you mean?"

The rogue merely grinned. He eyed the shotgun Dunn had found behind the hatch venomously. "Come on, spit it out!" Dunn snapped. "What's the matter?"

The sailor winked at him, like a huge one-eyed toad blinking in the sun. "Me'n me mates here is honest seamen; we'll spill the beans fer a divvy, eh?"

Dunn felt sure Ross had not attacked the yacht merely for revenge, or in an attempt at piracy. What then was his object in attacking at all? Twentieth century sea-villainy had its limits, and a sort of later day piracy was one of them. Unable to find a reason for the innuendo he decided it was bluff, pure and simple. He called for Ah Jung; no answer came. Fitz had come to and was calling the muster, Ah Jung was missing.

Dunn was casting about for some way to prevent these men from causing more trouble.

"What 'll we do, Fitz?" he asked. "We can't tie them up or sink the Mary; we can't kill them; how the devil are we going to make sure they don't make more mischief?"

"Take away their diving gear," Fitz suggested finally. "That 'll take the stingers out of them."

"Good! That would discourage any one," Dunn answered. Then he stopped. "Damn it! That was why Ross attacked us! Where's our own gear?" He supplemented his question by a hurried rush to the stern where the motor sailer had been moored with the diving apparatus covered by a tarpaulin. "It's gone!" he shouted to Fitz. "The boat's gone, with the gear in it! Holy mackerel, Fitz, lock these birds up in the storeroom and then dash over to the Mary and get her gear. Put a guard over them and throw in some first aid packages. They've scuttled the motor sailer! I'm going to teach that fellow Ross some of the Christian virtues!"

He turned to race forward again. Florence met him.

"Jung is adrift out there in the boat. I saw him and another Chinaman fighting." She pointed to the motor sailer, now about a mile away, in the grip of the current.

"Thanks!" he panted. "I'm off in the spare dory to see what the trouble is; maybe Jung still has the gear."

He jumped into the boat, started the engine, and with a rapid roar, shot away and headed for the drifting boat.

When he reached it he found the imperturbable Ah Jung sitting on the chest of his adversary. The prone Chinaman had his head stuck into a five-gallon gasoline can, the end having been cut out in the shape of a serrated collar. If the prisoner moved, he ran the risk of having his throat cut by the sharp edges. Jung had tied his thumbs together behind his back.

"Him velly bad Chinaman, Cap'n Bill. Him t'ief, steal log; velly bad."

Dunn released the frightened Celestial from his improvised prison, and lashed him to the sailing thwart. When they had taken the motor sailer's painter to the stern of the dory, Dunn towed the heavy craft through the water toward the Olympia. He found that Fitz had taken several men and had removed the Mary's diving gear to the yacht.

"We'll just keep their stuff until we return to Colon," Dunn said. "Now we'll put them in the hoosgow along with their spy."

"And while we are about it," Fitz suggested, "we might as well get the Mary off our hands. She has a gasoline kicker aboard; I'll put a couple of my men on her and place Leavitt in command. He can take her to Colon and turn her over to the United States marshall to await action. Besides, that will remove any temptation of that gang of hooligans to try an escape with her."

"Fair enough," Dunn agreed. "She'd be a nuisance here for us to care for. Send 'em off right away, the quicker the better!"

They called Leavitt, the chief mate of the Olympia, and he detailed three men to man the Mary and take her into port. After they had checked on the fuel for the kicker, food and stores Leavitt waved to them from the stern, and she slowly forged ahead and away to the northeastward.

Dunn inspected the imprisoned men.

Several heads were badly cracked and battered, but Ross had taken advantage of the first aid packets Fitz had given him and bandaged up the wounded.

" When I get through with you, Ross," Dunn said, " you'll be a whole lot wiser. If you think you can board a ship on the high seas and get away with it, you're crazy! I'll just turn you over to the authorities in Colon. Piracy doesn't go any more. From now on, your name is *Mud!* In the meantime you can cool off in the brig and watch us bring up the ivory. No monkey business; Casey, here, was a guard in a penetentiary and he knows how to handle birds like you."

The brig was too small to hold all of the ruffians and Fitz placed the remainder in a storeroom, minus a handy ventilator to escape by. They stationed a guard over each of the improvised jails with a shotgun and an oaken serving mallet.

Casey, the newly appointed warden, promptly warned them in language that was fiery to mind their p's and q's. He supplemented his warning with a handful of buckshot shells which he loaded into the shotgun.

" Now, youse guys," Casey told his charges, " kin heave out early to-morrow morning and crumb this vessel up. You kin massage the deck with holystones, an' scrub paint work. Ye'll shine up every damn bit of brass I kin find. If I can't see my face in it, why, I'll keep yer up all night shinin'. Ye can sand and canvas the bright woodwork, too. Ye can scrub dirty canvas. Oh, boy, ye'll think ye was on the President's yacht when I git done. I can't think of anything else right now, but I will!"

" Good riddance," Fitz said to Dunn as they turned away. " Come on, we still have time to put you two over for an inspection trip. I'm the least bit curious to see what kind of a pig we have in our poke."

The motor sailer was hauled alongside; the party embarked once more, and headed for the floating can still winking at them in the sunlight.

The sun was yet high overhead, casting its rays down deep into the water. Again they anchored fore and aft, assisted Dunn and Ah Jung into the diving suits, attached the lead-soled shoes and the life lines.

" Fitz," Dunn remarked as he lifted the helmet, " wish me luck. In a few minutes we will know whether I was right. Whether the Moon Glow lies here or not. Don't forget those signals and give us plenty of line. All right, put it on."

The helmet was fitted, the air pumps started to turn, manned by two of the deck hands, and the air was forced into the suit. Dunn's face was barely visible through the windows in the helmet. Fitz handed him a huge knife, commandeered from the galley on the Olympia.

Ah Jung was close behind him as he stepped to the ladder and descended slowly. When Fitz had seen all the lines clear, he tapped the copper helmet, which signaled to Bill to let go. The forms sank rapidly as Dunn obeyed. Ah Jung followed to the ladder and the same process was repeated.

Dunn was momentarily blinded by the rapid descent and the ascending bubbles. As the pressure increased, he felt the speed of the descent lessen. Before he knew it, he was standing ankle-deep in an ooze that swirled and eddied about him. Occasionally he saw white patches of sand, glaring through the water like Argus-eyed demons, faint, wavering with the current. The force of the current thrust his torso far over and he was compelled to lean against it at an angle of twenty degrees from the perpendicular.

A ribbon fish, with long trailing whiskers and a comb like a rooster, nosed curiously near him. Patches of red seaweed tinged with green, leaned obliquely with the current, writhing snakily.

Then Ah Jung came into his field of vision. They saw each other, and Dunn motioned Jung to come closer. Above them, faintly visible as a shadow they could make out the dark spot that marked the hull of the motor sailer. Dunn motioned Jung to follow and set off, his feet heavy, each step requiring a distinct effort. They had progressed but a few yards when Dunn saw an immense shadow. He hurried toward it as fast as the stiff current would allow.

Thrusting itself straight upward, like the

savage tooth of a tiger, was a pinnacle of rock. This, thought Dunn, was probably the thing the Defender had struck. He glanced around, searching for the hull of his old schooner. Vision was limited to a few yards, caused by the faint rays of light that filtered through the intervening water. Great devil's aprons, hundreds of feet in length, stretched upward. The pinnacle of rock was covered with rockweed and surrounded with immense swarms of tiny fish that flashed and charged.

In places their passage was obstructed with marine weed which surrendered easily to the knife. It was impossible to swing the blade owing to the pressure. They were forced to draw it against the weeds and thus clear the way.

A globe fish, round and with a warty, spotted skin, drifted by. Vicious mouthed barracuda, long, sharp and fast, eyed them stonily. They fought their way around the huge shaft of rock. Dunn tried to yell when he saw the dim hull of the Defender, on her beam ends, her mast leaning drunkenly over.

Fish, ever curious, were swimming over and around her slimy hull, as if on a trip of inspection. The tropical waters had covered her with a growth of seaweed, barnacles, and slime. Jung saw her, too; he motioned for Dunn to look. Now, it remained for Dunn to find the Moon Glow. If this was the same rock the Moon Glow had struck then he would come upon it soon. He had no verification that it was, however; there might have been a dozen reefs in this neighborhood; any one of which the Moon Glow might have struck. When he thought of the chances he was taking, his heart almost failed him. Down here, out of sight, with himself alone to converse with, the old spirit of taking the line of the least resistance made itself felt. He half doubted his own mind.

When they had been down for some time searching for the lost hull of the treasure ship, he began to surrender to the feeling of discouragement. Back and forth they had gone, but not a trace had they found of the Moon Glow. Dunn began to lag behind. His movements betrayed his spirit to Ah Jung.

What was the use? Who knew whether she had struck this reef or not?

To Ah Jung came the feeling he knew so well. His Cap'n Bill was in the grasp of the blue devils. Within the confines of his helmet he smiled. It was now up to him. Once more his Cap'n Bill needed him, and he was ready. Not a single, solitary germ of denunciation entered the yellow man's mind. His Cap'n Bill needed help. His own countrymen did not understand; it was the devils that had his master; it wasn't, it couldn't be, Cap'n Bill himself.

He came closer to Dunn and motioned for him to follow. Dunn answered by suggesting with his hands that they signal for the ascent. Jung stepped to the hull of the Defender a few feet distant, and with his knife cut the one word " No " in the slime. He drew the outline of a woman, not realizing that the figure awakened a sharp pang of self-condemnation in Dunn's mind.

When Jung began the search anew Dunn followed, whipped for the moment into a sense of shame. That skirted figure of Florence was responsible. Dunn realized that Ah Jung was driving him onward—pricking him, as he always had done.

They began anew, searching in a still wider circle, taxing their strength to the utmost. The long length of the air line behind them grew heavy.

Dunn could barely see the persistent Ah Jung ahead of him. " Damn," he thought, " will he never stop?"

After a while Ah Jung returned and together they signaled for the ascent. When their heads broke the water and the men had lifted the helmets clear, and Bill Dunn found the eyes of the girl on him. Fitz asked enthusiastically, " Find it, Bill?"

" No," Dunn answered; " not yet. We'll have to knock off now and try again tomorrow, when the light is better." Something—he did not know what—forced him to add the suggestion of a new trial. " And then we can shift the anchorage of the boat," he added. " We're too far away. We found the Defender all right. We had to come up; the weight of the lines and the force of the current were too heavy."

Dunn glimpsed the girl's face. He won-

dered for a moment if what he had seen in it was the responsible factor for the saving clause when he answered Fitz's first question. His own thought had been: "It's useless; I'm sick of trying."

Dimly, Dunn began to realize the battle the girl was fighting for him. His faults were slowly making themselves felt. He was faintly aware of what he should be, and was not. By the time they had reached the Olympia he found the new perspective clearer and more distinct. Fitz's own enthusiasm communicated itself to him. Only Florence remained silent.

It was a silent Bill Dunn that sat at the dinner table that night. He ate methodically, his mind far away; Fitz sensed the spirit of change in him, and looked to his sister. What he saw caused him to wonder vaguely. Once, Dunn caught her gaze fixed on him at the conclusion of the meal. They seemed to plead, entreat, to sue. He rose abruptly and went out, her eyes following him with the faintest suggestion of a tear in them.

Bill Dunn, the idealist, the dreamer, was awakening. Slowly, but surely, this girl was clearing the way, sweeping aside the veil. Ah Jung had not looked for the cause; he merely guided his master through. The girl was digging, ripping at the roots of his weakness.

They retired early, both Dunn and Ah Jung worn out with the day's labor of bucking against the strong current and lifting their heavy, lead-soled feet.

Early next morning they returned to the reef, anchoring the motor-sailer a cable length to the northwestward. This would prevent the divers from dragging great lengths of line behind them. Again Dunn and Ah Jung went below. They fought against the current, avoiding the patches of marine growth and stumbling on through the ooze.

To-day Dunn was driving himself onward. Yet when a half hour's searching revealed nothing, he began again to lose hope. Some force, however, heretofore unknown to him, seemed to battle with him to continue. It drove him on in spite of the old easy way that threatened to take hold of him. Ah Jung had taken the lead through the kelp and seaweed. Dunn followed behind, his body reacting to the new, stronger spirit.

He almost collided with Ah Jung on his knees, cutting at a mass of seaweed. Then he noticed that their reef shelved suddenly downward. He saw that Ah Jung was leaning against a hull, resting on the very edge of the reef. For a moment he thought they had traveled in a circle and returned to the Defender. His heart gave a leap when he recognized it as the hull of the Moon Glow, covered with seaweed, their tentacles seeming to hold the vessel in position. Immediately Dunn's mind began functioning again. It was that way; with success in his grasp that he was the self-confident Bill Dunn always. His nautical mind solved the riddle easily. Of course, the strong current and shifting sands had gradually moved the hull toward the direction of the current's drift. She barely rested on the edge, no doubt held there by the seaweed that had grown up around her while she rested and resisted further movement in a little depression.

Ah Jung had been slashing and cutting at the weed. Dunn knelt too, and lent a hand. Ah Jung crawled out on to the hull and began searching for a way into the vessel's interior. He found it, and slowly lowered himself into the opening.

Suddenly Dunn gave a shout which died in the helmet. The vessel was shifting. The force of the current, as if defying anything to stop it, slowly moved the hull. Dunn attempted a sudden leap toward Jung, trying to tap his helmet to warn him.

Before he had taken two steps the vessel gave a lurch, leaned slowly away, toward the bottom beneath the shelf, and then disappeared in a swirl of muddy water.

Jung's aid line tautened, throwing Dunn's foot aside. Dunn felt a rapid jerking on his signal line. It was Fitz on the surface, his face writhing in agony. He had seen the air line tauten and had quickly thrown overboard the slack. He felt Dunn signal for slack on his own line. "Give it to him! For God's sake, give it to him!" he cried.

For one bare second Dunn stared as if

turned to stone. A ghastly finger pointed straight at him. The seaweed about him seemed to shriek "Murderer!" His agonizing mind took up the strain, "Murderer! You spineless reptile."

For a brief space he saw himself as he was, in his true light. Sixty feet below the surface he caught a fleeting glimpse of himself. Jung had been fighting the fight that belonged to him, and had gone to destruction in his efforts to save what remained of a jellyfish, unfit to touch the old Chinaman's foot.

Blind, staggering with self-hatred, cursing himself, calling himself the basest name, he jerked the signal line for slack. For one minute Bill Dunn was going to fight against himself. For one minute his miserable body was going to obey Bill Dunn, the Bill Dunn that Florence FitzGerald wanted to know. Never before had he drawn this perspective of himself. The gates of truth, unvarnished, swung open, and, like a silvered mirror, all the baseness the irresoluteness, the rotten sore of moral decay, shone forth, plain and filthy. Then he saw himself as he was. The sight sickened him. He coiled his air line behind him until the people on the surface signaled the end. Then he lifted himself to the edge, and dropped off into the pit at his feet. Somewhere below him was the spirit that had kept him clean and decent; then, with the spirit belonged the body.

That sudden, decisive leap left behind the hesitancy that he had cast off.

As he fell he felt the pressure increase slowly. The light from above grew dimmer. He was startled to find himself suddenly alongside the Moon Glow, on her beam ends. The solid hull, unhurt by the long submersion, had remained unfractured. He searched for a sight of Ah Jung. He crawled over the side, through the snarl of rigging that had fallen, and found the still form of his loyal friend tangled and fouled among the rigging.

Somehow a timber had fallen across his chest. Dunn was unable to remove it. He found it to be the main boom of the schooner.

Dunn breathed a sigh of thankfulness when he saw that the air line had not been fractured and that Jung was still getting the life giving flow of air.

A plan occurred to him, and he put it into execution. Rapidly he disconnected the life line about his own waist and attached it to the end of the boom. Then he signaled savagely on his own signal line for them to hoist away. The life line tautened and strained.

The combined strength of Fitz and the men on the surface sufficed to lift the heavy boom clear.

After Jung was free of the weight, Dunn signaled for them to slack away again. Disconnecting his life line from the boom, he passed a turn about Ah Jung's waist and another about his own, then signaled for the ascent. The line would support both of them.

Their own measure of buoyancy made the task comparatively easy, and when Dunn's helmet broke the surface four arms reached down and drew Jung aboard. A quick turn of both segemental screws and the helmets were off.

"Quick!" Dunn panted. "Ah Jung fell and was caught in the tangle of rigging. Jerk off his suit. Quick, for God's sake! Jung! Jung! Old timer, speak!" Bill Dunn clambered aboard and fell on his knees beside the still form of his servant. Shamelessly the man's eyes filled with tears. To purchase decency at such a price maddened him. "Oh, God!" he whispered. "Please!"

The helmet, shoes, suit, were quickly drawn off, and first aid administered. They found Ah Jung had been bruised severely, but he soon came round to consciousness.

Later Dunn said: "We found the Moon Glow all right; the current had shifted her bodily over the reef until she came to the edge, where she stuck until Jung and I cut away the seaweeds; then she leaned over and dropped off, taking Jung with her. Tomorrow we can start work; she is in about twelve or thirteen fathoms of water."

"Treasure!" Florence breathed ecstatically. "You found it! You're rich!"

And Dunn nodded. He was rich—rich in his new found treasures, ivory and the will to do. He had found that which would clear him in the eyes of the girl he loved.

No more would he hesitate when faced with opposition; rather it would call for all the courage he possessed.

Next day the ivory came up out of the depths. Hundreds of specimens, all unhurt by their long immersion. All hands turned out to scrape off the slime and accumulated barnacles. The vessel's decks were covered with long, clean white tusks of animal ivory, ready to be turned into wealth.

When Dunn went below to see how the prisoners were faring he found Ross peering from behind the bars at him.

" Say, skipper," Ross mumbled, " you're kind o' lucky, ain't you? Ye got a whole damn shipload of ivory. Ye ain't gonna be a hog, are ye? Ye got yours; why don't ye have a heart? Ye put it all over us, wiped our eye good and proper. We didn't hurt yer ship, did we? No! We didn't! Why don't you let us go, like a good fella? We won't never cross yer bow again, believe me, we won't. Come on—be a sport!"

Dunn, rather well satised with everything in general, saw that Ross was speaking the truth. He felt no ill feeling against the men, now that he was flushed with victory.

" All right, Ross," he said at last. " I'll do that little thing; but with a string on it. I'll put you ashore at Point Praquie. It's fifteen miles to Colon from there, through the finest bit of jungle you ever saw. You can walk, crawl, hop, fly or swim the rest of the way, I don't give a damn how you do it, but do it you must!

" You can thank anybody you please for this, because you were due for the finest bit of stonebreaking you ever did. I had the fullest intentions of letting Uncle Sam teach you how to play golf with a sledgehammer. You were due for a good long cruise in the stone frigate with a squarehead bosun."

Ross hastily accepted the offer.

" Ye won't change yer mind?" he called after Dunn.

" No, I won't! You'll go free till you foul hawse with me again. Then, God help you!"

" Me! By Heaven, I'll never cross that guy's bow again! It 'll be all hands back water for me!"

When the bones of the Moon Glow were several hundred miles astern, Ah Jung approached Dunn as he stood at the fo'c's'le hatch.

" Cap'n Bill," he said, " mebbe so be velly good Ah Jung chop-chop?" The question was delivered jerkily, almost fearfully.

" What for, Jung? Why should you leave me? Oh! I see! No, Ah Jung. I won't need you as an anchor to leeward anyway. But, you old fraud, I'll always need the kind of a friend that you've been to me."

Ah Jung grinned and folded his hands in his sleeves.

" Velly good! Velly good Cap'n Bill take look-see."

He pointed to the bow of the Olympia, then turned and padded away.

Dunn looked forward and saw the form of Florence gazing over the bow. He walked to her.

" Florence," he said, " I'm back. I've come again."

The girl looked at him queerly, her eyes rejoicing in his victory. One last test.

" Please," she said distantly, " please—I—I—"

" No subterfuges, Florence," he interrupted with a touch of firmness. " I've wanted you. Until recently, I was unworthy, blind. Now, I'm going to have you. You can't put me off—unless—unless you can say you do not love me."

" But, Mr. Dunn," she gasped weakly, " you—you—"

" Say yes or no," Dunn answered steadily.

She hesitated, flexed her lips to answer. She glanced at him fleetingly. What she saw caused her to drop her chin, then softly, obediently: " Do I—must I say it—Bill—dear?"

Ah Jung slipped and fell the remainder of the hatch steps into the cabin. " Hell!" he said, grinning. " Cap'n Bill, him plenty topside skippah!"

THE END

The Man Without Hands.

By LYON MEARSON

Author of "The Lost Hour," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

VAL MORLEY, a wealthy young man, buys one of two bundles of books sold by a beautiful girl in poor circumstances to Mat Masterson, a book dealer. He hopes to learn her name. In a Bible he finds written "Jessica Pomeroy." He is startled to discover in the same book a ten thousand dollar bank note. That night he dreams uneasily of a man without hands. On awaking, he finds that he has been chloroformed and the books have been stolen. Returning to the book store, he finds Masterson murdered and the second bundle of books gone. Through the files of a newspaper he discovers Jessica Pomeroy is the daughter of a rich horse owner who died a year before. Locating her, he gives her the ten thousand dollar bill. As he leaves, after arranging to take her to dinner, a man without hands enters the apartment.

CHAPTER IX.

FREDDY TALKS.

VAL ordered Eddie to drive to the University Club and settled back on the cushions to discuss with himself this further aspect of the affair.

This man without hands! Val was free to admit to himself that he did not like him, nor any part of him. There was something sinister about him that repelled, yet held him with an air of hazy mystery. So it had been no dream, this vision he had had of an intruder whose arms ended in stumpy, sawed-off wrists. He had actually been in Val's bedroom — in fact, he had stolen the books from him.

Ah, yes, the books. Val permitted himself to consider them for an instant. Evidently they held the explanation of all this mystery. Everything seemed to revolve about them. A man is killed in order that they might be recovered. Another man is drugged to sleep and the books removed from his room. There must be a powerful motive concealed behind such develop-

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ments. What was it that these commonplace books held that made it so important that they be recovered?

And if they were really so valuable, in fact, why had Jessica Pomeroy been so willing—even anxious, it seemed—to get rid of them? Was there a message from the dead in them? Some secret that had gone to the grave with Miss Pomeroy's father? Val shrugged his shoulders and gave it up.

Where did the man without hands come into this, anyway Val was sure now that it was the same who had drugged him and stolen the books. That being the case, probably he could cast light upon the murder of poor old Mat Masterson. In fact, undoubtedly he could. Evidently he did not commit the murder himself—how could a man with no hands beat in another's head with a heavy, blunt instrument—but he was in the affair, that was certain.

So was Jessica Pomeroy, for that matter. He remembered now that she had thought him from the police—that she had shown fear at mention of the murder, and fear at the advent of this man, this uncanny stranger with the wicked eyes and mouth and the deformed limbs. Yet, not being implicated herself in the murder, of course—being but an innocent bystander, as it were—why should she not hand over this man to the police and let them sift the matter to the bottom?

Val decided that she could not do that. There was far more to this affair than appeared on the surface; there were things no stranger should know about; no stranger besides himself, he qualified. But he had begun to consider himself not a stranger where this beautiful girl was concerned. In the two short glimpses he had had of her, she had already taken possession of his thoughts to the exclusion of almost every other subject.

What was the mystery that surrounded her? Val wondered. Probably, in some way, she was in the power of this sinister cripple. She feared him, of that he was certain; yet she did not refuse to admit him to her apartment; and, indeed, he entered as though he belonged there—as though Jessica herself was, in some manner, his own. Could it be that he—but Val cast the thought aside. It was plain enough that Jessica loathed the man.

Well, he would learn something of all this to-morrow at dinner. He smiled as he gave himself over to reflections of what he would say to her and of what she would say to him. How she would smile at him tenderly with her eyes over the gleaming silver and shining white cloth of the dinner table at the Giltmore. He knew an alcove, somewhat away from the rest of the dining room, where they might have comparative privacy. That would be good. He would call up the Giltmore at once and reserve that table for to-morrow night.

His heart sang within him as he reflected on these matters. Here he was, young, in perfect health, beginning to enjoy life again, no financial worries of any kind except how to dispose of his abnormally large income—and now, into his life like a falling star shooting across the summer skies came Jessica Pomeroy with all her radiant beauty. And with her came mystery and adventure, murder and sudden death, messages from the dead and ten-thousand-dollar bills, engagements for dinner at seven thirty at the Giltmore, men with no hands —everything necessary, in fact, to feed the fires of romance and youth. Life was a fine proposition—there was no getting away from that. Poor old Mat Masterson!

The car swung around the corner into Fifth Avenue and stopped at the door of the University Club. Eddie Hughes jumped off and opened the door, rousing Val from his reverie.

"Eh, what?" said Val, coming to himself. "Oh, the club, to be sure."

"Yes, sir, the club," said Eddie impassively. "Shall I wait, sir?"

"No. Go home and tell Chong I'll be home to dinner—and tell him to make it good, too."

This was a joke, because Chong's cooking was the glory of Val's apartment, and no one knew this better than the suave little Oriental himself, who worshipped Val with an abiding love that was second only to the love Eddie had for his employer.

"You needn't come back, Eddie. I'll try to stagger home on foot."

"Yes, sir. Don't stagger through any dark streets, sir," replied Eddie evenly.

Val looked at him in inquiry.

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked. "Anything up that I don't know about?"

Eddie, as Val well knew, was not accustomed to making remarks at random to his employer.

Eddie stepped closer and whispered. There was nobody near them, so there was no reason for whispering, but it suited the moods of both men.

"There was two men, sir." He paused and looked at Val significantly, mysteriously.

"Two men!" Val gazed at him. "You mean—"

"Yes," came back Eddie. "They followed us in a taxi. I kinda thought you might of took notice, sir, but I guess you was too busy thinking. They was hanging around across the street from our last stop, with a cab handy, and when we beat it I looked back and noticed they give 'er the gas and followed."

"H-m!" Val cleared his throat importantly. So there were mysterious men following him in taxicabs! That was good. He could have wished for nothing better. There might be adventure later—fighting, and blood, and kisses.

"Is that all, sir?" broke in Eddie.

"All right, Eddie. You can go. I'll watch out for them."

Seated at a window of the club he watched the kaleidoscope that is Fifth Avenue, and pitied the passers-by who probably passed such uneventful sordid existences that nobody shadowed them, nobody made attacks on their lives, they did not know Jessica Pomeroy, to say nothing of never having made up their minds to marry said Jessica Pomeroy—which, by the way, Val had already decided to do. For some people life was very drab and lusterless.

"Some filly, that," remarked a drawling voice next to him. He turned, roused from his reverie, and beheld Freddy Vandenburgh, who lived, thought, and expressed himself only in terms of the race track. Freddy nodded to a girl getting into a machine at the curb.

"Oh, fair," admitted Val, hesitating to admit that, with the exception of one, there were any good looking girls in the world.

"I say, Val, you're just the man I wanted to see," said Freddy. "You see, I've got a good, first hand, sure-fire tip on the third race at Belmont to-morrow, and—"

"Well, why don't you play it?" inquired Val, though he knew the reason as well as Freddy did.

"Well, the fact is, Val—the reason why—that is, you know, my next quarter's allowance isn't due for three weeks, and—"

"What about last quarter's allowance, Freddy?"

Freddy smiled ingenuously. "The last quarter's! Ha! That's rather rich—must of it went to you when it did finally roll around. So I sort of thought—"

"You sort of thought that maybe—" Val looked at him pointedly.

"Exactly!" Freddy sighed with relief. That was just what he had thought.

"Well, there's nothing doing, Fred, old kid," he said with decision.

"Why, what do you mean, Val?" said Freddy with alarm.

"Oh, nothing," yawned Val, "except that the last time you had a tip that was sure to come through it cost me just fifteen hundred berries—too much money to put on a racehorse that won't race. The poor plug is probably running yet. I—"

"I say, Val, I didn't mean I want you to go in on this with me, you know," protested Freddy. "I just thought you might help me out with a loan, seeing I'm so short myself. This is different—this is a dead-sure thing—I got it from the owner himself. This here Jessica filly—"

"Jessica?" asked Val, sitting up with interest.

The other nodded. "Keep it quiet, though. No use everybody being in on it. Only brings the odds up, y' know. If you'd only let me have, say, five hundred, Val—"

"All right, Freddy. Five hundred it is."

He pulled out his check book. A sudden thought occurred to him. Freddy had been following the races—to the great destruction of his generous quarterly allowance, for many years. Perhaps he would know—

" Freddy?"

" Yes, what is it?"

" Did you ever hear of a racing man by the name of Peter J. Pomeroy?" He asked this nonchalantly, as though it was nothing to him; just something he was idly curious about. He gazed out of the window again at the passing show, pointedly careless about Freddy's reply.

" Old Pete Pomeroy? You bet I did," replied Freddy. " One of the finest. Why do you ask, Val, ole kid?"

" Oh, no particular reason, Freddy. What kind was he?"

" Died more than a year ago, I think—saw something about his bally demise in the papers. Awf'ly decent sort, Val—one of those old Southern gentlemen. Funny thing about him—used to breed and race, both. Sort of eccentric. Afraid of banks, or something like that; say, that bird used to carry as much as a hundred thousand dollars around with him, sometimes. I've seen that much on him more than once. Had all kinds of money, and figured it was just as good to him as to a bank—and not half so much of a temptation, I guess. Anyway, everybody knew he never put his money in a bank—funny, he never was held up.

" Queer duck. Had his breeding farm somewhere down in Virginia—near Old Point Comfort, y'know—I think it was a little on the other side of Hampton; tremendous estate, and they say he had a sort of a private race track on his estate, where he used to work them out. Had a daughter, too, I think. I saw her once, five—six years ago—just out of boarding school." Val sat up again.

" His daughter?" he repeated.

The other nodded lazily. " Yeh. Funny lookin' little tike, too. Skinny legged, with freckles and ugly red hair— I say, what's up?" he asked in alarm.

Val had shut up his check book and put it in his pocket.

" Nothing," he said shortly. " Only you don't get a nickel, that's all."

Ugly red hair, indeed! Freckles and skinny legs! The poor, misguided simp! Had the nerve to ask him for money, too. Why—

" Oh, I say, Val, you know you—" He broke off with a whistle, and a grin spread its way across his pleasant, weak face.

" So that's it," he said, enlightened. " The filly, eh? Well, you know, Val, she was only a kid when I saw her," he said ingratiatingly. " You know, that kind usually grow up into awf'ly fine looking girls. In fact, come to think of it, this girl's eyes were great—nicest I ever saw—white star on her forehead and—er, I mean—nice skin, and the freckles were really very fetching, if you know what I mean. She was—"

Val slapped him on the back, laughing. " Freddy, you old hypocrite, you win! Only the next time you say a girl has red hair think it over carefully before you open that fool mouth of yours. That nearly cost you five hundred dollars, and cheap at the price, too. Now, this Jessica horse—how about placing a little bet on her for me, too?"

CHAPTER X.

A THREAT?

THE inquiry of the medical examiner the next morning at ten, was the usual humdrum bit of business. Both Val and Sam Peters received rather sharp questioning concerning the young woman in the case—the girl who had sold the books which were subsequently stolen. It appeared that the entire case hinged on the robbery of the books—those which had disappeared from Val's apartment as well as those which had cost poor Mat Masterson his life.

Sam Peters, for his part, was legitimately hazy about the appearance of the girl. She had meant nothing to him—just another seller of books. They came into the store all the time—sometimes twenty or thirty a day, men and women. He was not accustomed to paying much attention to them. He gave what description he could, but it was vague and hazy.

But when it came to a hazy description, Val was the person who seemed to be able to deliver the goods. There have been hazy descriptions of women before now, but never has Val's description been surpassed for in-

definite, foglike vagueness. Val silenced his conscience by giving the description of a young girl as she should have appeared to the usual, disinterested observer in a public book store who had no business to notice her, anyway, and who—if he did notice her, did so in a casual manner that took in nothing of her looks or her appearance and contented itself by noticing merely that she was a person of the opposite sex and that she was young—or of an indeterminate age, as Val testified. Indeterminate was correct, he admitted to himself. He was undetermined as to whether her age was twenty-one or twenty-two—wasn't that indeterminate?

"I'll tell the astigmatic universe that's indeterminate," he told himself, and having once more won a strategic victory over the still voice of conscience, he smiled blandly at the police and hoped he would be able to assist them still further.

He intended, let it be said, to bring the murderer of his friend to earth, to hand him over to justice, but he did not intend to do it until matters were so arranged that it could be done without bringing a certain woman into the case. Unhampered by the police, he was sure he would be able to work swiftly and surely, considering the strands of circumstance he held in his hands—but he would not be unhampered by the police if they knew. It was simplest and best to conceal what he knew from them.

Val spoke to Sam Peters in the hall after the inquiry was concluded. Mat's out-of-town sister was there, too, and Sam introduced him to her. Val spoke briefly to her, and an arrangement was made whereby Sam was to continue the business until the settlement of the estate, thereafter to buy the business at the price set at an appraisal by an expert.

On the street Eddie Hughes waited for him with the limousine, impassively, deaf to his surroundings seemingly, yet seeing everything that might affect him or his master in any way. The afternoon had drawn to a close with the ending of the inquiry and the streets were rapidly filling with homeward-bound workers.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Morley," said a voice at his elbow, ingratiatingly close.

Val whirled. He disliked that voice even before he saw the speaker, even before he recognized him.

It was the heavy, sinister appearing, handless man of unpleasant memory. He lounged, as Val had seen him before, his hands in his pockets, bulking huge over everybody in the neighborhood but Val, who was rather something of a human tower himself. He must have weighed much more than two hundred pounds, yet he was not stocky—he was built in proportion to his height, and he carried his weight with the litheness of a mountain cat, swinging easily on his toes.

On the left side of his face, extending across his forehead and to the roots of his hair was an ugly scar, slightly red, looking a little like a jagged streak of lightning. He was dressed well. His voice, if unpleasant, was soft and well bred. The pupils of his eyes were little more than pin points, and the small lines around the corners of his mouth indicated a hard, determined, unscrupulous disposition, a will that would stop at nothing, that would consider no means too terrible for a desired end.

All this Val noticed in an instant, before replying as he halted, one foot on the step of his car. A dangerous man, he thought. Yet how could a man with no hands be dangerous physically? Val did not know, but he felt that it was possible. He was not squeamish, yet there was a physical repulsion vaguely produced in him by this man—the same sort of electric repulsion that cats produced in Val—a feeling of potential treachery.

Val decided that his age was somewhere between forty and forty-five or six, yet he had the bearing of a younger man, the powerful shoulders and sleeping strength of an athlete in condition—or a jaguar, lazy with sleep, in the daytime. That was it—the cat family. Val definitely placed him now; the suggestion of the cat was in him, with all the cruel latent strength and all the treachery of the cat.

"I beg your pardon," he said coldly, a note of inquiry in his modulated voice. "I haven't the honor—"

"I know you haven't, my young friend," broke in the older man, a little patronizing-

ly, it seemed to Val. "You have seen me before, however, and it—"

"Yes, so I have," said Val. "Twice before—"

"Once," corrected the man with no hands.

"No, twice—once in my bedroom—"

"Surely you're mistaken," interrupted the man who had no hands, suavely, but Val noticed a slight contraction of his eyes. "I have never had the pleasure of visiting you."

Val shrugged his shoulders. "It's of no consequence," he put in. "You have something to say to me?" He looked at him inquiringly.

"If you don't mind," said the other. "I won't take a minute."

"Well, I'm on my way uptown," offered Val. "If you'll ride up with me—"

"That 'll be fine," smiled the older man.

They stepped into the car. "Home, Eddie," called out Val, and the car slid out into the street and hummed on its way.

They sat shoulder to shoulder, strangely and constrainedly silent for a few moments. As for Val, he had nothing to say to this man until he had spoken to Jessica and knew what relationship there was between them. He did not know how this deformed man came into this plot, anyway. The other, on his part, seemed a bit reluctant to begin the conversation. There was something on his mind—that was evident enough; it did not appear easy to say it, however.

The limousine swung up Lafayette Street and joined a home-going stream of automobiles that must have included nearly every car in New York. From all points they added themselves to the live stream, noisy, with brakes and springs squeaking and horns braying.

"By Jove!" said a calm voice at Val's elbow. "You would think they cost a nickel apiece." Val nodded.

"You were saying—" he began tentatively, turning to his companion.

"That I had something to say to you," completed the other. "Well, I have. It's about Miss Pomeroy—and things connected with her. Through a curious series of events, Mr. Morley, you have—to a certain extent—been drawn into matters concerning Miss Pomeroy—and myself. These affairs can be of no interest to you—"

"You're impertinent, sir," interrupted Val, turning and looking at his companion squarely. The other met his eye, gaze for gaze.

"You wouldn't say so if you knew the circumstances. But I am not here to discuss them with you. You have seen Miss Pomeroy—I know you are to see her again." He paused for a moment.

"What if I am?" queried Val, calmly. "I'm not in the habit of permitting strangers to censor my calling list. You—"

"Only this," went on the man who had no hands, calmly. "It would not be advisable for you to keep up your acquaintance with Miss Pomeroy, or to see her again. It will be well for you to withdraw from all the affairs surrounding her—"

"You dare to threaten me!" Val said this softly, but his tone was of ice.

The other took his hands from his pockets—his stumps, rather, and held them up in front of him, misshapen and grotesque.

"Nonsense," he burst out. "How can I, a helpless cripple, threaten you? You see—" He regarded his hands, and was silent for a moment or two.

"Then just what do you mean by—"

"Exactly what I said. You are a stranger to Miss Pomeroy—it would be well for you to remain a stranger, and not to mix in affairs that do not concern you in any way."

"Is this a warning?" asked Val.

The other shrugged his shoulders. "It is anything you choose to make it, my young friend."

"And if I choose to disregard it—"

"Well, we shall see what we shall see, in that event. You are young and healthy—why not remain that way?" He looked at Val significantly, his scar glowing in the semidarkness of the car like a phosphorescent gash in his evil face. Val was silent—he did not choose to answer him, and after a time the man went on:

"You will find it best to take my—advice," he purred above the noise of the motor. "And now, if I may leave you—"

"Stop on the corner, Eddie," directed

Val through the communicating device. The car grated to a halt.

Val pushed the door open.

"Thank you for your advice," he said calmly. "When I feel in need of any more I'll let you know. I expect to see Miss Pomeroy to-night," he informed him gratuitously. There was no necessity for telling him this, but Val shrewdly suspected that he already knew, so there was no harm in the parting shot.

The other shrugged his shoulders again.

"Ah, well, youth—" he said, almost as though he were thinking aloud. He stood on the curb and bowed his thanks in a courtly manner as the car swung off on its way uptown.

CHAPTER XI.

"JUST WHO IS THIS MAN?"

MORE food for thought. It was beginning to look to Val as though this man, who was in this business so mysteriously and so unexplainedly, was to be the storm center around which the affair revolved. He had made it plain that Val's presence in any way was unwelcome; there had even been a veiled threat.

Why did the man who had no hands desire him to keep away? Why was it so important that he had gone to the trouble personally to warn him? And now that he knew Val suspected him of having been in his room and stolen the books from him, undoubtedly he knew that Val, in his mind, implicated him in the murder of the bookseller. For there also the books had been the only things taken—the books sold by Miss Pomeroy. That being the case he would from now on, beyond all doubt, consider Val as more than a rival for the attention of Miss Pomeroy, if indeed they were rivals. Probably, Val hoped, he would consider him as rather a dangerous enemy. That was good; he would rather have this man an open enemy than a lukewarm acquaintance, rather a finish fight with him than continual skirmishing and veiled attacks. One got somewhere by a fight—either one was victorious or he lost; either the spoils of victory were his or the losses of defeat. In either event he could know where he stood.

In a ferment of imagination and anticipation he lounged in Peacock Alley and waited for the coming of the girl with the burnished copper hair. As he sat there, seemingly oblivious to the teeming life that went on all around him, up and down the splendid room, more than one approving glance from feminine eyes was cast in his direction. In his dinner coat he was a figure to attract the second glance of any woman and most men. There was about him none of the glory of the man in his holiday attire—evening clothes were to him a part of his nature—he wore them as he did his shoes, without being aware of them.

Half a dozen times he consulted his watch. It did not seem to hasten her arrival in the least. But then he was a bit early. If you have an appointment with a lady at seven thirty it is absurd to expect her there at seven twenty. He told himself this and contained his impatience as well as he could.

He began to wonder whether she really would meet him; whether she would not change her mind and decide that, after all, it was best not to see him now. This produced in him no feeling of trepidation, because he would have gone to her if she had not come to him—if she did not come to-night he would go to her apartment and all the world could not stop him. If she did not—

He rose hastily, because at this moment he caught a glimpse of her at the end of the long corridor, halting in slight uncertainty. The evening had turned chilly with the first approach of autumn, and she wore a blue and gold wrap above the furry collar of which her head, encased in a lacy something, showed like a fragrant field flower. He hastened down the room to meet her, and she stood stock still to await his approach.

"Am I late, dear benefactor?" she asked, extending her hand to him. He bent above it and kissed the very tips of her tiny fingers—a trick he had learned in Europe and which seemed perfectly in order when he did it.

"You will always seem late when I wait

for you, Miss Pomeroy," he remarked, smiling. " The time will always be long—"

" Don't fire all your guns so early in the evening," she replied. " You will do better to keep some of them in reserve for later, Mr. Morley."

" I don't have to," he came back. " I'll make up better ones as we go along."

" I'm sure this is perfectly improper—dining with a man whom I have never actually met, isn't it?" she appealed to him.

He nodded pleasantly. " It certainly is, Miss Pomeroy."

" Isn't that fine!" she ejaculated. " I'm going to be highly improper to-night, then."

" Impropriety becomes the height of respectability when you indulge in it, Miss Pomeroy," he fired back. " Shall we go to the dining room?"

She nodded. " Please. I'm horribly hungry—I suppose you think I ought to live on humming birds' wings and nightingales' tongues—to judge from the things you say to me. I don't really, though," she confided to him in a low tone.

" No?" he asked. " You astound me."

" No," she said. " I'm going to deal out death and destruction to oysters, filet mignon, with dozens of different kinds of vegetables and salad, ice cream—"

" That's fine; at least, you know what you want. Most women don't seem to have the least idea of what they want to eat when they dine with a man. It's a relief to come across one who knows her own mind—stomach—if I may be so presumptuous as to suppose you have such a thing," he smiled. " It's a very personal matter."

" You'd think so, wouldn't you?" She smiled at him gently, and he took careful note of the dimples the smile produced in her cheeks. " And yet, I don't think we ought to stand here and discuss my—er—tummy in such an offhand way, do you?"

" Er—well, perhaps not," he answered gravely.

At the door of the dining room they were met by a squad of officials, respectful and obsequious. Prominent among them were the head waiter and the manager. The Morley name was a potent factor where it was known. This accounted for the ceremonial procession—almost like a coronation procession—through the dining room to a sheltered alcove where a table laid for two, decorated with just the proper flowers, awaited them.

" You must feel like a feudal baron," she whispered to him, " to whom everything comes as a matter of right."

He smiled. " I feel like an animated national bank, to tell you the truth."

" Yet, money has its uses," she said when they were seated.

He nodded. " So I've been led to believe," he said. " I don't know, really—I've always had it, you know—so perhaps I don't actually realize what it means. There are times when I've found it to be more of a disadvantage than— But we'd better order first and talk later. I'm sure you must be perfectly starved."

" I am," she admitted. " Don't forget the oysters."

They chatted idly for a while, until the first part of the dinner was finally served. It made little difference to Val what they talked about—rather, what she talked about. It was enough for him that he heard her voice; that he was sitting opposite her at table; that they were living a small fraction of their lives together. At present she was with him to the exclusion of the whole world.

Something of what he was thinking must have flashed into her mind like the ghost of a shadow—it must have been as intangible and as nebulous as that, because Val himself had not realized concretely his own thoughts. She looked at him, serious for perhaps the first time that evening—an appraising glance, a glance that seemed to dissect him. It was almost calculatingly cold. For that instant it seemed as though she looked at him not as a man who was there because he was interested in her, but as a tool that a workman finds ready to his hand, a sword a soldier finds conveniently placed so that he can use it.

" Curious that we should meet like this, isn't it?" She looked at him with frank approval now—he had been weighed in that instant. " I mean," she went on in a small sudden panic, afraid that it would seem to him that their juxtaposition was appearing very fateful and important in her eyes, " it's

funny how people meet, isn't it? Just an accident—and there you are."

"All meetings are like that," he said after a pause. "People meet—they must meet some way—by the most trivial sort of chances, by the most ordinary sort of accidents. Every formal introduction is an accident, isn't it? The accident of your all being there at that time—"

"Sometimes we're there purposely, Mr. Pomeroy, aren't we?"

He had to smile at this.

"Well, yes," he admitted. "As when we spend a couple of days hunting up the owner of a name in a Bible—but don't forget that the accident of our meeting came before that—in the bookstore."

He was silent for a moment or two after that, because both of them suddenly realized that there was much to be explained; the thought of the bookstore brought that back.

Her face had become sober again.

"I had made up my mind to be bright and happy for once, this evening," she said. "I was going to forget about—oh, about things, for a while—pretend I haven't anything to worry about."

"Acting, eh?" he commented.

She nodded her head quickly.

"That's just it—you know, I want to go on the stage. I have to, in fact—have to make a living some way. That's why I'm holding on to all these expensive clothes when I could have sold them and—"

"You know, Miss Pomeroy," he said seriously, "you don't have to tell me this unless you want to—unless it relieves your mind to have somebody to talk to. I'm not asking you, mind."

"Oh, I know—but I haven't anybody to tell things to," she said, a little troubled. "Perhaps, if I had a girl friend—" She was silent for a moment. "But even girl friends, you know, don't always quite answer the purpose. There's nothing in the world so satisfying to a woman as a man friend—a real friend with whom she can talk out her troubles and to whom—"

"I hope that you will be able to feel that I'm such a friend, Miss Pomeroy," he broke in.

"That's the singular part of it," she said, smiling. "I've felt that you were, from the moment I saw you at my apartment—even before you spoke a word."

He smiled back, much gratified.

This was a discerning girl, he decided. She knew a regular fellow when she saw one.

"I suppose I ought to begin at the beginning," she said; and he nodded. "Though we're having a peep at the end right now—"

"The way some women read a book, eh?" he commented.

"Well, not all. Some don't read—they live. The beginning," she went on, "is my father. Perhaps you know of him—he was a horseman. That is, he bred horses and he raced them—going around the country to wherever there was a meet. You can't have a home—in the true sense of the word—when your only living relative is always off somewhere at the other end of the country; so we lived, when we weren't separated, in a small apartment hotel here in the city. We had a place in Virginia, too, near Hampton; but the buildings are about ready to cave in, and nobody has lived there for twenty years—not since my mother died there. The house itself has been locked up, although we stayed a few times at one of the cottages there, on account of father's stable being there.

"I spent all my girlhood and most of my young womanhood in boarding and finishing schools, and I only came home for good a few months before my father's death last year, and I went to Europe soon after. I never was very intimate with my father—in fact, I don't think I saw enough of him to become intimate with him. But he was a peculiar sort—much different from most people. He came into a large fortune when he attained his majority—in Virginia. He turned it all into cash, preparatory to making an investment, and placed it all in the bank.

"The details of the investment took two or three months to complete. In the meantime the bank failed. Creditors received about two cents on the dollar—it completely wiped out my father's fortune. Well, he made two or three more before he was through; but, as I told you, he has never

trusted banks since, and he always kept his money and his valuable papers—stocks and bonds—hidden away or on his person. More than once he carried over a hundred thousand dollars with him in large bills, to my knowledge. I guess he always had many thousands of dollars with him.

"Well, as I say, he recouped. He always loved horses, so I suppose it was perfectly natural to go in for them as a business. At one time it was said that he had the largest blooded stable in America. A few months before he died he turned it all into cash, keeping only the Virginia estate, and retired from the business. I did not see him at his death—I was traveling in Europe with a companion, and he died suddenly from a stroke of apoplexy, lapsing into unconsciousness and regaining consciousness only a few seconds before he died. Ignace Teck was with him. He—"

"Ignace Teck?" queried Val. "Who is he?"

"You've seen him—the man who called at my place yesterday when you were there. He—"

"The man without hands?"

She nodded. "The man without hands. I didn't know you saw that. He usually keeps his hands in his pockets when strangers are present."

She was silent for a moment, unaccountably. So was Val. He was wondering who this Ignace Teck was—with his hard, sinister countenance, and his small, cruelly calculating eyes.

She played with a crumb on the table, the long lashes fringing her eyes like willow at the edge of a pond; but he noticed that her slender hand trembled just a little as her fingers continued their aimless playing. Evidently there was a great deal about this man for one to know, thought Val. Ignace Teck! The very name sounded ominous. He broke the silence at last.

"Just who is this man?" he asked, making his voice as careless as possible. "Where does he come into this thing, anyway?"

Her hands ceased their playing with the bread crumbs, and her eyes, no longer shaded by the lashes, looked directly into his for a brief instant. Then, slowly, in a voice as hard as flint and as dry as a country road, she answered him briefly.

"He is my fiancé," she said.

CHAPTER XII.

A DISTURBING NOTE.

VAL lived an eternity or two in Purgatory in the instant or two that followed.

He simply sat there and watched the room go round and round, the while he fought for his breath. Through the haze that was in front of his eyes he heard her voice, and suddenly he was sitting quietly in front of Jessica Pomeroy in the restaurant, and he was cold and calm.

It had lasted but an instant, but he had learned what it was to suffer as he had never suffered in the trenches. When love hits a man of Val's type, the poor, naked little kid has a haymaker in either mitt—and he had landed fair and square on Val.

"Does that surprise you?" she was saying calmly.

A shade of feeling flickered through her expressive eyes before she shaded them again with her silken lashes; he was sure of that. Ah, well, she wasn't married yet. That was something.

"Well, a little, of course—from what I know of him—" he began.

"You mean from what you suspect of him," she corrected him, and he thought her tone was a trifle stiff and cold; unnecessarily so, it seemed to him.

"Well, suspect, then," he admitted. "How did he lose his hands?" he asked.

"He saved my life when I was a six-year-old child," she answered. "I had fallen in front of a runaway horse dragging a heavy, loaded truck. He jumped in and threw me aside, but lost his balance before he could quite jump aside himself. He fell—both hands in front of him. The horse missed him, but the terribly heavy wheels of the truck went over his hands, crushing them. They had to be amputated." She was silent again, and he did not speak, letting this sink in. There was more to this than he had thought.

He had thought for a moment that per-

haps this cripple had so frightened her that— But it was more than that, he saw. There was a debt of gratitude to be paid, and she was paying it with the only thing she had—herself. It was a big price—too big, he decided. A shade of this must have flickered across his mobile countenance, because she spoke to his unuttered thought.

"Well, of course, it is partly gratitude—it would have to be," she told him frankly. "There are other things, though—things I cannot speak to you about. He was working for my father then—sort of an assistant manager of the stables, you know. My father kept him on all these years, until his death, as a confidential man—he often said he owed him more than he could ever repay. I think it became a sort of obsession with him in his last days, because he made me promise to marry Ignace."

"And you were willing to—"

"I had to," she said. "I would have done anything for my father—even marry Ignace Teck. Even though—"

"Even though you loathe him and are afraid of him?" he asked.

She nodded. "I am afraid of him—I don't know why I should tell you all this, Mr. Morley—there is something about him—I know he's unscrupulous and hard; he is revolting to me at times—and then at other times he is a charming gentleman, and I could almost bring myself to like him. But he's a man who will go to any lengths to accomplish his ends. But I'll marry him—eventually," she said.

They lapsed into a silence for a brief moment. She went on, then:

"But to get back to the story. After my father's death we could discover no trace of his money or other personal property. There must have been a great deal of it, because he had no debts—he paid everything in cash—and he had just sold his stables. Ignace thought there must have been half a million dollars, somewhere."

"Do you think so?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Somewhere, my father has hidden away a great deal of money. As I said, he was a trifle queer in his last years—in fact, I think that on the subject of Ignace Teck, and also on the subject of his money, he was unbalanced. He always had an idea that people wanted to take it from him—and he hid it in the most peculiar places; you know, like that ten thousand-dollar bill you found. But the great bulk of it has not been uncovered, although we have looked everywhere. Frankly, I think it's the money Ignace is after, more than me. He and his gang—"

"His gang?"

"He's an assistant district leader on the East Side—he lives there in a shabby tenement when he's in town—and he has men from the district who would do anything for him — commit robbery — murder, even—"

Val nodded his head.

"Then you think poor old Mat Masterson—"

"Probably," she acquiesced. "Oh, it is horrible to think of it!" she exclaimed. A shudder passed through her, and her face grew white as death as the matter was recalled to her mind. "The bookseller had what Ignace wanted, so—"

"The books!" broke in Val. "Why was it so important for him to get the books back?"

"That's what I don't know. Perhaps he thinks they contain some clew to where the money is—but if that is so, why did he not take them long ago? I had them with me all that time."

"Maybe it just occurred to him?" suggested Val. She nodded.

"You know, I was absolutely broke when you came in with that ten thousand dollars," she said. "You see, father left practically nothing—so far as we could ascertain. I had to move out of the hotel where we lived—though he wanted me to stay there—and take a cheaper place. My cash got lower and lower. I could have had money from Ignace, but I wouldn't take any of his money, of course.

"At last I went really bankrupt, and there was nothing in the house for Elizabeth and me to eat. Elizabeth is the old woman who answered the door for you—she's been with us for years, and she's staying on, though she knows I have no money to pay her. I would have tried to sell some of my expensive clothes and furs, but I'm trying to get on the stage, and a

wardrobe is a very handy thing to have. So I thought I'd get a little for the books—they've been around the house a long time, and they really were a nuisance, you know. We never had much in the way of books in the house, because I was away all the time, and my father was not much of a reader. So I had no bookcase, and they were in the way.

"I thought it would be a good time to get rid of them, and so stall Ignace off a little while longer. You see," she said, naïvely, "he wanted me to marry him right away, and if I was starving I would have had to do it. And then you came along with that ten thousand dollars like a bolt from the blue. It put a different aspect on life entirely. I can pay off the mortgage."

"What mortgage?" he inquired.

"On our Virginia place. A long time ago, when my father had some legal trouble, he thought that if he lost the case they might take away his property, so he protected the Virginia place by a mortgage for seven thousand dollars, which he gave to Ignace Teck—it's really worth far more than that, you know. Now Ignace is foreclosing the mortgage—not because he wants the place so badly, but because he always had an idea that dad's money was hidden somewhere down there.

"There are thousands of acres on the estate, and there's lots of room for it. He's getting the idea that I don't want to marry him, and he thinks that if he owns the Virginia estate he can shut me out of it and look for the money at his leisure. The action isn't finished yet—which is why you were so much of a godsend. I've already sent enough money down to my lawyers in Norfolk to fix the matter up."

"But surely you don't intend to marry this man?" inquired Val, leaning forward.

"Why not?" she answered coolly. "I promised to." It was a statement of fact, as though there were no other course. Val was glad to see the flush of color that had come up into her cheeks and the emotion that caused her to veil her eyes once more.

"Well, he's a murderer, you know."

She paled at this, though she had probably thought on the matter many times since it had first occurred to her. But she answered coldly:

"I don't know that he is."

"But if you knew—" he persisted.

"If I knew—" She turned away from him and seemed to be peering into the face of the future. It was as though he was not there; but her words were like a caress in their soft modulation, like a song dying down the wind. "If I knew—"

"Where does he live?" he asked abruptly.

She mentioned a number on the East Side. "Why do you want to know?" she asked quickly, as though repenting that she had given him this information. He made a mental note of the number before answering.

"Well, I thought that if I could bring you proof that he had the books you might be willing to believe—"

She interrupted him with a note of alarm in her voice.

"Oh, I'm sorry I told you where he lives—I shouldn't have done that! You mustn't go there, Mr. Morley! It would be terrible—"

"But why?" he asked. "Surely I cannot be hurt by a man with no hands. Even if he did find me—"

"It isn't he, you know. It's the gangsters he has around him. They would do anything—oh, you have no idea what a vicious crew they are. Why, if—"

"Well, don't worry," soothed Val, pleased and flattered that she should be alarmed over the question of his safety. "Why, there is no reason under the sun—"

"Miss Pomeroy?" questioned an utterly respectful voice at his elbow.

They both looked up, and until that moment they had not realized how absorbed they had been in one another. It had been as though they were in some private place, as though nobody else in the world existed but they. They, each of them, actually had to wrench away their gaze.

"I have a note," continued the head waiter, looking at Miss Pomeroy. "A boy delivered it and told me it was important."

He handed her the note. She took it, and he withdrew.

With an apology to Val she ripped open

the envelope and read the missive swiftly. Her face became pale as ashes and her breath came more quickly. He noticed these symptoms of fright as she read, and it was difficult to resist the feeling that the proper move for him was to take her in his arms and quiet and soothe her. If it had not been a public place—

"Is it as bad as that?" he asked softly.

"Oh, I must go at once—it's important!" she ejaculated. "It's from—"

"Can you tell me what it's about?" he inquired. "Of course, if there's anything I can—"

"No, I think there's nothing you can do, Mr. Morley," she broke in. "I—I think I can't tell you—now—what it's all about, but I must go at once."

They both rose.

"Perhaps I can help you," he persisted. "I would like nothing better than—"

"You're very good, Mr. Morley, but I can't call upon you in this particular case. It's—it's all right—there's no help needed. I was foolish to be so alarmed. It's from Ignace Teck and he's at my house—I must go back at once."

He stepped up close to her, so close that they almost touched where he towered above her like a good natured rock.

" I want you to promise me, Miss Pomeroy, that if you need assistance of any kind, you will call upon me. Any time of the day or night, any place—"

"Thank you so much, Mr. Morley," she breathed softly. "It will be good to know that. I promise. You'll come any time—"

"All you have to do is send for me. I'll break all records coming to you. Now, let me send you home in my car—it's waiting outside."

"No, you had better call a taxi for me," she decided, shaking her head dubiously. "It would be the wisest course to pursue."

CHAPTER XIII.

A CALL ON MR. TECK.

FOR a while Val sat in the onyx and gold lobby of the Giltmore and consumed numerous cigarettes. Action it had to be, he decided; he was not the man to take a passive part in the melodrama that was wrapping itself around the woman he loved. Here was love and adventure.

He knew that Jessica Pomeroy was determined on her course; he could see that she had a high sense of duty and obligation—and if her duty and her sense of obligation led her even to the point of marrying the loathsome object that had no hands, why, she would do it. He knew that. It was not a question of whether she cared for him, Valentine Morley. How could a perfect creature like Jessica Pomeroy care for an ordinary man like him?

But he would make her care! And the first way to do that was to release her from her assumed obligation to marry this Ignace Teck. She had intimated that if it was proved to her that he had murdered Mat Masterson she might reconsider her determination—she was not bound to marry a murderer. But how to prove that?

"If I can find out that he has the books," thought Val, "it stands to reason that he must be implicated in the murder of poor old Mat—and it's a sure thing he has 'em."

He was thankful that he had found out his address from Miss Pomeroy. That would help. If he had the books they were very probably in his place on the East Side.

That, then, was where Val must look. There was another important reason for getting those books. Very possibly there was a clew in them to the lost wealth of the girl's father. Otherwise, why should Teck be so anxious to get them back that he would even commit murder? That money belonged to Jessica Pomeroy, and Val was determined that she get it.

Lost treasure! The love of a beautiful woman! The dark villainy of an unscrupulous scoundrel! It was good to be alive and to be caught up in the swirl of this affair. Val's blood tingled in his veins, and he rose hastily, smiling gently. There was no time like the present. Ignace Teck, he was sure, was at Jessica's—he called her that privately—home. That being the case, what was there to prevent Val from making a raid on the handless one's rooms? Nothing. Teck had done that to him, so there was no ethical reason why he should not now return the compliment.

He walked out of the Giltmore and engaged Eddie Hughes in conversation.

"Eddie," he said, "haven't we got an automatic or two somewhere?"

Eddie brightened. This was language he understood.

He nodded. "At home," he answered laconically. "Who do you want croaked?"

"Nobody, you bloodthirsty scoundrel!" grinned Val. "I might need one for protection, though. Let's go home and get it."

He jumped in. "Hustle," he shouted. The car turned the corner on two wheels and nearly ran down a traffic policeman. It was out of sight before the policeman had a chance to reach into his pocket and pull out a summons.

"I'm going to burgle a little to-night, Eddie," announced Val. He was sitting with the driver, in front. Eddie looked at him impassively. Nothing that his amazing employer said to him startled him. He could have announced that he was going to work and it would scarcely have shocked the callous Eddie.

"That's not included in your contract, Eddie, so you can stay in the apartment and keep the home fires burning until I get back," he continued. "Not that I don't think the exercise wouldn't do you some good. A little night work, such as I propose—"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but I decline to stay home," interrupted Eddie. "If you think that I'm going to slave my life away for you, and then, when there is a chance for a little recreation, be left at home like a cook, why—"

"You're waxing impertinent, Edward," said Val severely. "I really ought to discharge you. Your recommendations said nothing about your being a good burglar. How do I know that you're any good at the job? This is something that requires experience. You can get a good chauffeur or valet anywhere, but where can you get an efficient burglar? Eddie, have you ever burgled?"

"No, sir," replied Eddie. "But I'm willing to learn."

"Ah, my boy, you have struck on the keynote of our American life. The reason America has forged ahead so fast is because Americans are willing to learn. We have no deep rooted prejudices to eradicate—if anything worth while comes along, like burgling, or pinochle, we are willing to learn," he went on, growing expansive. "It is what has made us what we are to-day—"

"What are we to-day, sir?" asked Eddie mildly. Val turned and looked at him in astonishment.

"Why, we are—er—we are—damn it! Eddie, don't you read your history and your newspapers? Why, we are—Eddie, I sincerely trust you are not being insolent enough to poke fun at me or at our institutions."

"No, sir," replied Eddie. "About this—er—burgling job, then, we can consider that I am going along, sir?

He noted the look of indecision in Val's face, the while he missed a truck by an inch. Val saw no particular reason for exposing Eddie Hughes to whatever dangers there were attending this job. "Of course," went on Eddie, "if you refuse, and thus make it necessary for me to notify the police of your—er—midnight exercise, why, it will be—"

"Pinked!" ejaculated Val. "I'll come down. Eddie, you're one of us to-night. But if you get killed, don't blame me."

"I won't, sir," said Eddie gravely.

"Ah—very good, Eddie! Now that you're a member of the party, I'll tell you what I propose to do."

He told him, and Eddie listened gravely, without comment.

"How does it look to you?" he inquired at the conclusion of the recital of his proposed deeds.

"All right, sir," returned his man, "except that it seems to me that it would be better if we went in a taxicab. This big car is sure to attract attention if we leave it standing for any length of time in that East Side street. And then we can have the cab and the chauffeur waiting for us with the engine running, so that we can get away on the jump when we come out. We might be in a hurry, sir," he suggested.

Val nodded. "You've struck twelve, Eddie." They were home now. "Put the car away and get a taxi. I'll go upstairs and get the guns."

At about ten thirty that evening a soiled gray taxicab carrying Val and Eddie came to a grinding stop at the corner of a small, narrow, ill-smelling alley.

"Are we there?" asked Val, popping his head out of the door.

"Dunno," replied the driver. "I think it's around here somewhere, though. Maybe one of these fellers can tell us. Hey!" he called to them.

A small tough came forward, unshaven, rat faced, and with sharp, beady eyes that seemed to look in two different directions at once. His derby, which was too small for him, a sort of brown bowler, was perched perilously on one side of his unkempt hair, and he spat viciously into the gutter under the taxicab before opening his mouth to speak.

"Whacher want?" he asked, eying the occupants of the taxicab sharply.

"Can you tell me where 22 Delancey Place is?" asked Val.

The other looked at him searchingly for an instant.

"Dis here's Delancey Place," he replied. "Yer number's at de other end, cul. What name yer lookin' fer?" he asked with an assumption of confidential familiarity.

"Why?" asked Val.

The other did not meet his direct gaze. He spat again, this time on the hub of the taxi's rear wheel, and regarded his marksmanship admiringly for a moment or two before answering.

"Oh, nothin'," he said at length. "Just thort I might help yer, dat's all."

Val gave him a quarter, which he accepted in a dignified manner, much as a shopkeeper accepts money for merchandise. He turned and went back to lounge with his friends, paying no more attention to Val and his party.

Telling the taxi driver to wait for them there, and to be ready to start at an instant's notice, Val and his man proceeded up the alley to No. 22, Eddie carrying a suit case in which to take away the books if they found them. Val had his plans made, sketchily. They were simply this: to knock on the door; if Teck was in, which was not likely, they were to enter, and by a show of force search his rooms. If he was not in, they were to find a way to force their entrance into the rooms. That was all—to get into the rooms.

The legality of the proceeding, to say nothing of the danger of it, did not bother Val in the least, and it bothered Eddie less. He was satisfied, if Val was. If his conscience smote him a bit—that is, Val's conscience, for Eddie had none except in Val's name—he silenced it by the reflection that after all they were his own books and they had been stolen from him. As the English say, he was merely getting back "a bit of his own."

It was a mean looking alley, Delancey Place. Comparatively early as it was, the sidewalks of Delancey Place were bare and deserted. With the exception of one lamp burning bleakly at the beginning of the alley, there were no lights. Windows were barred, and although here and there a shaft of yellow gaslight escaped through a ramshackle shutter, it did little but accentuate the general gloom and dispiritedness of the place. It was a location to take the heart out of a man who had no legitimate business there—nor did it look, on the other hand, as though any one who lived there could have any legitimate business.

They found the house they were looking for at the far end. It was a three-story frame house—one of the few frame houses still in existence on the East Side. There was no front door, though the hinges were still there to show that at some happier and far distant time there had been such an affair at the entrance. The hall yawned blackly before them.

"Got your flash?" queried Val. The other handed it to him. "Looks like midnight inside a cow's belly," commented Val.

"Yes, sir," replied Eddie impassively.

They entered the house. By working his flashlight diligently Val discovered that there was a door to an apartment on each side of the hall. He knocked on one of them loudly. There was no answer. He knocked again. There was a sound of moving around, and he heard a low, guttural, feminine voice cursing whole-heartedly. The door was opened a crack, as far as a stout chain would permit.

"Can you tell me where Teck lives?" asked Val.

"One flight up, on the left, in the rear," grunted the woman, and banged the door. People evidently did not keep their doors open any longer than they could help in this neighborhood, meditated Val. Ah, well, it occurred to him that if he lived there he wouldn't keep his door open any longer, either.

They made their way up the creaking, uncovered stairs, with the aid of the invaluable flashlight. A musty, filthy smell, the fetid, odorous accumulation of many years' cooking, a composite smell of perhaps thirty years standing, greeted their nostrils. On the wall, to the left of the stairs, the plaster had come off in great gobs, exposing the bare lath underneath. At the head of the stairs, to the left, they found the door they were looking for.

"This must be it, sir," whispered Eddie.

"Correct," whispered Val. He knocked softly.

There came no answer, as he had expected.

He knocked again. Louder this time. Still no answer.

"Where's that cold chisel?" he asked in a whisper.

Eddie produced it silently and handed it to him.

"Now for a little plain and fancy burgling," muttered Val.

The door did not fit well. Probably, at the beginning, many years before, it had fitted snugly, but that time was long years agone. It was badly warped by now, and it was a simple matter to find room for the chisel. There was a sharp straining of wood against iron, a dull rasping sound, another push, and the door swung open.

"If this is the burglar's art," said Val, "it's very easy."

They entered the room silently, and the flashlight showed them that it was a fairly large living room, with another smaller room, probably a bedroom, on one side. In a moment or two he made certain that there was nobody in the apartment.

He located the gaslight in the center of the room.

"Close the door and pull down the shades, Eddie, and I'll light up so we can have a look around."

Eddie did so, and Val lighted the gas, illuminating the rooms.

They were surprised at the comfort and good taste shown in the furnishing of the room. It was evidently a combined living room and library, with deep leather chairs, a reading lamp, a walnut library table, and rather fine prints and etchings on the walls. The first thing that struck Val's attention, however, was a bundle of books on the library table. Even before he advanced to them he knew that they were the ones he was looking for.

"Ah, we have with us to-day, Eddie, pieces of eight, doubloons and Spanish gold, as exemplified in yon books—maybe." He waved his hand to the books. He looked them over briefly, perfunctorily. A glance told him that he was correct.

"Are they the ones?" asked Eddie.

Val nodded. "I'll tell the astigmatic world they are, my boy," he said.

"Yes, sir," replied Eddie. He opened the suit case and placed the books within carefully. "Let's go."

"Right-o! Let us stagger homeward. Sorry we cannot wait until our good friend, Iggy Teck, comes back. It would be nice to visit with him, but—"

The door opened silently, and four men stood in the opening, quiet, grim, revolvers leveled. Only one spoke. It was the little cross-eyed man who had directed them to this address.

"Reach fer a cloud, men!" he said. "Grab yerself a star!"

"I take it that you mean by that that you want us to raise our hands in—"

"Damn right, kid!" snapped the gangster. "Stick 'em up—an' don't let me have ter tell yer again, neither."

Slowly Val's hands went up into the air. "To what are we indebted for the honor of this—er—visitation?" he asked. "You didn't—er—send up your cards, nor were you announced by the butler," he bantered, sparring for time, but his eyes were contracted to pin points and his square jaw had hardened angularly.

"Never mind all that guff," ordered the gangster. "Stand right where you are and

be quiet. Come in boys," he called to the rest of the gang.

" Keep them up there, you!" he directed Eddie, who was standing a little to the left of Val and had shown signs of being tired of the position. " If this here cannon goes off, you're liable ter git an awful headache, t' say nothin' of cotchin' cold account 'er th' air bein' let through yer."

" Just what can I do to oblige you boys?" said Val pleasantly. " If there is any little thing I can do, any little favor, why, just say the word—"

" Yes, yer kin keep mum an' move over here till I relieves yer of any stray gats yer may have about yer poison—git me?"

Val nodded, his hands up in the air, and half turned to glance at Eddie, who had remained suspiciously quiet and immobile. Their eyes met, and in that brief glance he told him to be ready to jump for it at an instant's notice—to hold himself prepared for anything.

The men gathered around them as Val moved forward to the center of the room, right under the gas jet. He made a motion as though to lower his hands.

" Keep dem fins up a minit, you!" ordered the little unshaven tough sharply. Like lightning Val's hands shot up. He had gauged the distance exactly, and his right hand came in contact with the cock of the gas jet. With a snap of his fingers he turned it, leaving the room in instant black darkness.

" Jump, Eddie!" he shouted, leaping from his own place instantly.

It was well that he did so, because the blackness of the room was punctured by a vivid barking flash as a gun went off, filling the room with acrid smoke.

In an instant the six men in the room were a tangle of striking arms and legs, each fearing to shoot, not knowing which was friend and which was foe. With a fearful, vivid joy, Val and Eddie plunged into the mass, striking, throwing aside, kicking.

Val's big arms picked up a cursing body and threw it, knocking down furniture and men. He jumped into the thick of the struggling humans, pounding viciously with his hamlike fist and his revolver butt. At the door the mix-up was thickest. A figure jumped at Eddie. There was the sharp crack of a human fist on bone, and the man slumped down unconscious, as clean a knockout as was ever made.

" Through the door, boss!" shouted Eddie.

" Right-o!" shouted Val, plunging for the entrance.

A figure blocked his way. He picked it up and threw it through the door. It struck the stairs halfway down and rolled on.

" Now for it, young feller me lad!" shouted Val. Down the stairs they plunged, Val and Eddie. A revolver barked three times after them, but they felt nothing. The doors in the apartments were closed—it was not a good time to open doors.

Out into the street they burst, both of them, with a couple of shouting men in pursuit. Now figures popped out of doors and took up the chase.

" To the taxi, Eddie!" shouted Val.

" Yes, sir," returned Eddie, and fifty yards ahead of their pursuers they made speed. They rounded the corner to the car.

The corner was bare of automobiles. The taxi had gone.

They glanced back for an instant. The pursuit was hot, and the pursuers' numbers had been augmented.

" Stop thief!" some one shouted, and the neighborhood, which a moment before had been silent and slumberous, suddenly became a living maelstrom of humanity, swirling, streaming after the fugitives.

" To the subway!" panted Eddie. They turned at an acute angle and headed for the subway kiosk, two blocks away.

Through the night streets of the East Side they dashed, with the crowd after them; but nobody stopped their progress, because, in the excitement, Val had forgotten to put away his gun, and he was still brandishing it as he ran. At last, still fifty yards to the good, they reached the kiosk.

Down the stairs they clattered, only to see the tail lights of a train pulling out. Too late!

A thunderous noise made itself heard in the tunnel.

"The other side!" panted Eddie. "There's a train coming in."

They leaped over the turnstiles, jumped down to the tracks, and scrambled up on the other side just as a train thundered in, missing them by little more than the proverbial hair. The doors of the train opened; Val and Eddie, the only oncoming passengers, entered, and the gates clanged shut again. The bell rang the length of the car, and with a grinding of wheels the train started. Through the glass of the car platform, Val and Eddie could see the foremost of the pursuing gang plunge into the station and look up and down for their quarry.

Val kissed his hand to them as the train pulled out.

"Rather close," commented Val, and for the first time he was able to turn to Eddie. He gave a gasp of surprise.

In his hand Eddie Hughes held carefully the suit case containing the books they had gone after.

Before a crackling blaze in the grate, Val sat sunk deep in an easy chair, examining the books strewed around him. He was feeling better, more exhilarated with life, than he had felt for many a day. Tomorrow he would have something to tell Jessica Pomeroy. He recounted to himself the several aspects of the story he would have to tell her. It was good. She could hardly keep on with Ignace Teck, now that he—"

"Anything more to-night, sir?" asked Eddie respectfully, at the door. Val half turned.

"Nothing, Eddie, except that you're a good boy, and in my report to G. H. Q., I'll recommend you for conspicuous coolness and daring under fire. You ought to get a citation for it, you know."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir," grinned Eddie impassively.

"Good night, Eddie," said Val.

"Good night, sir." He went to his room.

Val turned to the books again. Carefully he went through the one he held in his hand, page by page. It was a volume of E. P. Roe's.

"Imagine finding anything worth while in this!" he muttered, and threw it aside to pick up another. For half or three-quarters of an hour he sat before his fire, going through book after book. Not knowing what he was looking for, he found nothing. He could not seem to get on the track of anything that looked promising.

It was a puzzle, and he did not have the key. It would have been hard enough even if he had known what he wanted. He had decided that the books had something to do with the money that old Peter Pomeroy had cached somewhere—but in what way? That he could not tell, and the books he had examined left him just as much in the dark.

Now, if he only could unearth that money and hand it over to Jessica Pomeroy! The thought of the name brought him around to her, and he smiled gently. Was there ever girl like her before? There was not, he decided. She was the recapitulation of all the beauty that had ever been in this world.

And the way she had smiled at him to-night at times! Why, it was like spring coming suddenly on a cold winter's day, the sun breaking through a bleak cloud, flowers poking their gay heads through the snow blanket, stars in June skies, oases—was that the proper plural?—in the Sahara, a fugitive moment of happiness.

At this stage the house telephone rang insistently. He turned impatiently to the offending instrument, exasperated at being interrupted just at the moment when he was about to think of the best figure of speech of all. But Eddie had retired to a well earned rest, and he had to answer the call himself. He picked up the receiver.

It was the hall boy downstairs. "There's a man wants to see you, sir?" came to him over the wires.

"To see me—at this time of night?" queried Val. "What's he want?"

"I don't know, sir. He's a chauffeur, and he says he has an important message for you personally."

"Well, send him up," directed Val, putting down the receiver.

An important message for him at this time of the night! There was only one thing that was important enough to break

the night for him, and that was— Why, to be sure, perhaps it was from Jessica! He remembered now he had told her to look to him at any time of the day or night if she needed him. Why, perhaps she was in trouble. He hastened to the door and opened it.

A chauffeur came out of the elevator and hurried to him.

"Mr. Morley?" he asked respectfully.

Val nodded. "You have a message for me?"

"Yes, sir," replied the chauffeur. "From Miss Pomeroy, sir."

A warm glow went through Val. She needed him, and she was sending for him. That was good.

"She wants you to come right away, sir —my taxi is downstairs," added the chauffeur.

"Come in," said Val, and he preceded the man into his apartment, peeling off his dressing robe as he did so.

"What's the matter with Miss Pomeroy?" he asked.

The driver shook his head negatively. "Dunno, sir. I was cruisin' around without no fare in me cab when I passed through her street. She called to me from the window, and I come up. Then she told me to come to you and ask you to come at once. That's all I know, sir. Said I was to say it was very important."

"All right—be right with you," snapped Val, going for his coat.

He slipped his automatic into his pocket for the second time that night.

"Might need it," he muttered.

He decided not to wake Eddie. He was tired, and had done his share for that night. Probably he would not be necessary, anyway. Women get funny notions, and probably Jessica didn't need him so badly as she thought she did. But he felt exhilarated just the same. He glowed all over with the thought, the feeling that she had instinctively turned to him when she needed assistance.

"Let's go!" he snapped to the chauffeur.

A shabby taxi was waiting downstairs and the driver jumped for the wheel.

"Never mind the speed laws, young man," directed Val. "Let 'er out."

"Yes, sir," replied the driver, and the car, with a coughing of the exhaust, shot ahead.

Through the darkened streets they fled across town, leaving belated wayfarers staring after them in astonishment. Corners meant no slackening of the speed. Within the car Val, for all his bulk, rattled round like a pebble.

"Give 'er the gas!" he shouted out to the driver. "Faster! Can't you go faster?"

The driver said nothing, but the maker of that car would have been glad to get a testimonial of the speed of which it was capable. It was not something for any automobile manufacturer to be ashamed of. Now that he had time to think of it, Val was beginning to be alarmed for the girl. Surely it must be something of vast importance that would cause her to send for him so late at night.

She was in danger! Perhaps, even now, whatever it was that was menacing her had overtaken her. Perhaps by now she was lying white and still—"

"Speed 'er up!" he shouted to the driver, who grunted something unintelligible in reply. Val's strained, white face gazed at the backward flying, slumberous streets; his soul was leaping far ahead of the car, straining to get to the side of his well-beloved. The car swept around a corner into Jessica's street, and with a grind of brakes slowed up in front of the house.

"Here y' are, sir," said the driver.

Val banged the door open and leaped out.

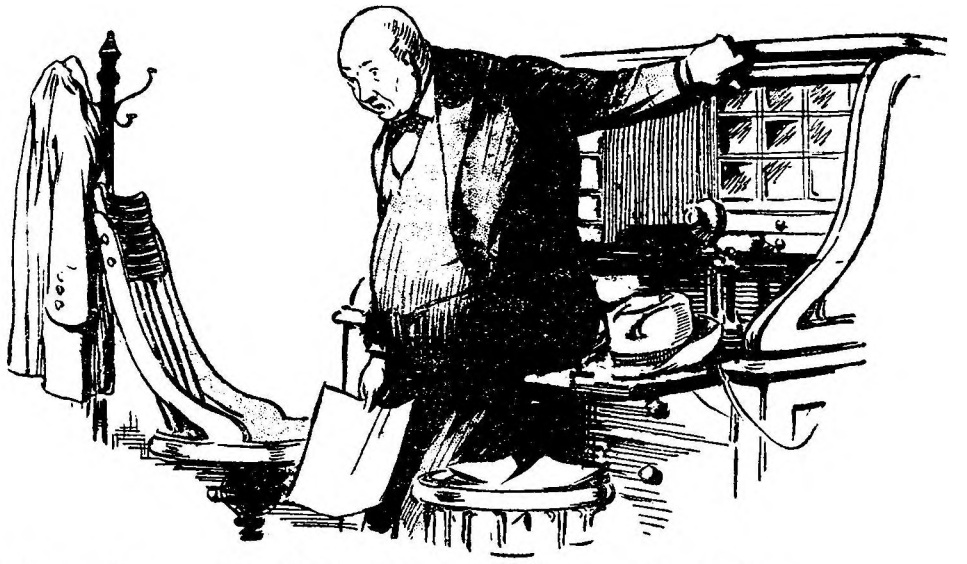
"Wait here!" he directed, and plunged for the dark vestibule.

He turned to the bells to find the name of Pomeroy. It was so dark he could not make it out, and he leaned forward further.

Suddenly a million constellations burst before his eyes. A mass of unthinking, unconscious flesh, Val dropped, crumpled up, in the vestibule of the house of Jessica Pomeroy.

Above him a large figure, grinning malevolently in the gloom, reared itself.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Two Weeks' Notice

By JACK BECHDOLT

AMOS BIRD, general manager of the Eureka Manufacturing Company, began the day in high good humor. He rang for Miss Lee, the stenographer, and after his customary brisk smile and snappy " Good morning," proceeded as follows:

" Take this, please, and make four copies. Send one to that engrosser who did the presentation resolution for us last Christmas and have him do it on genuine vellum. Tell him to put his very best artist on it and make it a first class job in every way, but—er—tell him he must submit his cost figure to me for O. K. We can't have him putting anything over on us! Ready, Miss Lee?"

Miss Lee nodded.

" By the Board of Directors of the Eureka Manufacturing Company," Bird dictated; " put that in capital letters, Miss Lee. Be it Resolved—" Bird tipped back in his chair, stared intently at the ceiling and rubbed his chin thoughtfully, seeking inspiration. Finally he proceeded slowly, amending here and there:

" It is with a sense of irreparable loss that the board has this day accepted the resignation of Mr. John Smith, founder and for twenty-five years president of the Eureka Manufacturing Company. It is only our recognition of the fact that for the encroachment of old age and failing health no man is— No, never mind that! Cut that out about old age, Miss Lee! Er—well, it is only our recognition—make it *reluctant* recognition, Miss Lee—of circumstances which no man can alter which reconciles us to parting with the services of a man whose life work has been the upbuilding of the fortunes of this company. We feel this an occasion when we must express, however feebly, our sense of undying gratitude to one who has guided this corporation through the stormy seas of business, across the treacherous shallows—"

Bird paused to allow himself a slight smile of creative joy. That last was good! "Treacherous shallows," he repeated, relishing the words, "and into the sunny—no, sunlit—waters, of commercial prosperity. To Mr. John Smith and his wife this board extends its heartfelt wishes for Mr. Smith's speedy recovery of health and the indefinite continuation of a life of service to his fellow men. And—er—yes, I guess that will do for that, Miss Lee. Er—you have the knack of expression yourself very well, Miss Lee. If you notice any rough spots will you be so kind as to iron them out—*edit them,* I think is the proper word?"

"Yes, Mr. Bird."

"Thank you, Miss Lee." Bird smiled, then the smile vanished into his usual brisk, businesslike look of alertness. "There is just one thing more," he said. "Take this, please. It is brief.

"MR. CASPAR LANSING,
"Eureka Manufacturing Company:
"Dear Sir—I regret to inform you that it will be necessary for us to accept your resignation as assistant sales manager of this company two weeks from date.
"Yours, *et cetera.*"

"That is all," said Bird. "Don't forget to telephone the engrosser about the resolution, Miss Lee. We shall want it at once, before Mr. Smith goes to California."

Departing, Miss Lee for a moment held open the door to Bird's private office and the general manager was afforded a glance into the wide open spaces of the big general offices. His eyes swept the desks with a swift, inclusive glance, and what he saw pleased him. They were all young men out there, young, energetic, hustling men, throughout the Eureka organization, all save John Smith, the retiring president, and Caspar Lansing, whose fate he had just settled. Mr. Bird, who had just turned his fortieth birthday and considered himself a very young man, tipped back and surveyed the ceiling with a smile.

"It looks like a good year," he said to the ceiling. "Yes, a very good year! This plant is no longer a home for old men!"

John Smith, the retiring president of the Eureka Manufacturing Company, came out of the directors' room, where the board had just elected Amos Bird to succeed him as president, and entered the general offices. He was a tall, spare man, with crisp, crinkly white hair, bushy white eyebrows and keen blue eyes. He was smooth shaven and his face still held the pallor of a recent illness and showed deeply etched lines about the eyes and nostrils. For all that John Smith stood very erect and moved with a springy, youthful step and all his old-time snap and decision.

John Smith had heard the resolution accepting his resignation and was touched by its expressions of friendship. He concealed his emotions fairly successfully under the cloak of his usual brisk, gruff, good humored banter with his fellow directors and took his leave of them as a man should. But he was glad that the board had met late in the afternoon and consequently that the office force had gone home. John Smith did not care, just then, to face the ordeal of innumerable handshakes and good wishes from the young men of his organization. He was glad to see nobody was in the office except Miss Lee, the stenographer, bent over her machine, and old Caspar Lansing, the assistant sales manager. He strode, with a nod and cheery "Good night" past Miss Lee, to Lansing's desk.

Lansing was facing several hours of overtime work, checking up new sales orders. He had paused to eat a sandwich, taken from the pocket of his tattered office coat.

Lansing was a short, tubby, bald headed little man. He had the round, bland, snub nosed face of a cheerful baby, and if he had shaved off his short, gray mustache and removed his glasses he might have substituted in any perambulator without arousing undue suspicion.

John Smith paused at Lansing's desk and extended his hand. "Well, Caspar!"

Lansing sprang to his feet, grasping the hand hard. "Good-by, Johnny; good-by! I—I'm sorry you're leaving us—"

"We can't help getting old, Caspar. You damn fraud, you're not so young yourself, but you manage to keep Bird fooled somehow!"

Caspar's eyes twinkled. "Oh, me!" he exclaimed. "I'm too insignificant. He's

forgot me, I guess. So you're off to California for a whole year!"

Smith's eyes clouded a little. "Doctor's orders," he said gruffly. "Complete rest. Do nothing, say nothing, think nothing, that's what it amounts to. And, confound him, he's cut off my smoking, too! Here, have a cigar, Caspar, take 'em all—I can't use 'em!"

"Why, Johnny, you—you're a lucky man!" Lansing tried to make his voice ring with conviction. "A year in California! No work. No worry. Lie in bed as long as you like. No time clock to punch. Nothing, you lucky dog!"

"You damn old liar!" Smith snapped. "Caspar, I put the best of my life into this business, and you know it. Remember the time we had the little loft down on Marginal Street and our total capital was two hundred and twenty-five dollars? Remember that? And how you used to keep the books and pack orders and boss the shop while I was out trying to collect enough to pay your wages? I tell you, boy, we hustled in those days, eh? And it was fun! It's always been fun for me, Caspar—"

"It's been pretty good fun for me, too," Lansing acknowledged, rubbing his bald head thoughtfully.

"Of course it has! Fun! Why not? Haven't we built up something? Haven't we had the fun of making it grow—making a howling success of it? Haven't we both put our best years into it until it's got to be our life interest? Now I've got to get out because of a couple of old women doctors and a fool wife. But you! You lucky stiff, you can keep on here, keep up the good work! Oh, you lucky old dog!"

John Smith clasped Lansing's hand hard and turned away without more ado, unable to go on with his farewell. And Lansing watched him out of the office, rubbing his bald head thoughtfully with that soothing, circular motion he used to calm a perturbed mind.

"Poor old Johnny!" he murmured. "He hates to quit! So would I! Yes, sir, so would I. Thank God I'm not important enough for that!"

Miss Lee coated and hatted and ready to go home, her hand holding a bundle of belated letters which she would mail at the chute in the hall, paused at his desk to drop one of her missives where it would meet his eye. It was the curt note Bird had dictated that morning.

II.

JOHN SMITH'S troubles had begun with a dish of lobster salad. He ate the salad at the house of his married daughter in Englewood late one evening, and when he drove his wife home he was looking very thoughtful. He looked even more thoughtful and said no more than was absolutely necessary when he departed for the Eureka offices at eight thirty next morning. In the middle of the morning and during a conference with Amos Bird, John Smith fainted dead away in his chair from acute indigestion. Bird made an occasion of the incident, speeding messengers for glasses of water, telephoning to doctors, summoning a luxurious private ambulance, dispatching a warning message to Mrs. Smith, doing everything spectacular and efficient he could think of. Next day John Smith insisted on returning to work against the doctor's advice. He caught a chill and developed a heavy cold from overexertion and was sent home in the ambulance, swearing like a pirate at Amos Bird.

Three specialists, much more noted and expensive than the first, were summoned to his bedside. They discovered heart murmurs and other alarming symptoms of an overdriven, breaking-down human machine and with the aid of John Smith's wife, who had been jealous of his office and work all her married life, finally banished him to California.

John Smith occupied the rear seat of his big touring car on a sunny morning some nine months after his resignation and banishment. The car had been parked at one side of a suburban boulevard. Jenks, his stocky little chauffeur, lounged over a brown paper cigarette in front.

The morning was fine and the California sun blazed down. Nevertheless, John Smith wore a light overcoat and round his neck a silken muffler was wrapped. He hated the coat and despised the muffler and dared

not dispense with either. If he had, Jenks would have wrapped him up again, patiently, good humoredly, but inexorably firm.

Nine months had passed and John Smith was an old man, an irascible, petulant, unhappy old man. On occasions he realized this fact and this morning was one of the occasions. They had made him old, Maude, his wife, and the eminent California specialist, and his business associates of the Eureka Company. Even Jenks. Jenks was in the conspiracy, too! Wrapping him up, bundling him in a silken scarf, wheeling him around the boulevards like a baby. Why, damn it, they wouldn't let him even drive his own car any more! No, sir! Tucked him in like a poor, doddering old wreck and tooled him over the boulevards at twenty miles an hour! And when he came home Maude would make him lie down for an hour before lunch!

Maude had her fun. She was wrapped up in the affairs of their second daughter, married just a little more than a year. Between Hilda and her husband and the prospective addition to their family Maude had plenty to occupy her mind. Thought of his daughter made him shudder. When her baby was born they'd all call him grandpa!

Worst of all, he could get no news about affairs at the office—affairs of his own company—the company in which he still controlled forty-nine per cent of the stock. They kept that from him! Vague, cheerful, rambling letters came from his associates, letters recommending that he take up golf or tarpon fishing or tour the Yosemite. But especially golf. He despised golf.

Between Maude and the doctors and the conspiracy among his old associates John Smith had nothing left to think about but himself and he felt mighty sorry for himself.

Old! He roused, scowling fiercely, chewing savagely at the cigar he did not dare light because if he lit it Jenks would take it away from him. Old? Damn it, he wasn't old! Just past fifty—or was it forty-nine? He never could remember whether you counted from birth or the first birthday. Old!

Bl-a-a-a-a!

A noisy, rattling, dust covered flivver, sun-blistered, rusted, scarred and dented and overflowing with passengers, pulled off the road and parked just behind them. John Smith watched a worried, coatless man jump out and inspect a flat tire while a shapeless woman in a Mother Hubbard volunteered shrill advice.

"Mister, got a jack I can borrow?" the coatless man yelled it at John Smith.

"Jack? You bet you, neighbor!"

John Smith was up and out of his car, fumbling at the tool locker. "Let me, sir," murmured Jenks, instantly at his side.

John Smith found the jack, but Jenks relieved him of it and handed it to the coatless man. They proceeded in a body to the rear of the flivver, got the jack under the axle and raised the car, now empty of passengers. They made quite a little crowd, including the coatless man's numerous family of small children. John Smith was pleasurably excited. Something had happened, something interesting! He found a rim wrench and started loosening nuts, preparing the rim holding the damaged tire for removal. He got grease on his hands and enjoyed it.

"Let me, Mr. Smith." Jenks took the wrench from him.

John Smith began unlashing the spare from the tire carrier. Jenks relieved him of the task, kindly but firmly. Between Jenks and the coatless man they left him nothing to do but squat in the dust, watching with breathless interest the removal of the tire and the substitution of the rim carrying the spare one. Once a rim nut rolled away and he was allowed to hold that until it was needed. He felt it an honor.

The spare tire was locked in place, the damaged one strapped in the carrier and the jack no longer needed. "I'm sure much obliged," said the proprietor of the flivver. "Got to get down to San Pedro before noon. Job waiting for me there—same firm I used to work for in Jersey City—"

"You're from Jersey City?" John Smith exclaimed with heightened interest.

"Left last March, all of us—"

"You drove it?"

"Well, we didn't care to walk, mister."

John Smith surveyed the battered Lizzie with new respect, almost fondness. It had

come from Jersey City—they all had. They were home folks!

"Say," catching the coatless man's arm, "you know the Eureka Manufacturing Company in Jersey City?"

"Nope, guess not."

"Big concrete plant down near the river—electric sign a block long on the roof—"

"Can't place it, mister. There's such a lot of them factories."

"It doesn't matter," John Smith murmured, but he watched the flivver depart with a sense of hurt. From Jersey City! Why in the devil couldn't the man have known the Eureka plant? The coatless man's ignorance cut him deeply. It seemed like base ingratitude. He had done him a good turn and that was how he repaid! Couldn't even remember seeing that electric sign a block long—the sign he was so proud of.

A homesickness for Jersey City and the Eureka plant—a longing to hear the trucks rumbling over the cobbles, to smell the hot machine oil odor of the shops, the cool, varnishy interior of his private office, a longing to pull up his chair before a desk heaped high with waiting business—all this possessed him and left a bitter, galling taste on his tongue and a throbbing hurt in his heart. That was his life—and they had taken life from him!

Jenks's voice came to him: "Did you say to go on, Mr. Smith?"

"No!" he barked perversely.

Jenks ostentatiously referred to his watch.

John Smith submitted. "Oh, all right. I don't care. Wait, I'm going to ride in front with you."

Jenks closed up the windshield tight to protect his employer from draft. "Jenks, you're a damn fool," said Smith. The chauffeur grinned. "I'm no more an invalid than you are, Jenks—"

"No, sir."

"Then why in hell do you insist on treating me like a baby?"

Jenks shrugged and blew smoke from his nose. He had his orders.

John Smith thought hard for a quarter of an hour. "Jenks," he began innocently, "didn't you say your little daughter is in Chicago?"

Jenks brightened. "Yes, sir, with her grandmother—"

"And you haven't seen her for several years?"

"Not since her mother died, almost two years ago."

"But you'd like to see her, eh?"

The knuckles of the chauffeur's brown hands whitened as he gripped hard on the wheel. He nodded.

"You're going to see her—see her soon, too," John Smith predicted. "Say, you can drive this car across the continent, can't you? That Lizzie made it."

"I can drive this car anywhere where there's land to drive it on."

John Smith nodded. He unbuttoned several layers of coats and brought out a wallet. From the wallet he began to sort out yellow-backed currency notes. He displayed a handful of these to Jenks with a crafty leer. "My boy, there's five hundred there. Five hundred would help quite a lot in putting your little girl through school, wouldn't it?"

"You said a mouthful, Mr. Smith!" Jenks replied.

"H-m! Well—maybe you'll get a chance to earn it. I was talking to the doctor the other day. He said he thought it would do me good to drive up to the Yosemite and spend a month or so in a good hotel up there. Jenks, I think we'll go touring in the Yosemite. You understand, *the Yosemite?*"

The chauffeur grinned. "Yes, sir. Oh, yes, the Yosemite, Mr. Smith!"

"All right. If we do go, Jenks, and you show a little reason about driving the way I like to be driven, there's going to be another five hundred for you when we get home again. But mind, we're just making a trip to the Yosemite!"

III.

THE town of Othee lies to the eastward of the Mississippi River, but considerably more than a thousand miles from Jersey City. It has three thousand inhabitants, enjoys a brisk trade supplied by the farming district about, but lacks in attractions for the tourist. John Smith, who had

walked Othee's main street up one side and down the other, felt he had just about exhausted the attractions. He hadn't come to Othee to see the town, anyway. It was just one more dot on the road map, one milestone nearer to the Eureka Plant in Jersey City.

Escape from his wife and doctor had been simpler than he anticipated. With her daughter's impending domestic crisis claiming her attention, Maude Smith had been glad to be rid of the care of her husband so long as she knew he would be in safe hands. And the specialist approved the change for him. They had tarried long enough in Yosemite for the fugitive to plant a series of pre-dated letters home—letters reporting his well-being which would be mailed from time to time, thanks to a well-bribed hotel bellboy. His wife's correspondence would be forwarded and awaiting him in Chicago. Then they started over the coast-to-coast trail. All went well until Othee. There ignition trouble halted them, and while the car was being overhauled with the terrible leisure of garage mechanics John Smith raged up and down the street.

Fuming at the stupidity of Othee and the mid-afternoon heat, which was something to remember, John Smith turned into a shaded side thoroughfare. A sign brought him to a halt, excited and incredulous. "It can't be!" he exclaimed. "The thing's out of the question. Still, it might be a relative of his. I'll ask."

The sign was over a store—a dejected, dusty, small-town store, which seemed about ready to give up the ghost and be done with an unsympathetic world. The sign announced:

CASPAR LANING—HARDWARE

John Smith walked into the store. His critical eye saw that it was empty of customers, saw that dust-covered stock crowded every available inch of floor space and impeded his progress; saw on every hand evidence of failure. A round little man came out of the shadows at the rear. His babyish face had brightened hopefully at sound of footsteps. Customers were a rare event with him. It was Caspar himself—Caspar, assistant sales manager at the Eureka plant, John Smith's friend and crony for twenty-five years.

Caspar reported himself with numerous pauses to massage his bald head with the old-time circular motion that told of his perturbed mind. "You see, Johnny, after Bird fired me—"

"Bird!" John Smith snorted. "He's gone mad with the idea that anybody too old for rompers is too old to carry on business. Wants to make a day nursery out of the Eureka plant! I'd like to see him dare fire you while I was there!"

"Yes. Well, he fired me anyhow. And I had a couple of thousand dollars I'd saved, and I always wanted to own a business of my own. Wanted something I could build up. I—I had an idea I could sell things—"

"Caspar, you always were a natural-born fool—"

"I suppose so, Johnny. I saw an advertisement offering this business for sale, and I came here. The owner, Mr. Albee, had a good little proposition. You see, it was the only hardware store in town—"

"I saw one on Main Street just now, Caspar—"

"Yes, I know," Caspar sighed. "This was the only one when I came. Albee's price seemed reasonable. I raised the money—I pawned my life insurance, you see—and bought him out. It was understood between us that he was going out of business—"

"And he didn't!"

"You guessed it, Johnny. He started that store you saw on Main Street two months after I came in here. He gave me his word he wouldn't—"

"You ought to have a thing like that in writing, Caspar."

"Yes, I guess I should. But he looked honest. I guess, the fact is, from what I've heard, all Albee wanted was to sell this store to raise cash to take a better location. And there isn't room for two stores in town."

Caspar sighed again, and began rubbing his bald head round and round.

"The pup!" John Smith snorted. "The low down, yellow pup!"

"Yes, it looked to me as if Albee was kind of—sharp," Caspar admitted mildly.

"And now you're broke, eh?"

Caspar glanced about the dusty store, at the idle stock, and finally back to his friend. "Cleaned out," he murmured, evidently stunned at the prospect of his future. "Cleaned out. I guess I never was cut out to run my own business—and now I'm too old to learn—"

"Too old, hell!" John Smith began pacing up and down the crowded aisle, amidst kegs of nails, racks of adzes and axes, hoes, rakes, garden hose, lawn mowers, shovels, stacked tin pails, and a small regiment of patent domestic washing machines. "Too old!" he cried. "Nobody's too old. You're not too old and I'm not too old! Oh, why—why in the name of sweet poverty didn't I think of something like this? Caspar, this last nine months have been hell—plain hell! And here you've been spoiling a perfect picnic that same time. Look here, I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts I could have taken this business of yours and chased that crook Albee out of town by legitimate competition in half the time it took you to lose all your money!"

"I know you could. You always were smart at selling, Johnny."

"And I am yet! It's not too late. It's never too late, Caspar. I'm just finding that out, and it's damn important to remember. Just paste that in your hat: It's never too late. It's worth money to know that."

He took another turn about and examined a washing machine. "What's the matter with this thing?" he demanded.

"Nothing. It's a fine machine. Runs by electricity—"

"There's a power plant in town?"

"Yes, and on most of the farms around here. I stocked up with them, figuring a modern community like this would eat 'em up. Nobody as much as nibbled."

"Try marking down the price a few dollars to get 'em going?"

"Can't. The manufacturer's contract fixes the price—"

"H-m! Well, look here, what's to stop you making a dicker with the electric company, then, and making every purchaser of a machine a free present of ten dollars worth of electric power to operate their washers?"

"Nothing, except—I never thought of it—"

"Ha!" John Smith grinned. "Well, I did! What's more, we'll do that very thing. Caspar!" He smote his old employee a tremendous blow across the shoulders. "We're going to show this old town new tricks. I've been spoiling for a fight these last nine months. Thank God, I've found one! You and I are going to get your friend Albee on the run and chase him out of business altogether, and we're going to start by selling washing machines. I've got some new ideas—"

"But, Johnny, you can't! Your health—your trip East to the factory—"

"Health! I'm twice as healthy as you are right now! As for the factory, Caspar, I never kidded myself a minute about that! Oh, I know! They'd all tell me how glad they were to see me, and glad-hand me around the shop and then shoo me out! That 'd be the size of my visit. D'you think Bird would let me have a look in at real business, once he's got in the saddle? I never fooled myself about that, but it was all I had to do just then. I was so darn humble I would have taken even those crumbs and given thanks. But now!"

Later in the afternoon Jenks, seeking his employer with the apologetic message that the car would be laid up until the following morning, was astounded, after a long search, to discover him in the window of a small, dusty, insignificant side street hardware store, where he was placing newly painted placards about an electric washing machine. John Smith's face was streaked with dust and sweat. He had removed coat and vest and collar. He looked a sight.

Jenks's news about the car only brought an impudent grin to John Smith's face.

"Listen, son," said he, "you catch the night train to Chicago and go visit your little girl and her grandma—and stay there until you hear from me. Forward any mail that's waiting for me, and keep your mouth shut, that's all you've got to do. Here"—he found his wallet—"I guess

you've earned the rest of that money I promised you—"

"But, Mr. Smith!" Jenks stammered. "How about your trip? How about your old home? You said you were homesick—"

"I was," John Smith agreed. "I was damn near dead of it. But, son, I'm at home right now. Yes, sir, right here is home-sweet-home to me for the present—and here I stay!"

IV.

On a fine fall day about three months later two important-looking strangers alighted from a limited train and had themselves driven hurriedly through the streets of Othee to a side street hardware store known to them by description. The store did not accord with the description given them. It was dazzling in a coat of fresh white paint with black trim. The new plate glass display windows were bright—one with a few choice kitchen utensils, the other featuring a washing machine of spotless enamel white with a plate glass let into its middle to display the agitation of a sudsy, soapy sea. The interior of the store was equally captivating with wide aisles, glittering displays of cutlery and novelties and new plate glass show cases. There were half a dozen customers at the time, and two brisk clerks were kept busy attending them. In only one way did the place answer descriptions, the sign above it proclaimed:

LANSING & SMITH
Hardware
"The Washing Machine Kings"

The strangers demanded John Smith. A clerk told them that Mr. Smith was in the country for the day. They asked for Caspar Lansing. Mr. Lansing was very busy, in conference with Mr. Albee, a local merchant. The clerk doubted if they could be disturbed. When Casper Lansing spared them a moment, he gave his visitors information which sent them scurrying past outlying farms in a rented touring car.

They found John Smith in the kitchen of a farmhouse. Clad in spotless white flannels, coatless, he was lecturing suavely on the merits of an electric washing machine which stood hitched up in the middle of the floor. As he lectured he fed the farmwife's weekly laundry into the washer's capacious mouth, and guided freshly washed clothes through the electric wringer, and all without getting a spot of water on his immaculate raiment. John Smith's eyes were sparkling, his voice was firm and mellow, and the flow of his eloquence was a perpetual delight to the farmer, the farmer's wife, the hired girl, and five small girls and boys ranged in a group about him.

"John Smith!" his visitors gasped.

John Smith wheeled at hearing his name. He knew them in a second—Burgess and Reed, two directors of the Eureka Manufacturing Company. But he showed no astonishment.

"You boys wait outside until I've finished," he said coolly. They would have protested, but he came closer and hissed, "Outside, you damn fools! Do you want to spoil a sale for me?" As they retired the directors heard Smith's smooth explanation, "My assistants remind me I have many other places to visit this morning. If you'll just look over this time payment contract—and sign your name there in the lower corner, on the dotted line."

The astonished directors of the Eureka Manufacturing Company sat on a kitchen step, watching the ducks and chickens in the barnyard, and considered the astonishing end of the six weeks' search for John Smith, a search which had employed a dozen detectives before Jenks was located in Chicago and a real clew secured. They had passed an anxious six weeks, and had a hard journey, and met a surprising rebuff at the end of it; but they were in desperate need, and they had to wait patiently on the doorstep for John Smith, whether they liked it or not.

John Smith went back to Othee with his visitors.

"Caspar," he grinned at his partner, "Amos Bird has made a mess of the business. He got the Eureka Company in a jam, and they want me to go back to straighten things out. I've made my terms with them—complete control again, for as many years as I want to stay. Want to go back with me, Caspar?"

"Albee was in this morning, and agreed to buy us out at our own figure," Caspar answered. "I guess now he knows the town can't support two hardware stores! And maybe I had better go with you, Johnny. I'm safer with you."

V.

JOHN SMITH and Caspar Lansing sat in the president's office of the Eureka Manufacturing Company. It was the morning of John Smith's triumphal return. Miss Lee, the stenographer, entered.

"Take this, Miss Lee," said John Smith:

"MR. AMOS BIRD, Eureka Mfg. Company:
"Dear Sir—It will be necessary for us to accept your resignation from the employ of this company two weeks from this date. I remain, and so forth—"

Caspar caught his friend's arm and clutched hard. "Don't you do that!" he cried. "Don't you do it, Johnny. Bird is a good man for his work, and you know it. It's not fair to fire him—"

"Bird is too damn young—a mere infant," John Smith growled, striving to conceal a grin.

"It's not fair!" Caspar repeated vehemently. "And I—I won't stand for his being fired, either. I'll quit right now if you do that, Johnny—"

"Tear up that letter, Miss Lee," said Smith quietly. "I guess I won't need you any longer."

When Miss Lee had gone, John Smith turned on Caspar with the wide grin in full control of his face. "Bully for you, Caspar! Bird *is* a good man—in his place—among the juveniles. I only did that for your sake—figuring you had that satisfaction coming to you, if you wanted it. I'm glad you didn't stand for it—mighty glad. Why, Caspar, the way I feel right now, remembering all I went through out there in California, I wouldn't fire a yellow dog out of the old Eureka plant."

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SEA DREAMS

I AM choked on the air of the dusty town,
I am mad for the smell of the sea,
For the moss-gray slips and the urging ships
Where the wind in the west when the sun drops down
Runs calling and crying to me.

I must break from the grip of the stifling town,
I must go where the combers roar,
Where the wake twists white in the restless night
And the crested rollers come galloping down
On a grim, wind-buffeted shore.

For the winds are becalmed in a smoky town
To the man baptized in brine;
But the bright seas gleam in my endless dream,
Where the tall square-riggers tack up and down
And their cargoes are dreams of mine.

Karl W. Detzer.

Poker Faces

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "A Noise in Newboro," "Stay Home," etc.

CHAPTER IX.

GONE!

THIS last dreadful minute, tired Henry Curlew's perturbation had been visible, to James at least. Henry's forehead had wrinkled and his lips had taken to working; the glances he had been shooting at James mingled anger and appeal.

But now, with a rush, Henry emerged from his perturbation; he sat bolt upright and beamed!

"Um—yes! You could do that!" he stated.

"Well, of course I can do that!" cried Dixon, and his face fell a little. "That is—you *can* go, can't you?"

James Whitmore's eyes, away from the others, had been fixed upon Betty. It may be that she found something distasteful in them. At all events, she smiled sweetly, timidly, at Mr. Curlew and Mr. Dixon, and said:

"Why, I—I think so. I don't know why not!"

"Your aunt!" said James. "Your invalid aunt. You couldn't go to the theater because you didn't want to get away from a telephone."

"Yes, I know," murmured little Betty, and her slight confusion grew prettier and prettier. "I thought, after I'd told you about her, that—that a girl has no real right to permit family affairs to interfere with business! Has she? Of course, the theater was pleasure and that—that's why I didn't feel justified in going. But if Mr. Dixon really needs me—"

"Positively have to have you!" smiled

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 18.

the big man. "Couldn't undertake a job like this without a secretary of some sort—and you'll do for me, good and plenty!" And he laid a kindly hand on Betty's slender shoulder. "Now, I tell you what: we'll get the number of the train, and you can leave word so a wire can follow us—and if it just should happen that you had to come back, I'll come back with you, the whole way. I mean, you needn't be scared of having to travel alone, or anything like that!"

"Oh, I'm not so easily frightened!" Betty said demurely.

"No, I'll bet you're not! You're the greatest little—" Mr. Dixon caught himself even as James spoke.

"Well, I *think*," said James, and his words dripped poisoned honey, "that it might be best first of all for Miss Banford to telephone and make sure that her aunt is not worse. Don't you think so, Miss Banford?"

"I—I'd like to do that."

Henry Curlew was all alive again.

"Want to call up from in here, child?" he asked. "No—no, of course you don't want to talk over family affairs with a crowd of men standing around. Here, Miss Banford!"

Rising, he too laid a hand on her shoulder and pointed her toward the door. "Little room just by the door, up there, as you come into the house—find a telephone stuck in behind that vase on the table! That's it!"

He smiled kindly, as one must have smiled at Betty. He chuckled as she tripped daintily down the corridor. He looked at Dixon for a moment.

"Pretty kid, isn't she?" he said. "You've got good taste in picking secretaries."

"You found her," said Mr. Dixon with a faint grin. "Pretty! I'll say she's pretty! She's the cutest kid I ever laid eyes on, and—um!"

He subsided suddenly, into the doubtless pleasant pool of his own thoughts.

James Whitmore held his peace. It was a mighty undertaking—yet he held his peace! For one thing, he had sworn fealty to Curlew this evening, and an outbreak now, disclosing just the hundredth part of what he felt, would have blasted every plan of Henry Curlew's! For another, much of the responsibility rested upon Betty herself.

She had been torturing him, and perhaps he deserved it—and it was over with now, thank the Lord! Betty, as James understood fully, would go just about so far and no farther; which, specifically, meant that after two or three minutes Betty would reappear, outwardly concerned to whatever degree she might feel necessary, and report that her mythical aunt was failing very rapidly and that she must leave immediately. Understanding this, then, James pondered on with grim amusement. The confounded little rascal, ever to take things into her own hands like this and go through with it as she had! Wonderful little actress, though. He was bound to give her credit for that. And further—and this was the one really big satisfaction—she had been unable to break down his prized poker face. Aye, though she had worked and worked, she had failed to fight her way past that protective barrier of her husband's.

Nevertheless, he was tremendously grateful that the end of the comedy had been reached. There are some things before which even a countenance of stone might give, and another hour of this insane performance might well have found him screaming unbridled fury and dumfounding truths in Mr. Henry Curlew's splendid home! A small, shuddering sigh of relief came from James's lips as Betty's light step abruptly approached the door.

Dixon started forward eagerly with:

"Well? How is she, kid?"

"Oh, she's very much better, thank you!" Betty dimpled.

"Er—*what?*" cried Betty's husband.

"I said that my aunt's very much better, Mr. Whitmore," the perfect secretary explained. "I'm so glad!"

"It's all right, then?" Mr. Dixon's huge voice cried gladly.

"Why, I—I think so. I've just been talking to my other aunt. The—er—doctor said he might not even have to call tomorrow."

"Well, that's fine!" the visitor an-

nounced, and his beaming smile was reflected by Henry Curlew at least—and at just about that time Henry fluttered down into his big chair and caught a tired sigh. "Now let's see what we're going to do. I had a timetable here somewhere. Got New York-Washington trains on it, too, I think. Wait a second. What time is it now?"

"Getting on toward ten," said Curlew.

"Thunder! Is it as late as that?" Dixon muttered, turning the pages of his timetable. "We'll have to go down on a sleeper and— You speak, Mr. Whitmore?"

"I—I was about to speak, anyway," James said. "Er—Mr. Dixon! About Miss Banford."

Dixon's timetable dropped suddenly and he stared truculently.

"What about Miss Banford?"

"You're likely to be gone several days?"

"That's quite possible. What of it?"

"Well, while we want to do everything possible to make your stay here pleasant and profitable, I'm really afraid we need Miss Banford at the office."

"She never worked at your office. She's a new employee of Mr. Curlew's as I understood it!" Dixon said too promptly.

"To be sure—but we've really been planning to have her at the office, beginning to-morrow morning, and we're so shorthanded now that it might—er—disrupt things a bit if we had to find a new girl again. You understand, of course."

"But Curlew said—" the visitor began, and looked at Curlew and then grinned suddenly, for Henry's lids had dropped again and that last breath was a thin whistle.

"Asleep!" said Mr. Dixon. "Old—shot to pieces—no pep! When I get like that I'm going to step off the big cliffs at the end of my Blue River property and hit the rocks head first! What were you saying? Oh, about—"

"Exactly! Now, we have a man at the office, named Bolling—Mr. Curlew's private secretary, in fact—and I know that Curlew 'll be glad to lend him and that you'll find him—"

"Yes, but I—I don't know him!"

"Well, you haven't known Miss Banford more than two hours!"

"Well, that may be all," Mr. Dixon said, and gazed at her; "but at the same time— Oh, I say, Whitmore, what's all this nonsense about—what was his name—Bolling?"

"It isn't nonsense," James managed to smile, as he looked about for a telephone directory. "I'll get in touch with him immediately and I'm quite sure he'll be able to meet you at the next train. In addition, you'll find him a much more capable secretary!"

"Why, Mr. Whitmore!" Betty protested indignantly. "Why do you say that?"

"Eh? What was that he said?" Mr. Dixon cried, even more indignantly. "What do you mean, Whitmore—more capable?"

"Why, a faster stenographer, and a man much more experienced in—"

"I'm sure he isn't—isn't even as fast as I am!" Betty stated.

"Bolling," James responded, with a small and very dreadful smile, "is the fastest stenographer in New York City!"

"What if he is?" the visitor asked angrily. "I'm not going to run a speed contest with anybody. I usually dictate about ten words and then have to think five minutes before I dictate the next ten. Anyhow, I don't believe he has any sort of speed to touch this kid!"

"No! Neither do I," Betty pouted, causing James's skin to crawl. "Not really."

"And whether he has or not, I don't like the idea of starting out on a trip like this with a strange person," Dixon said decidedly. "Where'd you get that notion, Whitmore? Curlew seemed perfectly satisfied for me to take Miss Banford."

"Well, possibly *Curlew* did—" began to grind its way through James's teeth as Mr. Curlew opened his eyes suddenly.

"Huh? Eh?" he bubbled. "What's that?"

"Your partner wants me to take some infernal man that works for you, instead of Miss Banford!" Dixon explained hotly.

"Man—man—"

"Bolling, of course," said James.

Henry Curlew's latest spell of somnolent blinking came to a sudden end.

"Take Bolling? Why in blazes should

he take Bolling? He can't do that! I'm sorry, but I can't spare Bolling from the office unless it's for an actual life and death matter. You know that, Jim. I thought it was settled that Miss Banford was going with Dixon?"

The visitor smiled faintly, deeply, and returned to the examination of his time-table.

"You thought dead right!" he observed. "It is!"

And now he turned the leaves again, while Henry Curlew, after a long and inquiring stare at the expressionless James, subsided slowly into his chair once more, while Betty, also gazing at James, fluttered her eyelids in the most exquisitely innocent fashion and then dropped them modestly.

"Ha! Here we are!" Dixon reported gayly. "One train at eleven and another at twelve. Can we make that one at eleven?"

"I—I think so," Betty said timidly. "I'll have to rush home and pack— Just a grip, you know!"

"I suppose you will, kid!" Mr. Dixon grinned down at her tenderly. "Girls always have to have a lot of frippery along, eh? All right. How long will that take?"

"Not very long, if I start immediately."

"Well, you'd better do that," James said sharply. "And I will escort you home, Miss Banford."

"Oh!" said Betty.

"Yes. It's too late at night for a young woman to be traveling around town alone," young Mr. Whitmore added very flatly, and twitched down his coat lapels and glanced about in search of Gorely to fetch his coat and hat. "Where's your coat?"

"But—but—"

"Say, pardon me, Whitmore, for speaking right out in meeting, but it seems to be necessary!" boomed compellingly from Mr. Dixon. "Can't you see the girl doesn't want you to do that? Good Lord! Have some consideration for her natural delicacy, can't you? How does it look for a girl to be trotting around all hours of the night with one of the heads of her firm?"

"It—"

"How'd *you* like it—supposing something of the kind could happen—to have your daughter or your wife or sister running around with her employer?"

"I—I assure you that I should not—" was just vibrating from James, when Dixon, ignoring him, addressed Henry Curlew:

"Have you got a car we could borrow? That would save time!"

"It is in front of the house at this moment, I think. I had some idea that you might fancy a trip to the theater, and the man apparently hasn't been in for permission to return to the garage. Take it, Dixon—and I think, if you're going to make that train, you'd better hurry, Miss Banford."

"Yes, I—I will!" said Betty, and hurried away.

"Pardon me, but are *you* going to escort Miss Banford home?" James inquired, and although no sign of emotion appeared upon his face there was certainly something in his voice which Mr. Dixon caught.

An odd little smile curled upon Mr. Dixon's lips; he looked James up and down and up again.

"D'ye think *you're* going to stop me?" he asked rather astonishingly.

"I had no idea of doing that. I asked a question."

"All right! I'm going to escort Miss Banford home—and a lot farther than that," said Mr. Dixon. "Now it's answered."

After this he waited for further manifestations from James. They did not come. James, in fact, had just caught Henry Curlew's eyes; and if there had been something in James's voice a moment ago, there was something in Curlew's eye now! The ostensible junior partner clicked his teeth together.

Dixon laughed meditatively.

"Suppose there'll be any trouble about getting accommodations on the sleeper?" he mused.

"I'll make your reservations, while you are getting to the station," James said.

"Oh, I think you needn't do—"

"Yes, Jim 'll be glad to attend to that," Curlew supplied suavely. "Your own grip is all packed?"

"Mine? Oh, to be sure! Hasn't been touched since I landed here!" the visitor

said blithely. "You'll tend to those reservations, Whitmore?"

"I will!"

"Thanks," the big man said carelessly and turned away. "Well, I'll run up now and get my coat and bag and maybe I can give Miss Banford a hand putting on her things."

With which he departed swiftly. Young Mr. Whitmore stared fixedly after him. Young Mr. Whitmore's brain was spinning and an all consuming fury shook every ounce of him that lay beneath the skin. His hands were damp and icy cold; his throat was hot and painful sandpaper; sheer rage, just then, was vibrating his very spinal column.

He turned suddenly to Henry.

"Would it be as well if I—I went with them in that car?" he asked.

And he asked no more than this—for if James was invisibly angry, Henry also was angry, and not invisibly! Henry's tired old eyes blazed wickedly and there was a hectic flush on either cheek.

"No! It would not!" sizzled softly past Henry's lips.

"But—"

"We'll speak of this at greater length when they're out of the house!"

"But I think—"

"There, I am certain, Whitmore, you make the gravest error!" said the master of the house. "You do almost anything else! We will speak of that, too, when they are gone! And—psst!"

He quenched the conflagration in his eyes he wrenched a smile into place, and none too soon, for Mr. Dixon was tramping in again, one hand clutching the timid little arm of the so-called Miss Banford.

"Well, I guess we're on our way now, folks!" he cried genially. "See your man Pemmerly to-morrow, of course, and a lot will depend on what he has to say. Anyhow, don't expect us back before we get here!"

And he loosed his grip on the girl and held out a mighty hand, shaking Mr. Curlew's.

"Thanks for dinner and wanting to keep me here and all that!" he said. "In all probability I'll be back for another little visit—some time." And he glanced at James and plainly considered offering his hand and then changed his mind. "'By, Whitmore!" he said simply.

"Good-by, Dixon." James smiled terribly. "Good—ah—by, Miss Banford!"

"Er—good-by, Mr. Whitmore," murmured Betty and allowed her lids to flutter at him.

"And I hope that we may meet again," James added.

"Why, I—I hope so, of course," smiled Betty. "Er—some time, as Mr. Dixon says."

And now she had turned away from him and, Dixon pawing her again in the same sickening fashion that had marked their entrance, they were heading out of the room. They were going. Yes, they were going away together. Betty—little Betty—was going—*going*—

Here, not so remarkably perhaps, young Mr. Whitmore lost himself completely for several seconds. His tormented brain seemed to explode staggeringly, belching forth blood-red flame! He knew now what he was going to do: he was going to kill Dixon! He was going to relieve himself of just one soul-freezing scream and leap after Dixon and bear him down to the floor—and then he was going to tear him to little, horrid shreds, batter his handsome, ruddy countenance to a ghastly pulp, shatter his thick, conceited skull and—

A door slammed. Another door slammed, the door of a motor this time.

They were gone!

CHAPTER X.

THE MISSING.

THE tornado in James's brain had subsided now. For another three seconds, to the best of his comprehension, there was a sensation as if he had been smitten by a heavy club, in hands even stronger than Dixon's. And then, mercifully, the brain began to clear, and James turned suddenly upon his employer with:

"See here, sir. I—"

"Dry up, idiot!" Henry Curlew rasped, softly and amazingly.

" W-what?"

" I've just rung for Gorely. Keep your confounded mouth shut until he's gone and —ah, Gorely! Has the other car been repaired yet?"

" I think not, sir," said the butler.

" Telephone for a taxi, and do it quick! Thing has to be here in less than ten minutes—five, if possible! *Move!*"

The aged butler tottered off at quite a crazy pace. The master of the house looked up at James.

" There is something on what you call your mind?" he asked.

" There is, and—"

" Be quick about telling me—and then *I* want to talk to *you!*"

" Very well, sir," young Mr. Whitmore all but thundered. " Then—the—*how d'ye think that looks?*"

" What does that mean?"

" For a reputable firm to permit a young woman employee to—to go off traveling with a stranger?"

The merest trifle of the fury within him found its way to James's voice. Henry Curlew glanced up again, not so savagely.

" She's not an employee of the firm in the first place," he said. " She is my personal—"

" To all intents she's an employee of the firm!" James broke in. " Perhaps my job doesn't include giving you a lecture on business morals, Mr. Curlew. If it doesn't and you feel just like firing me, consider me fired on the spot. But I mean to say this: the whole thing looks bad and if any one with—with a grudge against the house happened to discover it and enlarge upon it, it would reflect unpleasantly on the house."

" In business, James," said Henry Curlew, " one has to take a chance occasionally."

" Not a—a damned indecent, immoral chance!"

" *What?*"

" It's just that. You've deliberately endangered the morals of an innocent young girl! I may be taking too much upon myself, but while I'm connected with the firm I'll do all I can to save it from a blot of that kind—chance or no chance! I'll get after them and catch them and—"

" James!" barked Henry Curlew.

" What?" said James, quite breathlessly.

" How the devil do *you* know she's an innocent young girl?"

" I—I assume that, of course. She looks like it."

" Ah, yes, but you never can tell, James," Henry Curlew said, and wagged his gray head sagely. " How old's that girl?"

" Twenty-four!" James barked, and added hastily. " Or about that!"

" Um—yes, about that, I should say. Well, at twenty-four, Whitmore, a girl is either moral or she isn't. One or the other, of course, but it's pretty safe to say that the general trend of her life is settled by that time. Now, this girl may be absolutely all right. Perhaps she is—"

" Well, she is!" vociferated James.

" Probably, Whitmore. But she has a wicked little twinkle in her eye." Mr. Curlew chuckled, and never even suspected that Death and Mutilation were dancing hand in hand above him in that instant.

Yet, having controlled his chuckling, Henry Curlew hitched up in his chair and bent upon James a gaze that held no chuckles at all.

" The worst of it is out of your system now, I take it, Whitmore?"

" It—"

" Well, it has to be," the head of the firm rapped out. " And now you'll listen to me. You're young and apparently highly moral; doubtless, I ought to be proud to know that we have so moral a young man with us and it's quite probable that I shall feel that—when I'm convinced that all your excitement's on the firm's account. But the fact remains that you are young and that you fell for that pretty kid with a loud crash when she entered this room. You can't deny that."

" I not only can, but I do!" said James, coldly and with entire truth. " I did nothing of the sort!"

" Well, if I'm wrong about that, it's high time I made another trip to the oculist," Henry grunted. " However, let that go; we haven't unlimited time in which to analyze your mind. I don't know whether that kid can scratch a line of stenography or not, Whitmore; she was hired for her looks!"

"Hah!"

"And she's got 'em—and they got him—and now *she's* got him! And that's all that matters and—say, Whitmore, I wish you'd get that outraged saint look out of your eyes. It doesn't go with the rest of the blankness!" Curlew said wearily. "The firm hasn't dropped into a sink hole of immorality and it has no intention of doing anything of the kind. She's simply keeping him interested, Whitmore. Hell's bells! *Can't you grasp that?*"

"I do grasp it—fully," said James. "And, by the way, I think I'll begin telephoning for their reservations. They ought to be in separate cars!"

"Ought to be—rot!" Henry snarled. "They're not taking any train!"

"Why not?"

"Because it's going to be my painful duty to ruin the trip. You don't suppose for one instant that I'm going to let him talk to Pemmerly before *I've* talked to him, do you? And I can't talk to him until I've called up every hotel in Washington and found out where he is—and even so, he may be at some friend's house, for all I know to the contrary. The thick-skulled, brass lunged fool didn't inform me as to where he was staying and I couldn't cross-question him with Dixon in the room. So we'll have to smash the trip and—oh, Lord!"

Weariness bending him a little forward, Henry Curlew rose and moved to the big table and opened the drawer. Hunched over, he brought out little slips of paper, larger slips of paper, glancing at each one, grunting a little.

"Looking for the confounded girl's telephone number," he explained.

"Did you have that?" escaped James.

"What? Yes. Mitchell hired her for me, you know. Had that infernal number, because he gave it to me at the office this afternoon—and I stuck it in my pocket and I'm certain I put it in here." He hunted further. "Attached no importance to it, of course, because I never expected to use it."

"Well, why do you want to use it now?" James asked flatly.

The head of the firm sat back.

"I wonder," said he, with patience sorely stretching, "if, some time before I die, I shall be able to hire a person—just one person—whose brain power rates higher, even in the littlest degree, than that of the average cockroach? Explicitly, then, Whitmore, it is my desire to catch 'em at the girl's home while she is packing and inform them—mendaciously, you understand, since Pemmerly actually has *not* again communicated with me—that Pemmerly has just informed me over the long distance that he has started for New York."

"Ah!" James said grimly.

"And I don't mean to sneer at you, Whitmore, and I beg your pardon—but I'm tired—*tired!*" Henry Curlew said as he rummaged on. "Well—the thing's not here. I'll have Gorely look in my vest and—no, I'll go look myself. I'll have to do it eventually, anyway," muttered Henry as he rose and walked slowly out of the room.

James Whitmore sat down with a thud! They were gone! Betty, little Betty, actually had left with that beetle-browed hulk! *Betty!* Nobody in the whole world had ever been more punctilious about the finer shades of appearance than Betty. In that she differed so markedly from many modern young women that James had esteemed her as the very rarest of prizes! Yes, he had so esteemed her that at that breakfast time, which seemed years ago, he had sneered at her until she went quite mad! James dropped his aching head to his hands and clutched and groaned aloud. Little Betty, alone in a car with the Dixon beast! Little Betty—*alone with him in their flat!*

Well, why couldn't he call her up now? Why couldn't he order her—no, not that—why couldn't he plead with her to get rid of Dixon and wait, just as she was, for him to appear, which he would do within a very few minutes? Or, for that matter, why not call up and deliver Curlew's message? James bounced up—and James sank down again.

There were several reasons. For one of them, Betty seemed to have passed the stage where pleading might be effective. For another, he couldn't very well deliver the Curlew message without having later to explain how he came by the number; and

while, in superheated wrath, he had several times this evening considered abandoning his job, the idea brought a strange chill to him now. If he knew Curlew's insistence upon sterling honesty in the office force—which he did—he knew also the cynical and skeptical sneer with which Curlew would hear an explanation of Mrs. Whitmore's presence in the case, knew that dark suspicion of some fathomless conspiracy would leap instantly into the Curlew brain; knew, in conclusion, that without ever bothering to probe to the bottom of it a disgusted Curlew would dismiss his alleged partner.

Another man might hear and appreciate and chuckle, but Curlew wasn't either patient or charitable about such things. James had been hired to act one lie this evening; the disclosure that he had been acting two of them would be amply sufficient to end his connection with Henry Curlew, Incorporated.

And at the same time there be things which no man can subordinate to mere bread winning, things to the enduring of which in cowardly silence starvation is much to be preferred and—James, hot eyes resting upon the clock as his angry head came up, abruptly forgot his entire problem for the moment.

The hour hand had long since passed the quarter; now it was crawling down toward half past ten and—*where was Henry Curlew?*

Young Mr. Whitmore rose with a jerk and looked around wildly. He'd have to summon Gorely, of course, and have him hunt out his employer and—what was that? Somebody was stumbling around or along the corridor beyond; James, speeding to the door, all but collided with Henry Curlew himself. Eyes slightly bleared, hair slightly rumpled, the elder man puffed excitedly as he cried:

"What the—what—why didn't you send for me, Whitmore? What's the matter with you? Are you plain crazy? Look at the time!"

"I have been looking at it. Where were you?"

"Asleep, of course. I sat down on the edge of an infernal chair up there and went sound asleep! I—"

"Well, did you find the telephone number?"

"It wasn't there. I don't know what's become of it. Look in the book, Whitmore; look for Banford and—no, never mind. Don't look. They're on their way to the station long before this! Get your hat and coat. Where the devil's Gorely? What? I've had my hand on this button ever since I came into this room, haven't I? Ha! Gorely, is that cab here? It is? All right! Mr. Whitmore's things, Gorely. Hustle!"

Then, calming somewhat, he laid a rather shaky hand on James's arm. "Whitmore, give me your whole attention for ten seconds. Get down there to the Penn Station and head 'em off. Say that Pemmerly called up again and he's on his way to New York and he'll be here some time during the morning. Make it spectacular and impressive—breathless stuff, you know, as if you'd about killed yourself getting there in time. And then bring them back here, both of them. Be sure to bring the girl, whatever she says or wants to do. We didn't even have a finger nail grip on Dixon till I rang in that girl and I wouldn't part with her now for ten thousand dollars until I'm through with him. That's all clear, Whitmore?"

"It is," James said coldly.

"Go!" croaked the head of the firm. "*Go!*"

So James went, speeding away without further comment, leaping into the taxicab at the curb. But the address he barked at the driver was not the Pennsylvania Station; it was that of his own home.

There were reasons and they were not of the black, unworthy sort. Betty, you see, was just a little kid after all—just a little kid, greatly piqued, playing with a kind of fire she really did not understand. Beyond any reasonable doubt, it had been Betty's intention to crown a mad evening by letting Dixon take her home and there dismissing him and ending the matter.

And if she had been able to end it there, all was well—and there was hardly a chance in the world that she had been able to end it there.

Dixon, the masterful, overwhelming brute type, had insisted upon seeing her to the very door of the flat, at least. After that,

after she had fitted her key and opened the door—James turned to cold stone for a few seconds. Some few seconds more and the stone was shaking with new fury. For, trying as he might to deceive himself, he knew. He knew that he—James Whitmore—who had started this day as a fairly happy young accountant, was to end it in a cell, with the stain of human blood upon his hands!

They had never reached any railroad station; nothing of that sort ever had been in Dixon's plans. For that matter, since Dixon assumed the young woman to be living at home with a family of aunts, it was equally possible that they had never reached the flat, either. This was a new thought and somewhat staggering; it caused James's breath to come in noisier, more difficult wheezes. James's hands clenched hard together and he cursed aloud the driver who could make no more than thirty miles an hour through city traffic; and almost immediately the curses died upon his lips and a new cold chill ran through him.

For they were stopping now, before his door.

An instant James hesitated; a small, insane smile came to his poker countenance. Before this one bedeviled day of his life, how many, many times he had hurried up to this same door, all contentment and happiness and anticipation, with gay little Betty waiting upstairs to greet him with a strangling hug and a rain of kisses! And, once to-day, he had raced to it vibrating with horror, very fully expecting to find the same little Betty self-slain; and now—now—

"You wait here!" James said hoarsely, to his driver. "I'll probably need you again."

For there might be a chance to escape—afterward. If they were there, there might be a chance to snatch up Betty and what little money was in the house and make their way to a railroad station somewhere and then out of it, before the tragedy was discovered. If so, James meant to take the chance. He passed through the empty foyer and up the stairs. At the door he paused again and gripped himself; when these incredible things have to be done, one does them with a certain dignity and dispatch and without hysteria.

And the key turned and—there was only blackness in the apartment.

"Betty!" called James's wonderfully quiet voice.

There was no answer. They had never reached this point; his latest horrible thought had been the correct one after all. He hesitated; it would be about as well to waste no time looking through the desecrated home; and yet—well, he'd make sure they had not been here, if possible. James closed the door behind him, pushed in the wall switch and marched into the lighted living room.

It was very still—more ominously still than it had been that afternoon when, James recalled with a bitter pang, he had considered it far too still. He had been quite fretful then about Betty's absence; what would he not have given at this moment to—to—oh, just to collide sharply with something and wake up with a scream and find that it had all been a nightmare!

But every dear, familiar object remained quite substantial and undreamlike, and young Mr. Whitmore, muttering brokenly in the midst of his ruined home, passed to its bedroom. He'd take one perfunctory glance in there and then start the hunt that would end in the electric chair! He—he stopped. Very evidently, they *had* reached this point and moved on elsewhere!

The closet stood wide open. There was a small, rumpled spot on the bed, as if some one had sat down hurriedly. And over there, tossed aside with a lack of tidiness that was far from characteristic of the normal Betty, two small patent leather shoes lay on the floor, and in the closet there was another little gap, lately occupied by Betty's heavier tan pair. James Whitmore, swaying against the casing, peered at the upper shelf, where should have reposed that expensive little black grip he had given Betty on her last birthday. It did not repose there now!

In a situation such as this one is really unlikely to change shoes or pack bags at the compulsion of brute force; seek to deny it as he might, stare doggedly as he might

at the upper shelf, in the absurd hope that the bag would somehow reappear, the cold fact still confronted James that Betty had returned and packed and left again of her own volition!

And so she was gone—whither? Not to Washington, not actually out of the city with that lumbering lout? That *couldn't* be! However angry Betty might have been, she would never go to that extreme! And still, while he reeled and tottered here, just what else was she doing? Young Mr. Whitmore awoke suddenly and, without even switching off the lights, dashed out of his home and slammed the door after him; and only two or three seconds later the taxi driver heard:

"Penn Station! Quick! Quick!"

This driver was a person who gave service of the desired sort, worked for substantial tips, and as a rule got them. He knew the character of the springs in his vehicle—knew, for example, that James had just hit the roof for the third time in the seven minutes of their latest going—but when real speed was required he gauged it according to the amount of excitement manifested by the passenger, and James had been very obviously perturbed.

New York, then, passed this particular taxicab as telegraph poles pass a flying express train.

Traffic officers, charged down upon it with the very nicest judgment, stared hard but failed to raise detaining hands. Violent meetings with surface cars and other automobiles were avoided by the fraction of a centimeter, but were still mercifully avoided. Mere pedestrians, every so often, fluttered out of the way like so many scared chickens, their cackling protests lost in a rush of wind. But James was getting to the station in record time.

And now he was there!

Now he had poked a bill at his driver and pitched forward headlong—now he was rushing into the great concourse and through it, eagle eyes peering here and there and everywhere, and finding no trace of Betty or the vicious bulk that accompanied her, on to the train gates, for even if the thing was moving he'd leap aboard and drag them off at the first stop, and—James's wild progress slowed, for his eagle eyes had swept over the surface of the clock. It was now just seven minutes past eleven!

A porter, passing, glanced at him, found him without luggage, and would have moved on but for James's gasped: "The —Washington train! Did that go—out on time?"

"The 'leven o'clock train, sir?" inquired the porter. "Yessir, that went out right on the tick."

Then he really did pass on. A man without so much as a golf bag to be carried cannot claim a porter's interest.

CHAPTER XI.

PRACTICALLY STRANGERS.

HOWEVER old fashioned some of his ideas, however egotistical he may have been in some respects, James Whitmore was fundamentally a just person. Which is to say that, after the first terrible ten seconds, he did not plunge about in mad fury, demanding blood and vengeance and special trains and such other similar odds and ends as he might fairly have been expected to demand; but with slow, dead steps he moved to the side of the place, instinct perhaps pointing him toward a wall which might be leaned against.

He was stunned. Little Betty was gone! Not merely gone to Washington on a rather demented excursion, be it understood, but gone completely out of his life. Had she been a flighty, irresponsible little thing of the butterfly type, it might have been possible to think that she had acted without realizing the full significance of her act; but Betty was neither flighty nor irresponsible. She was a sane and well balanced young woman, who had lived with eyes and mind wide open; what she had done now, she had done deliberately, fully aware that the real end of her journey must be in that ghastliest of all places, the divorce court.

Yes, she had done it deliberately and—*why* had she done it?

Punishment of an overbearing, unreasonable husband—a rather brutal joke, his views considered—these might have ac-

counted for the earlier evenings, but they didn't account for this. Cold, limp, a veil seemed to drop from before James's inner vision; more than once to-day he had glimpsed past the veil, but now it had been snatched away in its entirety—he himself was to blame!

He should have made little Betty happy; in his own conceited way he had fancied that he was doing that. Now he knew the bitter truth about himself. He had regarded Betty partly as a child, partly as a piece of personal property; unquestionably he had treated her accordingly. Aye, he who should have cherished her and respected her, who should have deferred to her as at least an equal and probably as a superior, he had treated her in just that fashion—and this was the result.

Little Betty, into whose life he had so complacently assumed that no other male being ever could intrude, had fled with another man! And—to cast aside the very last shreds of the veil—she had fled with a much handsomer man, a very, very much richer man, and a man who, with a very little training, would regard her permanently as something just a shade less than divine!

Well? In this hideous moment of being entirely honest, was there anything actually remarkable about that? There was not! And would not the average human, possessed of something second rate and not highly satisfactory, quite gladly trade it for something first rate and preëminently satisfactory? Unquestionably, the average human would do just that! Morality? Oh, morality didn't count for as much these days as it had in the quaint old times when James's first principles were inculcated. Perhaps it was just as well, since it seemed to make for happiness in the ultimate, the general tendency being to banish unhappiness. Betty had traded a cramped little flat and a cranky husband for a vast section of the West and a devoted man. That was about all!

And yet it couldn't be! It was impossible! No woman of Betty's character can thinkably toss aside every responsibility like an old glove, break every tie, just leave and start over again! Civilization, struggling upward, age after age, has laid an insurmountable barrier in the path of that sort of thing! And still, without unduly blaming civilization, the barrier seemed to have been surmounted in this case, since the eleven o'clock train had gone out and taken with it Betty and her admirer.

The queerest thing in this dreadful time was that James felt no particular rage. There was no real inclination to dash away in pursuit; Dixon, as an individual, hardly seemed to figure in the proposition. It was all Betty who, having little, finding the opportunity to take much, had taken it! She was right. Doubtless James would have done the same thing himself. Only—no, he wouldn't! He couldn't have done that! He laughed bitterly. Reasons seemed to pop up with such painful promptness and clarity just now! In all probability, the reason he couldn't have done that was that he was merely he, while Betty was Betty, a pearl beyond any computable price!

Well—he wished the kid every happiness on earth. That was all, and it was honest; and if ever Dixon did one thing to make her unhappy, he'd follow Dixon down to the gates of hell itself and there torture him to death.

This was indeed a strange mood for James Whitmore, part of it undoubtedly being reaction from a difficult evening. A hint of its strangeness glimmered to him now; his dull eyes looked around dazedly. What did he mean to do next? Go back to Curlew and report? James smiled sourly. Curlew, regular job, special job, everything else connected with Curlew, might go to blazes together now! He had no further use for them—nor for home nor for New York nor for anything he'd ever laid eyes on before! He wanted to run—south, north, aboard ship; he wanted to vanish forever from—

The dull eyes, roving still, grew fixed. A change, sudden, startling, incredible almost, was coming over James Whitmore. The lifeless droop departed from him; his eyes dilated; his erstwhile poker countenance flamed a brilliant red. Nor was this all, by any means! James's drooping shoulders squared and his legs stiffened anew and his hands clenched into fists, the while his

eyes narrowed to savage little slits and something rumbled terrifically within him.

For over there, her grip beside her on the floor, stood Betty Whitmore, quite alone!

She did not seem the gay, abandoned person, either. She was looking around with quick, darting little glances; her foot was tapping; even at the distance James sensed that her lids were moving rapidly, as Betty's lids did when their owner was disturbed. Yes, they were doing just that, as James was now able to observe, the distance between them having been decreased by half. And little Betty had seen her husband, too, and her eyes were opening widely, not at all in terror, but in what certainly looked like joyful relief.

This, too, James noted. And having considered his mental state at some length, you will deduce at once that, even in that public place, James was about to fall upon his knees before little Betty; that he was about to crave her forgiveness and swear to be a better man forever after; that, in fine, the very prettiest little reconciliation was about to occur, with whatever consequences to the Curlew affair itself.

And you will deduce wrongly. There is no controverting the fact that at first bound toward his wife James's heart throbbed gratefully; but, having finished the last ten feet of his progress with a really remarkable slide, he drew breath and with rarest tact demanded:

" Elizabeth, what—what the devil do you mean by it?"

Betty winced sharply, amazedly. Her eyes, meeting those of James, lost all their glad light and turned a numbed, angry cold. In a twinkling, too, James's poker face was once more on duty, which seemed still further to harden Betty's gaze and to feed the chilly flame of her eye.

Her lips tightened as she inquired:

" Are you speaking to *me,* Mr. Whitmore?"

" Huh? I'm speaking to you, all right! And don't—"

" Then don't speak in just that way, please! I'm not accustomed to that sort of thing, from an employer or from any one else."

" Betty, I want you to drop all that rot now—d'ye hear? A joke's a joke, but this thing's gone a long way beyond a joke. What do you mean by coming here with that fathead?"

" Mean, Mr. Whitmore?" Betty echoed and drew back indignantly. " I—I—why, I hardly know what to say. Why should I explain to you, please? I am an employee of your partner's, and he directed me to come here. Is that sufficient?"

James swallowed twice.

" Say, Betty, do you want me to lose all control of myself and begin damning things up hill and down dale?" he demanded, with difficulty.

" Mr. Whitmore, do you see the police officer standing there by the door?" Betty asked, very evenly.

" What?"

" If you feel called upon to direct any more filthy language at me, I shall scream for him! Yes, I mean it. If you are the antiquated type that feels a girl to be open to insult because she's working for a living, you need a lesson, and you shall have it! Well, Mr. Whitmore?"

" Betty, for the love of Mike, will you can all that stuff and come down to earth?" James demanded desperately, and, of course, with disgusting coarseness. " What's the matter with you? Have you gone insane? Don't you understand that you're compromising yourself horribly, acting like this? Suppose any one who knew us saw you trailing around with that elephant at this hour?"

Betty, consumed with prettiest bewilderment, held up her hands as if to fend off a maniac.

" But—but you speak as if you had some claim on me, Mr. Whitmore!" she cried. " As if I were your—your sister or your wife!"

" You bet your sweet life that you're my wife, and the time to remember it is *now!*"

" Oh, but I'm not, I assure you! Why, you'd never recognize any one as your wife who—"

James relaxed with a grunt that did hold some humility.

" I know, Betsy—I know," he said. " I'm an idiot, and I suppose it's all right

for you to grind it in; only it's beginning to be downright foolish now, and I want you to stop! Where's that overfed jackass "

"That—what?"

"Dixon! Dixon! You know perfectly well I mean Dixon!"

"Oh—Mr. Dixon?" Betty shrugged carelessly. "Why, he's gone to get Pullman berths, I think. We reached here just a moment before the train left, and he found that you hadn't made reservations, as you promised, and there wasn't a thing to be had. So we're going down on the midnight train."

"Betty," James said hoarsely, "are you serious about that?"

"Serious? About going to Washington? Of course!"

"You're really going with him?"

"Mr. Whitmore, I don't like that tone!" Betty said crisply. "It seems to imply something I—I don't quite understand. If you mean to suggest—"

"Say, listen to me, kid!" James Whitmore said, forcefully, as something within him snapped. "I may have been an ass, but I'm not raving crazy, and I'm not going to let you be, just because you're mad at me. You're so sure of yourself that you simply don't understand what you're up against with a beast like that, and—say! You're coming home with me now!"

"But—"

"And when I get you there, you're going to stick there, too!" James added, growing downright rough, and laid a heavy hand upon Betty's arm. "You can make a scene if you want to, or you can come along like a sane girl; but either way—"

"Hey!" said a large voice, in James's ear, and a hand descended so heavily on his shoulder that his grip was shaken loose. "What's wrong here?"

There was a tiny instant wherein young Mr. Whitmore felt himself about to whirl around, draw back a fairly capable fist, plant it squarely in the center of the Dixon countenance—and take the consequences. And following this there came another instant, before James had moved an actual muscle, wherein flashed before him the notoriety, the ghastly reflection upon Betty when the battle reached the public prints; and immediately after these cheerful thoughts raced others—the really mightily important Curlew matter, the thousand dollars, which would also be important when Betty's reason had been restored. After all, you see, James had sworn himself to Curlew's service this night—and Curlew had no means at all of knowing that his pretty emergency secretary was James's wife, nor, in bare justice, should his peculiar interests have suffered through that mischance.

Therefore, causing the said wife to stare a trifle, young Mr. Whitmore merely glanced up with the smoothest:

"Oh! Hello, Dixon. Back, eh?"

Dixon, both eyes on Betty, was not looking at him.

"Was this man annoying you, Miss Banford?" he asked dangerously.

"He—why, he—er—" Betty murmured, and James really should have drawn some comfort from the realization that his wife plainly did not wish to see him slain in cold blood.

"All right. I understand," the visitor said shortly, and tightened his grip on James's arm. "You come over here with me for a minute. I want to speak to you private!"

He strode five paces, and James accompanied him, willy nilly; he then whisked James about and, chin protruding, brought his darkening face nearer to the bland one of James.

"You know why I didn't knock the damned head off your shoulders, standing right where we were, don't you?" he queried.

"My dear Dixon!" James protested. "I think you're a bit—"

"Don't try to put any of that slick stuff over on me. I'm not giving you what you deserve, because it would get that soft little kid all excited and scare her cold to see what I'd like to do to you. But—but—Whitmore, I don't like your town, and, of all things in it, I don't like *you!* I don't like the way you look at that kid; if they'd change the laws a little, I'd spend the rest of my days killing off dirty hounds that look at young girls the way you look at *her!*" Mr. Dixon explained.

"I don't know what you were trying to pull just now, but I've seen other girls that had to work for animals like you to get their living—and I can guess. And so that brings me to what I started to say, Whitmore," he concluded, and brought his face still closer. "I just want to give you a sacred promise, that if ever you do one little thing to harm that girl, I'll crack every last bone in your body. That's clear?"

"Oh, that's quite clear, dear fellow," James laughed, so easily that Dixon gaped. "I was merely asking the young woman what had become of you, you know; we have a curious custom, here in New York, of failing to fall on one knee and bow the head when addressing an employee, and—oh, I say, Dixon! Are you *quite* through making yourself ridiculous?" young Mr. Whitmore asked, and the impatience of his tone was so sharp that Dixon flushed a trifle and looked more than a trifle abashed and bewildered. "Because if you are, it may occur to you that I didn't come racing here for the purpose of persecuting Miss—whatever her name is. I came to save you a wild goose chase."

"What?"

"Pemmerly telephoned again, ten minutes after you left. Curlew ordered him to start here at once, and he'll be at Curlew's house in the morning."

"Oh!" said the visitor, and his face dropped suddenly.

"So, if you'll come along, we'll look up a taxi and get back there," James said in conclusion, and shaded a yawn as he strolled back to Betty with Dixon at his side. "Miss—er—oh, yes, Banford, you may wish to go to your own home for the rest of the night?"

"Nope! She doesn't want to do that! Can't spare her!" Dixon put in promptly. "If I have to talk to that cuss in the morning, I want to get up mighty early and have some of my stuff in shape. You don't mind getting up early for once, Miss Banford?"

"I'm used to it!"

"Fine!" the big man said jovially, and beamed down upon her; and there could have been no better index to his mental condition just then than the way he glanced at certain tickets in his hand, frowned vaguely, tossed them away, and then took Betty's arm before they had even fluttered to the floor.

"All right, then!" he said, and more or less gently pushed James aside as he reached for Betty's grip and swept it up himself in the same great hand that held his own. "*I'll* take that, Whitmore. You just trot off and find that cab, if you will. We'll be tagging along behind here somewhere."

He motioned quite peremptorily, and James, after a flitting inspection of Betty, who was looking trustfully up at Mr. Dixon again, turned and hurried toward the entrance.

In the taxi, he ceased to exist!

The gentleman from the West, having settled Betty to his satisfaction, leaned over her and talked in low and confidential tones—tones rendered deliberately inaudible to James, perched there on the little folding seat. He laughed, softly and richly, too, did Mr. Dixon, at irregular intervals, plainly amusing Betty, who also laughed.

At this shameful scene, doubtless, James should have writhed in uncontrollable fury. He failed to writhe. In simple truth, for the time being overwhelming relief, mixed with a little wholesome terror, had turned James quite limp.

Never would he have believed Betty actually capable of going to such lengths—of accompanying that hulk to the depot!

That she would have gone farther, he refused to believe. There had been something in Betty's expression as he lunged toward her across the concourse that had not missed young Mr. Whitmore — something highly suggestive of the frightened maiden about to be rescued, at the very last minute, by her beloved. No, she would have gone no farther, but he had irritated her enough to make her go that far. James shuddered. He had repaid that indefinable look of Betty's by swearing at her again, hadn't he? He was as near to being the complete fool as the authorities permitted to roam loose! A decent, humble, affectionate two minutes before Dixon reappeared, and Betty would have insisted on going home alone. Instead, she was punishing him again by flirting further with

Dixon. High-spirited, she doubtless felt at this moment greater anger than ever toward her husband. And still, if they had had a proper two minutes, and Betty had gone on home, Curlew would probably have slain his alleged partner for violating orders and allowing the girl to escape and—and—James leaned against the side of the rocking taxicab and groaned silently.

Yet a current of profound gratitude ran beneath all the rest of the turmoil in his brain. Whatever else happened, Betty was still safe and still in sight, where upon extreme occasion her husband could protect her. And that occasion, by the way, seemed perilously near just now! Let Dixon lean a little bit closer to James's wife, let him mumble just a little bit more ardently and Curlew's whole proposition was going to blow into ten million small pieces and in a certain taxicab—

Dixon looked up just then, somewhat disappointedly.

"Oh! That's why we stopped, is it?" he muttered. "We're back again!"

CHAPTER XII.

LOOKING TOWARD SLEEP.

JAMES, collecting himself quite hurriedly, stepped out and waited to assist little Betty.

Mr. Dixon, one foot on the step, paused and looked fixedly at James.

"Excuse me! You're in the way!" he said bluntyl.

"I was merely—"

"I can help Miss Banford out, if that's what you're waiting for. You pay the man!" Mr. Dixon responded very briefly, and reached for the grips, and then, ever so tenderly, reached for Betty.

He had escorted her to the door, too, before James received his change; ah, yes, and into the house as James followed rather nimbly. Now, with Miss Banford demurely at one side, he was shaking Henry Curlew's hand rather unenthusiastically.

"Yes, he caught us, all right," he said, as James entered and Gorely closed the door behind him. "Not quite sure I'm glad he did, but—he did, anyway. Well, there's nothing to do now but wait for Pemmerly, eh? I think—oh, hold on there, you! I'll take up those bags!"

"I—I'm sure, sir—" the butler began.

"*I'll* take 'em—both of them!" the visitor said, firmly, and then he grinned down suddenly at the alleged Miss Banford. "I suppose you have to run up and get all fussed and primped and powdered again, eh? All right. Come along, honey!"

Nor did he even glance again at his host or at the partner of his host; Mr. Dixon, taking Betty's slim arm in his helpful hand, steered her upward, laughing gayly, muttering merrily to her. Henry Curlew gazed after them, and chuckled deeply, as did James, although without chuckling at all.

"We'll wait for him in the library, I guess," Henry said suddenly as he noted James's gaze.

He led the way slowly, wearily. He pushed the door after them and tottered, rather than walked, to a chair; and he settled down with an exhausted:

"Is he—is he just as crazy about her as ever?"

"Crazier!" said James.

"Lovely!" breathed the elder man. "Sure about that?"

"Quite," James said, even more shortly.

"Couldn't be better. Beats the devil, doesn't it, Jim? Hundred and twenty pounds of pretty kid like that one 'll hold a man down firm as a ton of steel chain! Wonderful, eh?"

"Yes."

"But you're not inclined to get up and cheer over it, huh?" Henry muttered, disgustedly, and with weariness ever more apparent. "Pah! Once we're through with this loon, you can get a divorce and marry her if you like, but—Jim!"

"What?"

"I can't get in touch with that ass of a Pemmerly to save my soul! I've called up every hotel in Washington and he's not registered at one of them. He must be with friends—he's got several dozen of 'em down there, he told me—and he may not feel moved to report again until—heigh ho! Heigh ho! Good Lord, I'm tired! Aren't *you* tired?"

"Not particularly."

"I am. I'm nearly dead, James! It's just about all I can do to hold my head up. Well, you don't show it, if you are!"

Henry rambled on and considered James with dull, glazing, almost uncomprehending eyes. "Gad! What an astonishing face it is! I know; I've said that before, James. But I can't get over it—can't get over my wisdom in picking it for this job, I mean. Y'know, I had more than a suspicion that this was going to be an unusual evening—evening to try a man's nerve and get him fussed and—impatient, and so on—get him to looking and doing things that might irritate Dixon, that is, and—"

"See here, sir!" James itnerrupted firmly. "Why don't you go to bed?"

"Huh?" said Henry, and straightened up. "Am I—getting incoherent?"

"Not just that, perhaps," James smiled faintly, "but you're extremely tired and there's nothing now that I can't look after."

"Nevertheless, James, I'll never take off so much as my collar until I hear that biped dynamo snoring in his bed upstairs!" the elder gentleman responded, more energetically. "You can't tell what notion may strike him; he might feel moved to take that girl and start out to see New York's night life—and Berwind's gang might catch him. Jim!"

"Yes?"

"Were you watching him on the way home?"

"Every minute," James said, very shortly.

"Did he yawn much?" Henry asked hopefully.

"Not once."

Mr. Curlew's eye, grown pained and saddened for the moment, hardened doggedly.

"Well, he'll yawn soon, James," he said. "I've arranged for that."

"You're not going to drug him?" young Mr. Whitmore cried amazedly.

"I am—with food," sighed Henry. "I've—I've tried to provide for everything this evening. Gorely and I have been conferring while you were out and it's ready now. Supper, that is—the sort of supper that 'd paralyze a normal ostrich!" Mr. Curlew concluded, stifling a giant yawn. "Oh—that you, Gorely? You may as well find Mr. Dixon and tell him that we're—we're supping now."

His tired head wagged at James as the butler moved away and new hope came into his foggy eyes.

"And, then, James," he croaked softly, exultantly, "when the wild animal's been stuffed until it's just capable of stealing away to its lair and curling up—then, James, *we sleep!*"

Dixon entered within the minute, walking briskly and bearing the general effect of a man who, risen from long slumber, has just left his invigorating cold bath.

"Want to see me?" he asked as briskly. "Miss Banford's freshening up, of course, but I thought when she was finished that I'd put in an hour or two getting some notes in shape and—"

"Oh, but, my dear boy! No more business to-night!" Henry protested playfully. "Just a bite of supper and then bed! Hungry?"

"Me? I'm always hungry!" Dixon said cheerfully.

"Hah!" said Henry. "Good hearty eater?"

"You bet!" said the visitor.

"You'll have to prove it to me," chuckled Mr. Curlew as he piloted his guest from the library and to the dining room where Gorely, himself a trifle weary, awaited them. "Now, if you'll just—"

"Oh! Only three chairs, eh?" Mr. Dixon said suddenly.

"There are three of us."

"Yes, I—yes, of course," the visitor laughed shortly. "Only—well, say, perhaps I'd better not eat anything now, after all. I think I'll get at my stuff upstairs there."

Just for an instant Henry's thin hand passed over his brow.

"But you said—not a minute ago—hungry—"

"Well, Mr. Curlew, may I speak out plainly?" Dixon asked in a sudden, surprisingly violent burst. "I mean, without making any hard feelings?"

"Of course."

"Well, I don't know just how to put it, but out my way, where I've spent most of my life, we look on the people that work

for us as human beings and just about as good as we are ourselves. What I'm getting at, if there was a nice supper like this laid out in my house and as nice a girl as Miss Banford working for me, I'd no more think of sitting down without asking her to join us than I'd think of flying! That's what I hate about the whole blamed East and about New York in particular and, especially, about rich people in New York—" Mr. Dixon cried with mounting heat before Henry could hurl in his spasmodic:

"Why, Dixon, to be sure! To be sure! You're absolutely right! I—as—Miss Banford, that is—I say, Gorely, why the deuce can't you attend to business a little better? Why didn't you lay four places?"

"It—it was my oversight, sir," the butler sighed drearily.

"Well, finish there as soon as possible, Gorely, and then run up and ask Miss Banford if she'll honor us with her presence at—"

"Oh, that's all right, I'll get the kid myself!" the visitor said brightly.

He left, at a gay and rather alarming skip, which set the floor to vibrating. Henry Curlew regarded his younger associate with a smile of exceeding acidity.

"Whitmore, as man to man, do you *really* see anything about that little skirt to drive a man as wild as all that?" he asked.

"I—I think it's downright damned disgraceful!" James exploded.

"Hah!" said Henry, and stared a little. "Well, *that* sounds more like the level-headed chap I thought you were. That—well, I guess we won't worry about it!" he chuckled abruptly. "The little rat's got him roped tighter than I ever dared hope. I don't know what the morals of this vamp type are and I've got my own suspicions in this case, but she certainly has the goods when it comes to—"

Strange indeed was it that Dixon should have saved the elderly Henry Curlew a savage beating—but he did it by entering just then. Within James Whitmore, threads of self-restraint had been snapping at the rate of several to the second: within him hot, cowardly fury had been soaring to a point where only sudden death could have prevented James's fingers from twining about Henry's vile throat in another half minute. Yet, now, James gripped himself and turned his blazing attention to Dixon.

The visitor had Betty, slightly bewildered, upon his arm. He was beaming down upon her; and now he beamed at the room and even at James—and found something unpleasing about James and stared darkly at him for an instant—and then resumed his beaming at Betty. Curlew's sigh was thin and weak as the hand that waved them to the table.

"Everything here, Gorely?" he said as they were seated. "All right. No need for you to wait around, I fancy. That the coffee, over by Miss Banford? Very well. You'll do the coffee honors, Miss Banford. U-m! Most of the substantial forms of nourishment are grouped around me, aren't they? A pattie, Miss Banford?"

"Oh, just the smallest one, please, and nothing else," said Betty's sweet, soft voice. "I'm not—quite used to suppers."

"Why, kid?" Mr. Dixon asked bluntly, and James's enraged ear caught the angry little undertone that seemed ever present when Dixon considered little Mrs. Whitmore and her probable wrongs.

"Well—er—"

"I mean, is it because you can't afford that sort of thing?" the visitor went on, more sharply.

"Well, we can't afford anything like this at our house, of course," Betty sighed.

And her great, cool, innocent eyes rested on James for a moment—and James quite suddenly turned his whole attention to the table, for he had all but spoken that time. There was much to be seen on the table. There were patties—rich, fat little patties; there was cold beef; there was a salad, whose richness could be sensed even across the table; there were steaming hot, buttery little rolls; there was something or other swathed in a thick, thick sauce; there was another elaborate something which looked like a pudding. All in all, a man who ate well of this meal seemd calculated to go out like a candle flame in a tornado! James smiled internally.

"That's not all for me?" Mr. Dixon was asking, as Henry passed to him a laden plate

not wholly unlike a mountain in general size and contour.

"And a cup of coffee, too, Mr. Dixon?" Betty said sweetly and even tilted her head. "You like coffee?"

"I like anything *you* hand me!" Mr. Dixon said, quite thickly.

"Coffee for you, Mr. Whitmore?" Betty asked, almost as sweetly.

"If you please!" James said shortly.

"One lump of sugar?"

"Huh? *Two!*" barked James so violently that Henry Curlew, whose sodden head was rolling almost foolishly, glanced at him. On Mr. Dixon the effect was very much more pronounced. Mr. Dixon's heavy brows came down with a snap; he flushed as he glared at James.

"Say, pardon me, Whitmore!" he snapped. "I suppose it's not the customary thing, but my manners aren't specially pretty, anyway, and sometimes I have to speak out from the shoulder or bust. I wish you wouldn't yap at Miss Banford like that!"

"I—"

"No! She's not your wife, you know!"

"Do you—imagine that I speak to my wife in—an offensive way?" James had some trouble in asking.

"I don't know whether you do or not; it's no concern of mine. But with Miss Banford I wish you'd—"

"No, but as a matter of fact, do you, Mr. Whitmore?" Miss Banford inquired, suddenly, and she was looking straight at James. "Deliberately, I mean?"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Mr. Dixon delightedly. "I guess that's pretty pat, Whitmore! Come on! Give her an answer!"

"Um—without any great difficulty, I can imagine occasions on which I should speak—well, at least plainly—to my wife," said James, regarding her; and added: "And deliberately, of course."

"And she doesn't retaliate?" Betty asked with growing interest.

"Kind of woman that 'd marry him never would," Dixon said promptly.

"Oh, do you think so?" Betty murmured.

"Bound to be so," the visitor grinned.

Betty, with the same pretty timidity and a little horror, shook her head.

"No, I think you're wrong!" she said firmly. "I think a woman—any woman—can be tormented just so long. And then she passes her limit of endurance and—"

"And what does she do then, Miss Banford?" James asked, as Betty hesitated.

"Why, I think there's no telling what she might do! She might do anything—anything at all—if she was driven to it by—by brutality and deception and that sort of thing."

"But if the—ah—lady happens to be mistaken—happens to be exaggerating the brutality and the deception and so on, in her own mind," Mr. Whitmore pursued in an easy, conversational style, "isn't it possible—"

"Oh, but I'm sure she's very rarely mistaken, Mr. Whitmore!" Betty said earnestly. "I mean that when a—a normal woman really finds that she's about to do something desperate and awful, she *knows* why!"

"Well, whether she does or not, why should a little kid like you bother her head about such stuff?" Dixon demanded impatiently. "Listen, honey! Certain type of woman marries a certain type of man; that is all there is to it. If the man's on the level and they're congenial and so on, all right."

"And if they're not—or if he's not?" Betty asked.

"Sooner it's broken off, the better, once she finds it out," Mr. Dixon said, with a shrug.

"I think so, too!"

"Now, Mr. Whitmore's wife—" the visitor began with a grin—and just there Henry Curlew raised his head after a thirty second trip into slumberland.

"—more's wife!" he babbled. "State—complete subjection—leave her alone when he pleases—pleases—aah! Did you speak to me, Dixon?"

"I didn't—no," Dixon muttered, hard eyes on James. "But is that a fact? Does Whitmore boast about having his wife in complete subjection?"

"Does he what?" Henry gasped, wide awake again.

"You said that!"

"I—I said nothing of the sort!" Henry Curlew retorted and shot one rather terrified glance at James. "I may have dozed off for a moment—old age—pretty sick last year—I may have been dreaming. But I assure you, Dixon, that I never said anything of the sort. Such an idea never entered my head and—" He turned on James with a gusty: "Why the dickens didn't you bring Mrs. Whitmore with you to-night, anyway?"

"Why didn't you suggest it?" James inquired vibrantly.

"Suggest it! Confound you, sir, I insited on it!" Henry laughed intelligently.

"And Mrs. Whitmore couldn't come, Mr. Whitmore?" thrilled musically across the air from Betty's direction.

"She had another engagement, I believe!" James said.

"Maybe she doesn't mind such a terrible lot being left alone," Dixon grunted.

"Shall we—er—discuss the lady at greater length?" James asked ominously.

"You're in the habit of doing that?" Miss Banford inquired innocently.

"I am not!" snapped her husband.

Henry Curlew blinked rapidly.

"Well—well," he contributed. "Offended—naturally, yes. Ask the humblest kind of pardon, Whitmore, of course. Lady herself would be the first to appreciate the joke, but you're touchy, Jim."

"Oh! You know Mrs. Whitmore?" said Betty.

"Do I know my own partner's wife, my dear young lady?" Henry inquired with bland reproof. "Oddly, perhaps, I do." And he added a further deft touch in his pleasant: "She's at the house here very frequently, of course—a very, very charming woman. Full of life—spirits—a brilliant mind, too!"

"Oh, yes! I think I've seen her!" Betty cried. "Isn't she blond?"

"Very blond—very beautiful golden hair!" said Henry; and there, since even for Dixon's benefit, he could bring himself to no extended social intercourse with a female employee, he turned abruptly to Dixon himself with: "Here! You're not eating a mouthful!"

"Haven't started yet," the visitor explained and snapped his gaze, which now held real loathing, from James. "You're not, either, Miss Banford?"

"I'm not—very hungry."

"You need a good example, kid!" chuckled Mr. Dixon, as he laid great, relentless hands on knife and fork. "Just keep an eye on your old Uncle George!"

He ate!

So, to a greatly modified extent, did the rest of them; and conversation languished, just as it had languished at dinner when Mr. Dixon really devoted himself to the business of eating; and Betty, lips compressed, pecked daintily and failed to look up; and Henry Curlew, still slightly aghast, fought off slumber and made some pretense at absorbing nourishment. And James thought on, much as a man thinks in a wild delirium.

Other things apart, Henry Curlew—a senile wreck and doubtless with a strain of plain idiocy somewhere behind him—had contrived to furnish much new and interesting matter for later explanation by James. Putting the thing in the mildest and most considerate way, Betty was furious. James knew every varying curve of those lips. Betty, by the way, had some justification for being furious! It wasn't at all that James blamed his little Betty; it was the thought of what a maddened Betty, seething with the delusion of a blondly bigamous Mrs. Whitmore, might do before she could be made to understand the truth.

James himself was very much of the opinion that any woman can be tormented past the point of endurance.

And however crude Dixon might be, he was handsome. The more James looked at him, the more he understood this fact. Brown, big chested, fine featured, simple, wholesome—why, put a soft shirt and a slouch hat and a pair of riding boots on the cumbersome beast, and he might well enough have been expected to sweep from its feet anything feminine from a flapper to a grandmother!

And, once the sweeping process actually had taken place in Betty's case, James might disregard Curlew and everything else

and shout the truth to his heart's content and the limit of his lungs—and the damage still would have been done! He glowered at Dixon and drew breath. He would speak the truth *now*, while there was still a chance that it might not be too late and—Dixon, with his implements laid beside his empty plate with the same suddenness that had marked their going into service, turned to Betty and asked:

"What's your name?"

"My—my—" Betty stammered, emerging from a dark study of her own.

"Your first name?"

"Oh! Why—Elizabeth."

"Well, that's mighty pretty—mighty pretty," Mr. Dixon approved. "But what do they call you—those that love you?"

"No one does," Betty said simply, although there was nothing simple about the momentary glance that traveled in James's direction from beneath her lowered lids.

"Don't be too sure about that, kid!" Dixon chuckled deeply. "Well, if any one did love you, they'd call you Betty."

"It sounds rather nice."

"What do you mean, honey?" the visitor demanded eagerly. "Do you mean it sounds nice the way I say it?"

"I—I suppose that's what I do mean," Betty murmured, and failed to raise her destructive eyes.

From James Whitmore a small, strange sound issued. Dixon, evidently uncertain as to whether it had come from James or Curlew, turned quickly, flushed a trifle, and looked defiantly at them.

"I'm not trying to get fresh with this kid!" he said. "I like her—I like her a lot!"

"No law against, so far as I know, Dixon," Mr. Curlew said amiably. "Have some of this—"

"Not another thing, Mr. Curlew!" the visitor grinned. "I think Miss Banford might like—"

"No—nothing, thank you," Betty said hastily.

"Supper's over, then?" Mr. Dixon inquired with another grin, and leaned forward slightly, plainly poised for a leap into further activities so soon as his host should give the sign.

"I—er—yes!" Henry contrived to smile, although with vast effort he had just completed the mental outline of a discourse which should have kept Mr. Dixon seated in the warm room for half an hour at least.

Dixon, even then, was at Betty's chair, assisting her. Dixon beamed benevolently on them all, even upon James.

"Well, that was fine!" he said in his simple, hearty way. "That's just what I like, this time of night—just a light little snack instead of a lot of heavy stuff."

"It composes one for sleep," Henry suggested distinctly.

Mr. Dixon laughed heartily.

"Does it do that to you?" he asked. "It never does to me. Just fills me up with more pep, y' know!" And he considered Betty, and his wide, toothful grin appeared brilliantly. "Mr. Curlew says it's too late to work, honey," he concluded. "He's right. Let's you and me go somewhere now!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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NIGHT EYES

THE brazen street lamps of the night,
Stare in my window without shame;
Bold creatures of the gutter bred,
With lust aflame.

But modest stars, coquettishly,
Peep in my room from far-off skies,
With meshy veils of silken clouds
Before their eyes.

Margaret Wheeler Ross.

The Bugler of Belleau

By J. C. KOFOED

THE gentlemen of Congress are more prone to bend their distinguished thoughts to the framing of laws and tariffs than to the nurturing of sentiment, but there are times when sheer idealism rules their council chambers. Witness the burst of enthusiasm that marked the passage of the act to station buglers at the cemetery in Belleau Wood—buglers, who, every night at sunset, would stand with heels clapped together, and send the wistful note of " taps " winnowing over the endless row of crosses.

It was a monument to the dead, and to the unforgetfulness of the living; a monument more appealing to the imagination than placid marble. It was a triumph of sentiment. At least, the press was unanimous in that belief.

The men chosen for the post were Sergeant Buglers Whelen and McCarty—and Whelen had hated McCarty since he was a little shaver, scrabbling about in the grime of Peregrine Street!

Larry Whelen had been born without the gift of laughter, and so they nicknamed him " Sadface." There were hollows under his cheek bones; his lips sagged at the corners; there was a doleful light in his pale eyes. From nostril wing to ear was a white seam that had been made by the bayonet of a Prussian guardsman.

The build of him was long and flat, on the general architecture of a slat, but there was unsuspected muscle and sinew laid along his bones. He was one of the old breed of regulars, with half a dozen " hash " marks on his sleeves, and a line of Chinese, and European service ribbons adding a touch of color to the breast of his service blouse.

McCarty was shorter, thick shouldered, with eyes as blue as the heart of a flame. Where Whelen's lips were downdrawn with the sorrow of living, his were upturned with the joy of it.

As boys in Peregrine Street they had fought times without number, and more than once Sadface—who was stronger than his chubby foe—had seen McCarty's back in flight. So Whelen dubbed him coward,

and spread his shame through the length and breadth of the neighborhood.

It was on his seventeenth birthday that Sadface's hatred and scorn of Bill McCarty rose to its bitterest pitch. Through all the years that followed—years in which he never saw the McCarty face nor heard the McCarty name—it burned steadily. He did not forget it, nor did he want to forget.

At that time Sadface was working on the night shift at the locomotive works, and he rose for breakfast at three o'clock in the afternoon.

He had a room on the third floor of a slab-sided house in Peregrine Street. It was a furiously hot day. The sun beat down in waves on the asphalt, where horses' hoofs had made deep impressions. Nobody was about when he glanced carelessly out of the window. Only the blue shimmer at the river end of the street caught his gaze.

Then, suddenly came a scream, a frightful shriek in the high voice of a woman —a voice goaded to the uttermost pitch of horror. For a moment Sadface was rooted to the floor. The scream had smeared a sudden icy streak along his spine.

He stumbled to the window and looked out.

A woman was running up Peregrine Street, a fat, shapeless woman, whose sudsy skirts fluttered grotesquely about her thick, cotton stockinged legs. Her arms were outstretched, the fingers twitching. And, as she ran, she screamed.

Sadface watched her until she disappeared around a curve in the crooked street, but still he did not move. He knew the woman. She was the mother of one of his pals, Whippy O'Brien. Why had she screamed like that?

He waited.

The minutes seemed to drag like hours. Presently a sad little party turned the curve in Peregrine Street. Two men held Mrs. O'Brien by her fat arms, and helped her along. She was crying hysterically. They disappeared in the house across the way. Again Peregrine Street was deserted—for a moment.

Then, in the blazing sunlight, a man appeared, walking slowly. He carried a limp, wet figure in his arms—a dead boy—and the boy was Whippy O'Brien. Very slowly he proceeded, the man and his burden, as though he were already marching behind a funeral cortège, and disappeared into the house across the street.

Sadface was dazed. He went down into Peregrine Street in an aimless sort of shuffle, and asked the first person he met what had caused the tragedy.

"Oh, Whippy was playin' around down be the wharf, flyin' a kite or somethin', an' crash, he went off the stringpiece. Bill McCarty was down there, they tell me, an' he stood lookin' at the kid drown'd without tryin' to save him. Bill can swim all right, but I just guess he didn't have the guts to dive in."

"Damn him! Damn him!" Sadface whispered in a broken voice.

He went into the house that had been Whippy O'Brien's home, and mourned with the grieving mother. It was the first time that death had come so close to him, and the mystery of it awed and frightened him. He blamed it all on Bill McCarty, and, only knowing one way of meting out justice and punishment he went looking for his enemy with his grimy hands doubled into fists.

But he did not find him.

McCarty had gone. A month later a scribbled note let Peregrine Street know that he "had gone for a soldier"—that he had enlisted in the Marines and was then on his way to a post in China.

Sadface Whelen's disgust and hate mounted to heights that were almost sublime. The crawling, yellow quitter! He hadn't the courage to save little Whippy O'Brien, strangling there in the water under the dock, and he did not have enough nerve to face the contempt with which Peregrine Street would wither him.

The Marines, eh? A fine pass the corps was coming to when such whelps as Bill McCarty found it so easy to get in. And then, without any reason save a vague desire to beat McCarty at whatever game he attempted, Larry Whelen enlisted, too. In his dreams he became a man of authority; one who could give his enemy perpetually odious tasks as some small punishment for having allowed Whippy O'Brien to die.

Sadface Whelen was not a bitter man or a hard one. His heart was tender as a woman's toward every living creature but one.

Years passed. For Whelen they passed as the west winds in Samar over the glimmering valley grasses. But, whether in Manila, with its punky smells, or in Pekin or the dozen other places that duty sent him, Whelen never forgot Bill McCarty.

Yet, never in all that time did they meet. Fate had reserved their meeting for a more dramatic time and place.

In 1917 America turned her hand to the grim work of war, and old Sadface went overseas with the Marines. He won his share of honors at Soissons, at Belleau and in the Argonne. Twice he was cited, and a French general kissed his leathery cheeks after pinning on his blouse a Croix de Guerre with the palm. Even " Black Jack " Pershing, after presenting him with the Distinguished Service Cross, shook his hand, and said: " You are a credit not only to your regiment, but to the whole A. E. F."

Even then Whelen's downdrawn lips did not twist into a smile. He stood stiffly at attention, and saluted when the ceremony was over, but he was wondering in his heart if Bill McCarty had won any medals. Not much chance of that spaniel's being cited—unless it was in a court-martial report.

When the war was over Sadface went with the Army of Occupation to Germany, and eventually back to the States to the peaceful monotony of garrison life.

He heard, as every one else did, that Congress was debating a living memorial to the men who had died in France. When it was decided on, and later when informed that he was to be one of the buglers, he was rather pleased. There were memories of evenings in stone floored kitchens, with a bottle of *vin rouge* on the table, a pipe between one's teeth, and an admiring audience to listen to one's barrack room French.

He thought of the long white road that led from Paris to Château-Thierry, on past Belleau to shattered Soissons; of the brave boys who had trod it and who would march no more. He saw the wheat field again, sown with machine gun fire; the hunting lodge on the hill, and he remembered how good the slum tasted after days on iron rations. It would be rather nice to go back and look things over after these years.

Then they told him that Sergeant Bugler McCarty was to be his companion at Belleau!

The shock of it stunned Whelen for a moment. It wasn't merely coincidence. The thing had the look of fate.

He stood gazing at the colonel in a dazed sort of a way for a moment. Then he said: " I beg pardon, sir, but this McCarty—do you happen to know who he is?"

Shoulder straps referred to a memorandum before him.

" Sergeant Bugler William McCarty, Company B. One Hundredth Infantry."

" Yes, sir. If you don't mind—seein' as I'm to be with him for quite a spell—would you tell me where he come from?"

" His home address is Peregrine Street—"

That was enough. Sadface Whelen knew that after all these years Bill McCarty and he were to meet again. They would be together, the only Americans in a provincial French town, the only living ones, at least. Every night they would stand together, and pay their tribute to those men who had died for love of country; he, who had been decorated for bravery, and the man—the coward—who had watched poor little Whippy O'Brien die!

II.

It never occurred to Sadface to ask that he be not sent. Years of discipline had taught him never to question orders—regardless of what they meant to him. He had dreamed of meeting McCarty again; of punishing somehow in Whippy's name—of searing him with disgrace, and then leaving.

But to live in the same little town! To see him face to face every day, and be unable to escape the intimacies that such contact must bring; must, unless one set his face sternly against it. And that was just what Sadface Whelen proposed to do. He would make the coward of Peregrine Street suffer a month for every second that little Whippy had taken to die in the river's dirty water.

After all, it wasn't so bad. He had waited twenty-five years for the chance to

punish Bill McCarty—and how better than in this way?

He went overseas first cabin, marveling at the splendor of it. From Havre to Paris and from Paris to Bouresches occupied but a short time. It was in Bouresches that the buglers of Belleau were to be stationed. McCarty, so Sadface had been informed, would reach there a day after him.

That first night, at sunset, Sadface Whelen, his bugle swung by its cord over his shoulder, walked down the road to the cemetery. Several fascinated youngsters in black aprons and wooden sabots, followed him at a safe distance.

Nature works fast to cover up the work of man when he has turned his hand to the making of war. The yellow-green meadow lands were smooth where once they had been gouged and hacked by shells and a million feet. Even the houses that had been shattered or reduced to powdery shards had been rebuilt to something near their old proportions.

There were few visible signs that war had once laid so heavy a hand on this region; few signs save those white crosses row on row.

What was the line that had struck him so much in that "Flanders" poem? Sadface rubbed his cheek thoughtfully. Oh, yes!

> "If ye break faith with us who die
> We shall not sleep—"

That was it.

He had never broken faith with his comrades who lay there in the meadow lands, and he wouldn't break faith with little Whippy O'Brien—God rest his soul! He would see that McCarty paid the price for his cowardice.

Then, with the sun on the rim of the world, Sergeant Bugler Whelen put the bugle to his lips, and blew "Taps"—taps for the men who had died along the line from Château-Thierry to Berzy-le-Sec—and taps for the memory of little Whippy.

III.

McCarty arrived the next day. He came out from Château-Thierry in a battered, wheezy old taxicab that had once cruised up and down the Boulevard des Italiens in Paris. His chauffeur carried the luggage into Papa Merchaux's café and McCarty followed—square shouldered, smiling, a ruddy cheeked, powerful man.

Whelen stood by the window, looking out into the sudden squall of rain pattering down into the street. There was an uncompromising sternness in his erect and rigid attitude.

McCarty slapped him on the back, and shouted: "Hello, old timer. They tell me that you're the same Whelen who used to lick me when we were kids together down in Peregrine Street. It's funny how things turn out, ain't it? Happy days!"

Sadface turned very slowly and looked at the enemy he had not seen in twenty-five years. He did not hold out his hand, and the frown still ridged the skin between his brows.

"Yes, I'm the same Whelen," he said, "but I've in mind more than just the licking of you now, McCarty. We're strangers, you an' me. You needn't waste your time tryin' to make conversation, for I won't talk with you, an' that's flat. The reason you can have in two words—Whippy O'Brien."

With that he swung around squarely on his heels and without looking at McCarty or the equally astounded Papa Merchaux, who had brought forth a bottle of wine in honor of the occasion, he stamped out into the rain.

The days that followed presented a spectacle fit for the tears and laughter of the gods. Here were two men, who should have been bound together by every tie of service and of comradeship, the only Americans in a small French town, ignoring each other day by day. They passed each other in the street with rigid necks and averted eyes. By an unspoken arrangement they fixed the nights when each should blow taps in the cemetery down the road.

Whelen was set in his determination. McCarty, angered by the reception he had met, refused to make overtures. The inhabitants of Bouresches wagged their heads and gossiped.

Now that he had placed his enemy in

Coventry, Sadface began to feel that after all it was a more or less insufficient punishment. Certainly, the death of little Whippy called for more. The memory of that sun punished day in Peregrine Street often rose before him. There was no thought of vengeance as such in his mind—but justice only.

And he did not quite know how it could be achieved.

Sadface lay on his bed in the afternoon, looking out at the clouds that floated whitely across the cobalt sky. They were little clouds, woolly and shining in the slant of the sun, and made him think of the starched and spotless little girls he had seen romping with their nursemaids in Paris. Peculiar that he should think of those innocents when he was trying to focus his thoughts on the proper punishment for Sergeant Bugler McCarty—a coward.

The drowsy hum of insects outside the window and the soft summer air was soothing. He slept.

It might have been an hour; it might have been three or four when he woke with a sudden feeling of suffocation. He tried to call out and rise, but he could only flounder helplessly. His wrists and ankles were securely strapped and there was a gag between his teeth. Only his eyes were free to move, and there at the foot of the bed he saw Papa Merchaux, the innkeeper.

Whelen had always thought Merchaux's broad, white face a perfect index of stupidity. Now, on the contrary, it expressed only brutality and ferocity. In his hand he held a long, dull colored knife. When their eyes met the innkeeper leaned over the bed and laughed until it creaked protestingly.

"Ah, *cochon*, you are awake, I see," he gurgled. "And you wonder at the plight in which you find yourself. It is easily explained. I have need of money. You have it; all Americans are wealthy. So I will add yours to mine, and send you very easily to a place where you will have no need of it. Then I will do the same to this, Irelandais, McCarty. You think I am afraid. *Bon*, it is well to keep up your courage. But permit me to tell you that one who has served in the disciplinary battalions of Biribi has no fear of anything. And that's that, *monsieur*."

He waved his knife with a swagger.

Sadface cautiously tested his bonds. He had no belief in miracles, and he felt quite certain that unless he succeeded in loosening himself Papa Merchaux would calmly cut his throat. But it was useless. The straps had been tied by a skillful hand. Sadface drew a long breath, and lay there, looking at Papa's bull neck and wondering if it would ever feel the halter for this job, when the door opened and his eyes fell on the forest green uniform and square, red face of Bill McCarty.

A Marine has seen too much ever to be taken by surprise. No sooner had McCarty glanced at Whelen's bound figure than he understood how the land lay.

"So that's the game, is it, Merchaux?" he cried. "I thought there might be something in the wind when I saw you creeping up here so carefully. You'll smell the inside of the gendarmerie for this."

He was unarmed, but he leaped forward, gripping for the innkeeper's wrist. They swayed there; chest to chest, rising on their toes in an intensity of effort, for Papa Merchaux was no weakling. He sought to drive his knife downward, but without avail.

The heart of Sadface Whelen swelled with a sudden gratitude that he had never expected to feel for his enemy of Peregrine Street. McCarty was fighting for *him!*

Suddenly the innkeeper wrenched himself loose, darted to the bed, and stabbed at Whelen's throat. Sadface flung himself to the opposite side of the bed. The blade missed him, but the butt and Papa's fist struck him a terrific blow between the eyes. Consciousness departed in a bursting sheet of flame.

Sadface seemed to find himself in the open, watching the Rue Pigalle with a sudden intensity of interest; watching an army emerge from it.

Out of the narrow street the marchers issued, their heavy boots beating a sad and monotonous tune on the paving stones. Every man's equipment was identical. Every pack was fastened at the same angle; every rifle was sloped over every shoulder in the same manner. And—Sergeant Bugler

Whelen rubbed his eyes—every face was the same; the face of Bill McCarty.

There were thousands — uncountable numbers of them; the world was jammed to overflowing. They swung down the road from Bouresches, but their heavy trench shoes made not a sound on the white road. The expressions of some were sad; those of others were gay; but in the main they were smiling. They swarmed into Belleau Cemetery, and each man took a position by a grave, grounded his rifle smartly, and stood at attention.

Then the thought came to Sadface. Those figures before him were the million different emotions that went to make up the man Peregrine Street had known as Bill McCarty. There were the happy, the sad, the placid, the angry, the brave, the frightened. Why, that skulking figure to the rear might even be the cowardly Bill McCarty, who had let little Whippy O'Brien die because he was too afraid to save him.

And he—Sadface Whelen—had condemned the million because of the one. He had done wrong. You shouldn't mark a man's whole life black because of one bad quarter hour. Now the million were dead —unable to rest until he blew taps over them. Whippy, who had been a kindly soul, would have felt uneasy about that. He lifted the bugle to his lips and blew—blew as he never had before—but not a sound disturbed the stillness. The men beside the crosses looked at him with unwinking eyes. He had condemned them. It was up to him to give them rest, and—God in heaven!—he couldn't do it.

He threw his bugle on the ground and screamed.

IV.

A ROUGH hand touched his face. McCarty's voice said: "There, there, old timer! What's the fuss all about?"

Sadface Whelen opened his eyes. He lay in the great feather bed that was the principal article of furniture in the room. McCarty sat beside it, smoking a cigarette and nursing a knife slash across his knuckles. There was a quizzical look in his blue eyes.

"Where's Papa?" asked Sadface.

"Thinking things over in the hoosegow."

Whelen looked at him reproachfully. "You showed yourself game, and the one time you wasn't was only a little bit of you. Even Whippy O'Brien wouldn't hold it against you, I guess."

"Say," said McCarty, "who is this Whippy O'Brien. You mentioned him the day I came here. Spill it."

"Who's Whippy O'Brien? You saw him die—and you don't remember?"

The other man shook his head. "I saw thousands of men die, I guess, before the big scrap was over; but not anybody I knew by that name."

"Oh, this was years ago, before the war, when we was both back in Peregrine Street. Whippy was my buddy. He drowned—an' they said you stood lookin', an' didn't have nerve enough to go in after him."

McCarty got to his feet, very red in the face. "I remember Whippy now—a skinny, freckled kid he was—but I didn't see him die; on my word, I didn't. When did it happen?"

"On August 15, 1899," said Sadface. He never would forget the date.

"I told you! I left town on the 14th. My enlistment papers 'll show that I signed up in New York on the day you say Whippy was drownded. Somebody that didn't like me—some one that wanted to get me in a stew of trouble—must have said I was there. That's all."

For a moment Sadface Whelen lay there looking up at Bill McCarty. The sag of his lips lifted, the doleful light left his pale eyes, and for the first time in many a long day he smiled.

"I'm damned glad, McCarty," he said; "but even if you hadn't told me that, I couldn't have gone on hatin' you. Most of us forget, I guess, that every man's made up of a million parts, and they're like to hate the whole million for one little one. An' in tellin' you this, I don't figure that I'm breakin' faith with little Whippy. Let's be friends."

That night all Bouresches stared as the buglers of Belleau walked to the cemetery, and, standing together in the gathering dusk, blew taps.

The Way of the Buffalo

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Last Hope Ranch," "Riddle Gawne," "Brass Commandments," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTERMATH.

CAMERON watched Ballantine and Virginia until they vanished from view. Then he turned, looked at the crowd—which was now pressing very close—drew a deep breath, climbed into the engine cab, and pulled the throttle.

He had been deeply impressed by Ballantine's action, by the strange dignity of the old man's manner in withholding his fire. Cameron could not have shot again. He had pulled his gun as soon after Ballantine's command as mind and muscle would permit—but no sooner. He had not taken an unfair advantage.

Ballantine had given the word. Ballantine had sought the quarrel; he had given Cameron no alternative that a man of courage could accept. And, following the ancient custom, Cameron had been at liberty to shoot again, as many times as he wished.

But Cameron had had his chance; and he would not have shot again. He had waited, expecting Ballantine to kill him. Not until the engine was several hundred yards down the track did Cameron realize how the incident had affected him. He leaned against the side of the cab, drew a handkerchief from a pocket, and wiped glistening beads of cold perspiration from his forehead.

He was glad he had missed Ballantine. For in the instant following the report of his automatic he had had a new revelation of the old fellow's character. He had seen that back of the steel-like exterior was gentleness that he had not suspected, a nobility that awed him, a calm self-control that amazed him.

He was certain he would never forget

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the expression in Ballantine's eyes in the moment after the shot; it had appeared to him that Ballantine had been gazing into unfathomed distances, seeing something that no other eyes could see.

Strangely oppressed with regret, afflicted with an unaccountable depression, Cameron drove the engine to the works and turned it over to the man who was to run it. Then without a word to any of the men who had come to meet him, and with only a mirthless smile at Dell, the engineer, he walked toward the office. He did not go inside, but sat on the steps, his chin in his hands, gazing toward the white ranch house.

The crowd had dispersed. There was no one on the level stretching between the white ranch house and the foot of the slope toward town.

But as Cameron sat there he heard the rapid beating of hoofs off toward the slope, and he turned his head to see two horsemen racing across the level toward the ranch house. One of the riders was Joe Gibson; the other was Dr. Mills, the physician who had attended Ben Baxter.

Cameron watched them as they crossed the level and entered the grounds beyond the picket fence. Dr. Mills dismounted at the gate and ran down the walk toward the ranch house, with Gibson close behind him.

Cameron did not change position, although he was puzzled to account for the apparently desperate haste of Gibson and the doctor. Virginia, he supposed, had been overcome. He remembered how, after Ballantine had turned away, she had swayed and stumbled as she followed him.

Cameron was still sitting on the steps half an hour later when Dr. Mills came out of the house, walked to the gate, mounted his horse and rode toward him. When he saw that Mills was riding to the office Cameron arose and walked to meet him.

The doctor's face was grave as he slipped off his horse and stood, looking at Cameron.

"Cameron," he said, his gaze quizzical, "your gun carried the charmed bullet."

Cameron stiffened, paled. "You don't mean—" he began.

"Exactly," said Mills with a queer smile. "You hit him. In the shoulder. Rather high; through the major muscle. It's a clean wound, though. He'll get well. He's as tough as leather. Virginia told me about how he stood there—nobody knowing he'd been hit. Marvelous!

"Cameron, strong as you are, if you'd have got that bullet you'd have gone down. Nothing but will power—and maybe astonishment—held the old wolf up after that shot!

"I'll get him around all right. But, Cameron, Virginia doesn't want this thing to get out. She says it would break the old fellow's heart to have it known that a bullet had finally got him.

"He didn't say so himself, but he's terribly depressed. The wound itself doesn't seem to bother him very much. His only anxiety seems to be over what people will say about it. He kept you from knowing, and the crowd.

"He and Virginia made me promise that I wouldn't tell. But I had to tell you; it's a thing you ought to know. But don't worry about it; he'll sure come around all right."

Dr. Mills got on his horse and rode to town.

Cameron went into the office, dropped into the chair before his desk and tried to work. But he hadn't been in the office more than ten minutes when he put on his coat and hat and walked across the level to the white picket fence.

As he went down the walk toward the house he saw a rider just vanishing over the crest of a low hill westward. He recognized the rider as Joe Gibson.

Cameron paused at the edge of the rear porch. The screen door leading to the kitchen was closed. He stepped upon the porch and moved toward the door.

He heard a light sound, and saw Virginia coming toward the door. She was pale and strangely calm as she came to the door and looked at him.

"Oh!" she said impressively. "It's you."

She closed her lips tightly, and appeared to wait for him to speak. Her face was pale, and although her eyes were troubled he saw no blame in them.

"Virginia," he said. "I am sorry. It wouldn't have happened if I could have avoided it."

"Then you know?" she exclaimed, surprised.

"Dr. Mills told me," he replied. "He felt I ought to know. Nobody else knows—or will."

"I think it would kill him if they knew," she declared. "I—I didn't know until—until we got into the house. And then he showed me his shirt, where—" She shuddered, covered her face with her hands.

"I know you aren't to blame," she said presently, looking at him, steady-eyed, in a way that reminded him of Ballantine. "I've known all along that you couldn't do different. There was no other way; he'd have it no other way."

She opened the door and came out upon the porch softly, peering backward into the kitchen, and closing the door silently.

"He is lying in there with his eyes closed," she said. "He isn't asleep; he is thinking. He never sleeps, it seems," she added. "At any time of the day or night, whenever I go near him, he seems to know it. He is thinking, now; and I hope he will be able to see that there is no use quarreling any more."

She stood, with her back against the wall near the door, staring down at the porch floor. She was marvelously cool. Her voice was steady.

"I want to thank you for not—for not doing as you might have done," she said. "Joe Gibson told me how you shot that man who came here to bother that girl you brought from Denver, and I know what you might easily have done if you had wanted to."

Cameron had seen the faint tinge of red that had surged into her cheeks when she had mentioned Miss Fargo, and he had not failed to understand the slight emphasis Virginia had placed upon the words "you brought."

"Miss Fargo has been working for me for more than six years," Cameron explained. "I keep her because she attends strictly to business. There is no nonsense about her."

"Why are you telling me this, Mr. Cameron?" asked Virginia. She was looking straight at him now, and her head was raised proudly.

"Because I don't want you to misinterpret the significance of what happened," returned Cameron.

"Why should you think I would misinterpret what happened, Mr. Cameron?" Virginia demanded steadily. "I have no interest whatever in Miss Fargo. And I think I have none in you. You are rather pressing a point when you intimate that I might have."

"In spite of what you said some time ago—on the day you and uncle had that talk about your railroad—I believe I have given you no grounds to think that I could ever think of you as anything more than a man who came here to make trouble for myself and my uncle. And now that you have shot him, and have done all you can to make things miserable for me, don't you think you ought to let us alone?" She paused and glanced downward, and Cameron saw a wave of color mount her white throat and flow slowly into her cheeks.

"On the contrary, Virginia, I intend to stay here and show you that I am not what you think I am."

She did not look up as she replied:

"You will have a hard time convincing uncle that you are anything but a man who tried to kill him," she declared. "He will always think you did your best, even though I believe you were forced to do as you did and were very merciful."

"And still you show me no mercy," Cameron pointed out.

"You are not looking for mercy, Mr. Cameron," she returned; "you are after results in your business. You would go ahead with your enterprises if you knew that as a result half the people in this section of the country would suffer.

"You represent an element which will not let anything stand in its way. You would ride over any obstacle that should happen to get in your way. You have no regard or consideration for the feelings of other people.

"What counts with you and your kind is success in what you undertake, in the money you make. Money means more to

you than—than it does to me and my uncle, or anybody in this section of the country.

"I don't know that I blame you for it, because you've been brought up that way, and I suppose you don't know the difference. But that is why I can never feel toward you as you seem to thing I ought to feel. That is why we can never be anything more than just enemies."

Virginia stood there, again gazing downward.

Cameron stepped close to her and placed his hands gently on her shoulders. He felt her stiffen, but she did not resist, although she raised her head and gazed unwaveringly into his eyes.

"Virginia," he said, "you are a wonderful girl! And your uncle is a wonderful man! I think, though, that of the two, you are the braver. Your uncle did not flinch under my bullet, and you do not flinch when, in order to be loyal to him, you deliberately tell me things you do not feel."

She tried to keep her gaze steady, failed, and again looked downward.

"I have told you the truth, Mr. Cameron," she asserted slowly.

"Virginia," he said, "over on a certain ledge one day you told me that you never pretended. I knew then that you couldn't. I know it now. You tell me that I would ride over any obstacle. And yet, Virginia, what would you have thought of me if I had not driven the engine today?"

"I would have thought you a coward," she replied lowly.

"And what would you think of me if I ran away from here and gave up the woman I love?" he asked.

"I would think—" she said, and paused, to look into his eyes again. "I would think you a coward," she answered steadily.

And then again, as before, a marvelous color stole up her throat and into her cheeks, and her lashes drooped and lay lightly against the scarlet cheeks.

Cameron backed away from her and spoke gently as he reached the edge of the porch.

"Virginia," he said, "I am not going to run away from you."

He stepped to the ground at the edge of the porch. He saw Virginia looking into the little level between the porch and the corral fence, where two big cottonwood trees spread their heavy branches flatly outward.

Cameron followed her gaze, to see Joe Gibson standing between the trees. Gibson's back was toward the porch, and he was idly striking the bole of one of the trees with a short handled, long thonged leather quirt which was gripped in his right hand.

Gibson had evidently approached the porch without seeing Virginia and Cameron. And then, scorning to retreat, he had turned his back and was striking the bole of the tree with the quirt to attract their attention.

He turned now, at Cameron's greeting, and looked at him. The incipient friendliness which had characterized his manner toward Cameron on the day he had seen the latter whip Kensington was no longer in his eyes. They were cold, derisive.

He stood steadily regarding Cameron. And then, as if having seen what he wanted to see, he deliberately turned his back and began again to strike the bole of the tree with the quirt.

Cameron flushed, but said nothing. He looked at Virginia, who was now standing near the screen door, her face aflame. And then, as Cameron stood, watching Virginia, she raised her head, defiantly, it seemed to Cameron, and spoke to Gibson.

"Gibson," she said evenly, "did you find him?"

"Over beyond the second hill," Gibson replied. "He'll be here in half an hour."

This conversation seemed to exclude Cameron. He walked to the gate, trying to solve the riddle of Gibson's manner. It was because of his shooting of Ballantine, he supposed. He had liked Gibson; still liked him. And he had had hopes of making a friend of the man.

But he knew now that Gibson would never be his friend. A steady hostility had glinted in Gibson's eyes.

And Cameron felt that, because of what

he had done to Ballantine, a like hostility would be in the hearts of all the cattlemen of the section.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BACKWARD HERO.

FOR three days Ben Baxter was unconscious. Dr. Mills had discovered a slight fracture which had given him some trouble, but at the end of the third day, while Baxter was still unconscious, Dr. Mills had told Cameron that the patient would recover quickly.

Baxter, although entirely unaware of his surroundings for these three days, was occupying the City Hotel's best suite. A trained nurse, brought from the big hospital at Dry Bottom, at Cameron's suggestion, had been hovering near him; when not taking care of his few other patients Dr. Mills was sitting at Baxter's bedside, watching him; Cameron spent a great deal of his time in Baxter's suite, and Miss Fargo her evenings and the early morning. Bum, too, was permitted occasionally to see the patient.

Baxter had been delirious, although he hadn't talked much about what had happened to him. There had been much mumbling about Bum, and he had mentioned Cameron's name several times.

Once during Miss Fargo's presence he had joyfully announced that some one had "noticed" him. And when he declared that he couldn't "shuffle them time slips proper because Miss Fargo's face is always appearin' on them," the young lady blushed furiously and walked to a window, where she stood gazing out until Baxter ceased talking. But Baxter didn't want his desk changed, "because it's settin' just right so's I can see her plain."

Whereupon, Miss Fargo gave Baxter a swift, embarrassed glance and fled from the room. She appeared again that night, however, still blushing; and the vigilant eyed nurse wondered if she had been blushing throughout the day.

On the fourth day Baxter slept much. And on the morning of the fifth day, after Cameron had gone to the office, and while Miss Fargo, ready to follow Cameron, had paused at the door of Baxter's room before leaving, Baxter suddenly opened his eyes and stared at the room. He gave the nurse a glance, and then his gaze rested upon Miss Fargo, and he blushed.

"Shucks, ma'am," he said; "I've been a whole lot of bother. I've been hearin' you folks around me, an' I've been a heap eager to tell you that you hadn't ought to be wastin' so much time. But I couldn't seem to do any talkin'. How long have I been here?"

"This is the fifth day," Miss Fargo replied. Her blush rivaled his.

"Them time slips will be all mixed up," said Baxter. "I'll never be able to get them straightened out."

"The time slips are right up to date," smiled Miss Fargo. "I took care of them."

"You did! Well, I've been a heap worried about them. I'm thankin' you, ma'am. I've been thinkin' that if I let them get all mixed up Cameron would fire me."

"Fire you!" bristled Miss Fargo. "Well, I'd like to see him fire you!" And then she looked at Baxter and wondered how it came that a man who had risked his life for his employer's interests could be so modest and self-effacing as to think that his action had not overbalanced his negligence toward his job. For Cameron and Dell had discovered the partly burned papers in the rear of the office building and had been able to guess what had happened.

Baxter smiled and blushed again.

"Speakin' of 'fire' sort of reminds me of something," he said. "Strong an' that other guy didn't burn the buildin', did they?"

"Strong?" Miss Fargo exclaimed. "Was that it? Was it Strong who tried to set fire to the office?"

"Strong," declared Baxter. "Sure. Seems I couldn't make no mistake. I seen his face when he lit the match. Bum tore into him.

"That dog is sure a hummer, ma'am. Why, if it hadn't been for Bum they'd sure have burned the office. Bum chased them, ma'am; chased them clear up the slope. An' them shootin' at him! An' then

he came back an' was tryin' to tell me about what he'd done."

"Yes," said Miss Fargo, very softly, her eyes luminous; "I suppose Bum did it all. Did you do nothing except watch Bum?"

Baxter stared at her in sudden embarrassment.

"I done what I could, of course," he answered, blushing again. "I kicked the fire out. That had to be done first, you know."

"And I suppose Strong and the other man were hitting you while you were putting the fire out?" Miss Fargo inquired.

"Well, it seems they must have. I was not payin' much attention to what they was doin' just then.

"But after I'd got the fire out I lit into them; though my fightin' didn't amount to much, because by that time they was shootin' an' I was gettin' sort of weak.

"But, Bum! Why, ma'am, that dog was sure a hero!"

Miss Fargo's eyes were misty. She closed her lips very tightly and walked to Baxter's side.

"Yes," she said, as she gently stroked his forehead and smiled into his eyes in a way that set Baxter's heart to throbbing with a wild elation. "Yes," she repeated, "Bum is a hero. But, oh! Ben, suppose you had been killed!"

Miss Fargo looked at the nurse, upon whose lips was a smile of sympathy and knowledge, then she blushed, opened the door and vanished.

Baxter closed his eyes, then opened them again and looked at the nurse. What he saw in her eyes embarrassed him so he turned his head and stared out of a window.

Miss Fargo ran down the slope toward the office. She crossed the level at the foot of the slope and hurried breathlessly toward the office steps. Her face was flaming, and there was a light in her eyes that brought intense expectancy into Cameron's as he turned from his desk and saw her standing in the office doorway.

"What is it, Miss Fargo?" he asked.

"Oh, Mr. Cameron!" she cried. "He is conscious? He's in his right right mind, and everything! And, oh, Mr. Cameron, he's so brave!"

"You mean Baxter, I suppose," said Cameron. His eyes gleamed with a quizzical amusement over the girl's betraying excitement, over the telltale blushes that now surged into her cheeks as she interpreted her employer's look.

"Yes—Baxter," she replied, now almost defiant, although her joy could not be hidden and shone forth luminously and proudly. "And I don't care a darn who knows how I feel about him, Mr. Cameron!" she added as she came forward and stood at Cameron's desk. "Hs is nice, and I love him! And I think he is the bravest, and the most modest, and the most bashful man in the world!"

"Have you told him that?" Cameron questioned.

"I never shall tell him!" declared Miss Fargo.

Cameron got up and stood near the girl.

"Yes," he said. "You will tell him, Miss Fargo. Perhaps not in words; but he will know. And I want you to know that you have expressed my opinion of Baxter. We shall never quarrel because you praise Baxter too much."

Miss Fargo's face flamed again. Without any warning whatever she sprang upward, threw her arms around Cameron's neck, and kissed him upon the lips.

"You're a dear!" she cried. Then she blushed again, turned rapidly away, and appeared to hide her face in a coat that hung from a rack upon the wall.

Cameron smiled at her. He had seen this coming, because many times he had observed that Miss Fargo had covertly watched Baxter, her eyes gentle, her cheeks faintly tinged with color.

Cameron was glad. Miss Fargo was a good girl. Baxter deserved her. He meant to increase Baxter's wages, to promote him. He'd make Baxter a wedding present which would cause him to feel repaid for the wounds he had suffered in protecting his employer's interests.

Cameron smiled and looked toward the doorway.

Standing there—looking as if he had been there some time—was Joe Gibson. He was leaning against one of the door jambs. His arms were folded over his chest, and upon

his lips was a copy of the derisive smile which had been there some days before, when he had stood between the two cottonwood trees near the Ballantine ranch house, quirt in hand, striking idly at the bole of one of the trees.

CHAPTER XXI.

OPEN THREAT AND SILENT MENACE.

CAMERON'S face paled a little from resentment. This was the second time he had caught Gibson watching him, and each time Gibson had smiled in such a manner that he gave the impression that he had caught Cameron doing something stealthy, clandestine, or willfully malicious. Cameron had meant to ask Miss Fargo some questions about Ben Baxter, but instead he walked to the door and confronted Gibson.

Gibson still stood, his arms folded over his chest, a shoulder against one of the jambs of the door. He did not change position as Cameron stopped in front of him and looked at him.

" Gibson," said Cameron, " you have an annoying habit of appearing at the most inopportune times."

" I've noticed that," Gibson replied. He drawled his words; they did not come from his lips with the spontaneity which had marked his speech upon the occasion of his other visit. The genial, quizzical gleam was absent from his eyes; no suspicion of the old, odd smile was on his lips. His gaze was level and cold, his lips tight pressed; his manner was marked by a sinister deliberation.

" Gibson," Cameron continued, " it seems to me that there is danger of your misapprehending the significance of some things you have seen."

" Not a bit of danger," answered Gibson. " Mebbe you don't know it, but I'm able to think things out pretty straight. I ain't got nothin' ag'in' you, personally, but I've been talkin' with the boys, an' we've come to the conclusion that this section of the country can get along mighty fine without you!

" I reckon mebbe you don't know it, but there's twenty men in the T Down outfit that have got a soft spot somewhere inside of them for Sunset. They ain't never made much noise about it, an' mebbe old Sunset never knowed about it. But the boys are pretty well stirred up.

" It seems to them that even if Sunset did warn you about runnin' your railroad past his place, you hadn't ought to have plugged him that way. You're a young man, an' Sunset is pretty near as old as he can get, accordin' to the years that have been doled out.

" Sunset's somethin' over seventy. Sunset never done any man any harm which didn't try first to harm him."

Gibson stood for an instant, watching Cameron, who had bowed his head, feeling as he had felt every minute since the shooting, strangely guilty and ashamed.

It is possible that Gibson understood Cameron's feelings, for his hard gaze softened a little and one hand came up and meditatively caressed his chin.

Then he moved into the doorway, stepped one step down the stairs, and looked back. This time there was a more subdued note in his voice.

" That seems to be all, Cameron," he said. " The boys are dead set on havin' you do your work somewhere else. They think this country can get along without you. They've give you a week. That ought to be time enough for you to get somebody here to take your place."

Before Cameron could open his lips to speak, Gibson had swung into the saddle and was riding away. He did not look back.

Cameron stood, looking after Gibson. He knew how Gibson felt; he knew how all the men of the T Down felt. He was aware that it is one of the contradictions of human nature that a man does not become an object of veneration until he is shattered.

Gibson, the T Down men, most of the people of Ransome, and all Ballantine's friends near or far, would now idealize Sunset; they would place him upon the pedestal their fancy would erect for him.

And Cameron knew the man deserved to be so worshipped. He knew that from consulting his own feelings. Ballantine had woven a spell around him; and he knew,

despite what had happened between them, that he had come nearer to loving the man than he had ever come to loving any man, his father excepted.

Therefore, he felt no resentment toward Gibson. Gibson had merely expressed the things that he himself had felt. And yet Cameron had no intention of yielding to Gibson's demand.

As a matter of fact, he felt that after the first edge had worn off Gibson's resentment, he would realize that there had been no other way. None of Ballantine's friends would think dispassionately now, and their reason was shot through with barbs of prejudice.

Cameron walked back to his desk and stood there for an instant, staring thoughtfully down at its top. Then he crossed the room, to Miss Fargo's desk.

"You say Baxter was conscious," he remarked quietly. "Did he have anything to say concerning the identity of the men who attacked him?"

"He was certain of one," answered Miss Fargo. "Gideon Strong. He says he can't be mistaken, for he saw his face when Strong lit a match. He did not see another man."

Cameron said no more. He walked to the rack, put on his hat and coat, buckled his cartridge belt around his waist, went out, mounted White Star and rode to the hitching rack in front of the City Hotel. A few minutes later he was talking to Baxter, who repeated to him what he had told Miss Fargo.

Cameron descended to the street. He stood for a little while in front of the hotel. Then he saw Gideon Strong on the sidewalk near the livery stable.

Strong was walking eastward, toward the bank, and by making something of an effort Cameron caught up with him before he reached the latter building. He fell into step with Strong.

Strong, after a furtive, startled glance into Cameron's face, looked straight ahead. His cheeks had taken on a mottled appearance; he breathed heavily.

Quickening his step, and still giving no indication that he knew Cameron was walking at his side, he walked into the open doorway of the bank and halted before the cashier's window. He did not look around, but he knew Cameron was behind him, watching him.

Strong had been walking toward the bank with the intention of drawing some money for his daily expenses. But now, as he stood before the window he was beset with a sharp suspicion, a sudden fear.

When he had seen Cameron beside him on the sidewalk the fear had first gripped him, and it had grown until now it seemed to have taken possession of all his faculties. His legs appeared to have lost all sense of feeling, his hands were shaking; he was aware that his mouth was open and that he did not seem to be able to close it.

He was dismayed by Cameron's silence. He knew Cameron had learned something about what had happened to Baxter, but he did not know how much Cameron knew. Had Baxter regained consciousness? Had Baxter talked?

And if Baxter had talked how much had he been able to tell Cameron? Had Baxter recognized him in the light from the flare of the match?

These questions Strong could not answer. However, they tortured him as he stood in front of the cashier's window, they became very important, they were drummed insistently into his ears by an inner voice that would not be denied.

What did Cameron know?

This seemed to be the chief question. He did not dare to turn around and face Cameron lest the latter see the guilt in his eyes, in his flushed face.

Cameron knew something. But how much? Or was Cameron bluffing, hoping that if he kept silent and pretended to be "wise" he could find out something that would confirm a suspicion?

It was curious how greatly he feared Cameron! He could not understand it. He was bigger than Cameron; he felt certain he was stronger.

Of course, Cameron had once knocked him down, but that had been more or less of an accident. He had not expected Cameron to hit him, he had been taken unawares.

And yet the blow had been a terrible one.

He had not recovered from it until the next day, and there were times when he still felt a soreness in his jaw. But he was certain that it was not Cameron's strength that he was afraid of, it was something in Cameron's manner, in his eyes.

As he drew his pass book out of an inner pocket of his coat he became aware that he no longer liked Ransome. People in the town had never treated him just right, they had looked upon him with suspicion ever since he had appeared. Fancher didn't trust him, Kerslake had a queer way of seeming to laugh at him every time they met, Gilson was frankly distrustful.

Besides, there wasn't much opportunity for him in Ransome. The irrigation company was grabbing everything; Cameron would grab more. In a short time there wouldn't be anything left for anybody to grab.

It was time he got out of Ransome. He told himself that it wasn't fear of Cameron that would drive him out; he really wanted to go, anyway.

Still conscious of Cameron standing behind him, appearing to look over his shoulder, Strong shoved the pass book through the wicket.

The first time he opened his lips to speak no sound came. His throat was dry, parched; his tongue was thick. At the second attempt he said, croakingly:

" Give me a draft for the entire amount."

Fancher's face was framed in the wicket. He appeared to be mildly surprised.

" To yourself, Mr. Strong?"

" Yes."

" Going to leave us?" asked Fancher.

" Yes," muttered Strong. A wave of rage surged over him. " This town is getting too cluttered up with chromos!" he said savagely.

He stood, leaning heavily on the sill of the window while Fancher wrote the draft. When Fancher slipped it over the marble shelf toward him he took it mechanically and stuck it into a pocket. Then saying nothing more to Fancher he turned and walked out through the door.

He knew Cameron was behind him as he emerged into the sunlight. He walked on, keeping his eyes straight ahead, listening for Cameron's footsteps. He heard them; they were right behind him, close to him. Another surge of rage swept over him. But he did not yield to it, because a terrible fear instantly overwhelmed it.

If Cameron didn't know anything he wouldn't stick as close as he was sticking. He wouldn't have the nerve to do it. There was something sinister in Cameron's silence, a menace, a threat.

He doggedly kept on, heading toward the City Hotel. As he walked he wondered what Cameron meant to do. He wondered what would happen if Cameron knew and should tell the people of Ransome?

Everybody knew Baxter as a quiet, peaceable, harmless fellow. It seemed that nearly everybody loved Baxter. Strong had been surprised at the expressions of sympathy he had heard since it had become known that Baxter had been attacked while defending his employer's interests. Some way, word of the attempt to start the fire had got around.

Strong thought he knew what would happen if word were passed around that he had attacked Baxter; had shot him. Baxter's friends would be wild with rage. They'd hang him! Yes; they'd do that!

But just now Strong was facing a danger that was more imminent. It was just behind him, like a shadow, and he knew he could not get rid of it.

So he walked on. He entered the hotel and climbed the stairs to his room. He didn't look back, but he knew Cameron was at his heels.

He walked down the hall, opened the door of his room, and with a sudden movement tried to slip in and close the door, to keep Cameron out. But Cameron was so close that he merely stuck a foot between the door and the jamb.

Strong did not say anything, although his face grew pale. He walked to a window and stood there for an instant, looking out.

His fear of Cameron was growing. He wanted to say something to Cameron—anything—but he knew that to do so would be tacitly to invite Cameron to talk. And Strong felt certain that when Cameron talked he would talk about Baxter.

Strong didn't want to hear anything about

Baxter. Cameron's silence was a terrible thing, but talk about Baxter would be more terrible. As long as Cameron didn't say anything the situation couldn't get any worse.

But Strong could not look at Cameron; to do so was a physical impossibility. He knew Cameron was standing just inside the door, and that the door was closed. Somehow, although he did not look at Cameron, he got the impression that Cameron was standing with folded arms, watching him.

Strong went into a closet and got a suit case. He threw the case on the bed, went to a dresser and got various odds and ends of attire and threw them into the suit case. After that he drew a couple of suits out of a wardrobe, packed them into the case, jammed a pair of slippers in and closed the lid.

He did not make a second search, to see if he had forgotten anything. He had lost interest in such trivial possessions.

He was thinking now of his life. Life was more valuable than anything else, and he had a conviction that if he dallied Cameron would begin to talk. And when men talked their passions were not so easily governed. He knew how it was with himself.

He felt that if he made a false move Cameron would shoot him. He had already seen the blocky holster at Cameron's hip, and he knew Cameron was a deadly marksman. He still felt passionately resentful over Cameron's strange actions, but he knew he did not dare to betray resentment. That would be to invite disaster.

But he had never known that such a thing as a man silently watching him could so affect his nerves. He was bathed in an icy perspiration. The flesh on the insides of his legs was quivering, his feet were like leaden weights, the fingers of his hands were twitching, his mouth was open; he felt that his eyes were bulging.

He couldn't think; couldn't concentrate. The room appeared strange to him. He glanced out of a window at the familiar landscape. It seemed he had never seen it before. Things were turning around. The sun appeared to be coming from the wrong direction.

He reeled, sat down on the edge of the bed, took a handkerchief from a pocket and wiped the sweat from his brow and face, even running his fingers around the inside edge of his collar—which was now limp and damp.

Still, he said nothing to Cameron. He didn't want to precipitate the violence that threatened. He now had an idea that Cameron did not mean to let him get out of the room, and even though the outside world was strange to him, he felt that he had never seen anything so inviting.

He wondered what Cameron would do if he got up from the bed. He got to his feet and stood at the bedside, staring past Cameron.

Cameron did not move.

Strong took a tentative step toward the door—another.

Cameron did nothing.

Strong took two more steps. He had unknowingly grasped the handle of the suit case.

Cameron stepped aside, and Strong, drawing a deep breath of relief, continued to walk toward the door. He reached it, walked into the hall.

When he began to descend the stairs he felt Cameron was close behind him. He went to the desk, paid his bill; moved to the door. Out on the veranda he paused for an instant, to wipe the perspiration out of his eyes with the back of a hand. Then he stepped off the veranda and began to walk down the slope toward the railroad station.

He did not look around, but he knew Cameron was behind him. He made his way down the station platform, stopped at a window and bought a ticket to Chicago.

He stared at the clock behind the ticket agent and noted that the train was due in ten minutes. When he turned from the window he drew out a cigar and tried to light it. He wanted to show Cameron that his silent watching had not unnerved him.

But the cigar jerked so oddly that he couldn't get the lighted match to stay at its end long enough to ignite the tobacco. In a sudden rage he threw the cigar from him. Then he walked to the far end of the platform.

It was not until he heard a distant rumble that he turned. And then he saw Cameron standing not more than a half dozen feet from him.

For the first time he looked directly at Cameron. Cameron was standing rigid. His arms were folded over his chest and his chin was resting on the index finger of his closed right hand, the thumb underneath.

Cameron's eyes were steady and they were filled with ineffable contempt. But Strong saw something behind the contempt —a cold yearning to do violence.

Strong gulped with thankfulness when the train slid in and stopped with the steps of one of the coaches directly in front of him. He clambered aboard, entered the coach and dropped his suit case upon a seat. Then he stood, staring fearfully at the door. He wondered if Cameron was coming aboard.

Sweating, Strong began mentally to curse the train crew for the delay. He heard the conductor laughing, and never did laughter seem so hateful.

Although waiting, intensely eager for the train to start, Strong's heart seemed to leap into his throat when it did finally begin to move. Then he leaned over and gazed out of the window nearest him.

He saw Cameron standing near the ticket window, watching.

Then the train whirled away, and Strong knew he was taking his last look at Ransome. Not for ten times as much money as the draft in his pocket called for would he have returned to Ransome, to face the eyes which had watched him during the last hour of his stay in the town.

Leaning back in his seat, mopping the sweat from his face, Strong shivered.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE JOY OF JEALOUSY.

CAMERON had suggested getting a trained nurse for Ballantine. He had also told Dr. Mills that if Ballantine's wound did not yield readily to treatment he was to call in another physician, from Dry Bottom.

But Dr. Mills had smiled deprecatingly.

"There is no danger of the old boy not pulling through," he said. "He's got a constitution like a horse. He's lived clean, and he's as rugged as sole leather. His pride is hurt more than his body. He'll never get it back. You beat him to the 'draw,' and he can't get over it.

"As for a trained nurse, I don't think he'd have one around. I suggested it and he gave me a look that nearly froze me. Besides, Virginia is as good as any trained nurse I ever saw. Maybe that statement may sound unethical, but it's the truth.

"In the first place, Virginia's got brains. In the second place, she loves the old scoundrel, and makes him see it. And just now he needs love more than he needs anything else."

He looked sharply at Cameron, adding: "By the way, you haven't been in to see him yet. He's strong enough, even, to look at you."

Cameron was in no mood for levity. Two days had passed since he had seen Strong on the train, and he had since discovered from Baxter that Strong was the man who had kicked Bum. If he had known that at the time he had escorted Strong to the station he felt he would have treated the man differently.

He also had discovered that Bill Nelson had left town. Calamity had seen him, about one o'clock in the morning after the attack on Baxter, walking through the square. Nelson's trousers had been badly torn, there was a wound in his throat, his hands had been bleeding. Calamity had got close enough to him to observe these things. And some hours later Nelson had climbed aboard an eastbound train.

Thus, at least in Cameron's opinion, was revealed the identity of Strong's confederate. Nelson was the man Baxter had not seen. Cameron wondered if Nelson had not been punished enough. For, according to Calamity, Nelson's wounds had been rather severe.

That appeared to end the incident. Cameron was certain that Strong and Nelson would never return to Ransome.

Cameron had not attempted to discover Strong's motive in trying to set fire to the office. Still less did he seek a reason for

Nelson's action in helping Strong. Both had felt vengeful, he supposed.

Cameron's thoughts this morning were of things more vital. His work was getting along, he was running everything according to the schedule he had adopted. There was no complaint to be made on that score. His brain was functioning perfectly, as always. His judgment was as clear as ever whenever the details of his " job " were brought to his attention.

All the work was progressing, every project was succeeding. In all matters in which his intellectual powers were tested he was the same as always—quiet, determined, efficient.

But it seemed to him that a new element had entered into him. It had crept in—whatever it was—insidiously, gradually. He felt it had first come when he had stood, facing Ballantine, before he had shot the old man.

Perhaps it had been a dormant emotion, awaiting just that sort of a situation to make itself felt. It had grown upon him; it was growing. It had governed his attitude toward Strong.

In another day he would have whipped Strong until the man would never have forgotten it. But he hadn't whipped Strong.

Instead, he had felt a sort of contemptuous pity for the man. He had let him go without saying a word to him.

He kept seeing Ballantine's face as it had appeared in the instant after the shot from the automatic. The shock of the bullet striking must have been terrific.

But there had been no sign of shock in the old fellow's eyes. Except for the ironic gleam in them they had been as calm and serene and as coldly indomitable as ever.

Not until after he had heard from Dr. Mills that Ballantine had been hit had Cameron any conception of the tragedy that must have lain behind the fine old eyes. He knew, now, and the knowledge had saddened him, had filled him with a queer gentleness, had subdued him.

He meant to have a talk with Ballantine this afternoon; he wanted, if possible, to patch up their differences, to make peace.

As he walked down the path that led to the house he saw Virginia sitting on the edge of the rear porch. Her shoulders were drooped a little, her hands were crossed in her lap. She was looking directly at Cameron, and he felt she must have seen him as he had walked across the level leading from the office to the gate.

But as he came closer he perceived that she did not appear to be looking at him at all, but through him. She did not get up when he halted near her, but steadily watched him.

" You are here again," she said.

She was strangely calm. There was no passion in her eyes or in her manner.

" I've come to have a talk with your uncle," Cameron announced. " I want to make peace with him."

" You can't see him," she declared quietly, but firmly. " He's asleep—or as near asleep as he ever gets. I don't want him to be disturbed. Besides, I don't think he wants to see you again. I wish you would not come here any more."

" Virginia, I am going to keep on coming until this thing is settled."

" You've said that before," she returned. There was now a trace of scorn in her voice. " You are one of those men who can't be made to see that they are not wanted. What is between you and Uncle Jeff can never be settled! And if you call me ' Virginia ' again, I'll horsewhip you!"

She got up and stood on the ground at the edge of the porch, facing him. The heaving of her bosom warned him of the tumult that was raging within her, and the little flecks of cold fire in her eyes seemed to send lances of disdain toward him.

He bowed.

" I don't seem to be able to help it," he asserted. " I suppose you will have to horsewhip me often. Perhaps it may seem impudent to you. But it is the most natural thing in the world to me.

" When I first came here and saw you over there on the ledge with the rifle in your hands, I felt as though I had known you always. Before you told me your name I seemed to know it was Virginia."

There was contempt in her eyes, but a tide of red surged into her cheeks.

" You tell all of them that, I expaict," she remarked.

"All?" he exclaimed, astonished.

"Miss Fargo, for example," she charged, watching him steadily.

"Miss Fargo is my secretary."

"Of course."

"And a very nice little girl."

"I am not saying anything against the lady's character." Virginia's lips curved in derision. The flush in her cheeks grew deeper.

"And yet you kiss her!" she charged, suddenly.

"Oh, that!" he remarked, smiling. "But I didn't; she kissed me."

"Can you tell me what difference that makes?" she demanded, her lips now in straight lines, being firmly pressed together.

"Perhaps it wouldn't make much difference to an observer," he replied, feeling that Gibson had told her of what had happened. "But the one who was kissed would know the difference."

"A kiss is a kiss," she said coldly.

"Yes; of course. But—"

"And a woman wouldn't kiss you unless you wanted her to." Virginia was standing very rigid now. Her head was raised proudly, there was disdain in the glance she threw him.

"Of course, it isn't anything to me," she continued. "You are at liberty to kiss any girl you want to kiss—or who will let you. But I just want you to know that you can't come here and treat me like you treat other girls. You hadn't been here more than a week before you were telling me that you loved me! I want you to know that I don't believe love comes to anybody that quickly!"

"You don't, Virginia?" he insisted gently. He was not unmindful of the telltale crimson that stained her cheeks, and although he had had little experience with women, he was not unaware that jealousy is not without significance. Yet he was too full of wisdom to permit her to see that he knew. To betray his knowledge would be fatal.

"And yet I loved you from the first, Virginia."

She laughed mirthlessly.

"Did you tell Miss Fargo the same thing?" she asked.

"Virginia."

"Well?"

"Do you know Ben Baxter?"

"Of course."

"Do you know how gentle he is? How brave? How self-sacrificing? Do you know how magnetic he really is; how quickly one gets to loving him?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that he has regained consciousness, and that he has told us what happened that night?"

"I heard that."

"And do you know that Miss Fargo had been sitting within a few feet of Baxter, in the office, for a great many days?"

"Well?"

"And do you know that after Baxter was hurt Miss Fargo spent more than half her time helping to nurse him?"

Virginia looked swiftly at him.

"I didn't know that," she admitted.

"But you know how Baxter makes people love him—without any effort on his part?"

Virginia was silent.

"Virginia," continued Cameron, "some time between her first meeting with Baxter and the morning he regained consciousness, Miss Fargo fell in love with Baxter. On that morning she was telling me about it. She felt so happy that she kissed me—kissed me because I praised Baxter.

"Joe Gibson was standing in the doorway. He saw her kiss me. Virginia, Miss Fargo isn't the girl I want to kiss."

But Cameron perceived that Virginia did not believe him. She stood, looking straight at him, her gaze coldly incredulous, her lips slightly derisive.

"Mr. Cameron," she said, "you are very clever. But I think you are not very deep. What you did to Miss Fargo is no concern of mine. But there is always fire where there is smoke."

"It was such a little kiss, Virginia."

Virginia turned her head. She did not answer.

"On the side of my mouth, Virginia. Miss Fargo meant well, but I moved my head."

"That doesn't concern me, Mr. Cameron. Perhaps you didn't try very hard."

"To do what?"

"To escape her kiss."

Cameron looked covertly at Virginia, to see her nibbling at her lips. Her face was aflame.

"Joe Gibson saw it all," she declared. "Joe wouldn't lie." She met Cameron's gaze. Her eyes were alight with an accusing fire.

"She called you 'dear'!" she charged. "Gibson said he heard her!"

"I think she did," admitted Cameron. "But she was really thinking of Baxter, and I am sure—"

"Ah!" Virginia exclaimed. Her face had paled. Her lips were again tight-set, again contempt flamed in her eyes. She stepped upon the porch, walked to the door and stood before it, a hand on the knob.

"I think that is all, Mr. Cameron," she announced. "You seem to think that you can trifle with people and make them believe you are serious. I don't wish you any harm, though, and so I advise you to leave Ransome as soon as possible. Gibson and the other men are very vindictive. I overheard them talking about you. If you don't go away they will hurt you!"

She opened the door, stepped inside.

Cameron could hear her as she crossed the kitchen floor.

But there was joy in Cameron's heart despite the gloomy expression of his face as he went down the walk toward the gate.

Virginia's jealousy could mean only one thing!

CHAPTER XXIII.

TREACHERY.

MISS FARGO had betrayed signs of nervousness. Within half an hour Cameron, who had been staring out through the open door, had looked at her several times. Twice he had seen her glance at the big clock that hung on the front wall. Three-quarters of an hour before quitting time he soberly addressed the girl.

"Miss Fargo," he said, "Baxter wasn't doing so well at noon. Please go up there and see if there is anything you can do."

She was out of her chair before he ceased speaking. When she went out of the door a few seconds later he smiled.

But instantly the office became lonely. To Cameron's ears as he sat there came various sounds—the staccato thudding of a riveting machine, the monotonous rumbling of a concrete mixer, the incessant banging of hammers, the coughing of the dummy engine.

Outside activity; inside silence—and thought.

Cameron could not work. For the first time in many days the office irked him. He had no interest in work. Work was a thing any man could do. There were certain ways of doing work. It was a science. There were methods, means, customs, proved theories, mathematical problems that always worked out according to rule, technical tenets by which a man abided.

Love didn't work out that way. There was no rule or custom. A man couldn't approach love as he approached his work. He had found that out. Love wasn't a mathematical problem, there were no standards to go by.

Cameron sat at his desk and watched the sun go down. The light streamed into the open doorway and struck the wall behind him. He watched the light vanish. He got up and put on his coat. Dusk had come.

He straightened some papers on his desk, carried some to Miss Fargo's desk and laid them in a wire basket. Then he stood for an instant, gazing around. Reaching the door, he paused, mildly astonished.

Sitting on the bottom step, his elbows on his knees, his hands supporting his chin, was Calamity.

Cameron closed the door, locked it and walked down the steps, passing Calamity, who did not move.

"Calamity," said Cameron, looking down at the man, "you seem to be out of your latitude. I think this is the first time you have ever favored us with a visit."

Calamity looked up, his mournful eyes a shade more mournful than usual.

"I've been thinkin' of comin'," he observed. "I've been wantin' to look this place over. But there's always too many

folks around. Thought I'd come when there wasn't so many."

"You've struck it just right," smiled Cameron. "I'm here alone. If you've got time I'll show you around."

Calamity got up, seeming to unfold like a jackknife. He sighed deeply, his face lengthened lugubriously as he pressed a hand to his back, just above the hips.

"Get a twinge there once in a while," he explained. "Lumbago, likely. Always knowed I'd get it. My dad had it. Runs in the family. Mostly trouble does run in a family. But nothin' else—like money or brains or health. Them things sort of get side-tracked somewheres. A man can't anticipate them."

"The world looks very bright to you—doesn't it, Calamity?"

"Not so awful bright," denied the other. "I've quit expectin' it to. A man's a fool to get to expectin' good things to happen. They never do. Take my uncle. Lafe, his name was. Well, he used to say that better days was a comin'. An' him all bent up with rheumatiz. He never got no better—he ought to have resigned himself to the worst."

Calamity followed Cameron into the growing darkness. They stood for some time near the black bulk of a huge building, under construction. Cameron explained that when completed the structure was to be used as a power house.

"You ain't had no labor troubles here yet, eh?" asked Calamity.

"No. We do not anticipate any. Our men are satisfied."

"Nobody's been killed on the work?"

"Nobody has been killed."

"Nobody hurt?"

"Not a man."

"No trouble of any kind?"

"Not any."

Calamity sighed.

"I sort of don't understand it," he said, disappointment in his voice. "On jobs like this there's usually somebody hurt or killed or there's strikes an' such. You say there's nothin' like that happened?"

"Not a thing like that."

"Well, I don't understand it. You got a charm or somethin' around you?"

"No charms, Calamity."

Calamity shook his head and gazed about him.

"Let's walk over there by that gorge—where you've been buildin' the dam," he said. "I've heard folks say that if a man would fall offen there he'd sure get smashed up some. Mebbe there's a place there where it might happen."

Cameron led the way to a point about a quarter of a mile distant, to a hilltop from where they could dimly discern the outlines of the dam. Work had progressed rapidly, but the darkness had grown so dense that Cameron found it difficult to point out certain salient features.

Besides, Calamity did not appear to be listening to Cameron; he was casting glances here and there as though seeking out other objects of interest.

"Not a darned bit of trouble," he remarked, interrupting Cameron. "Things has been runnin' mighty smooth for you."

"Pretty smoothly," Cameron replied.

"Right from the first," Calamity continued. "The first night you was here you made a monkey of Strong. Nothin' happened. The very next day Virginia Ballantine shot a hole through your hat. That was after you'd kept Dave Jenkins from shootin' Ballantine."

"Calamity," Cameron said, "how do you know Virginia put a bullet through my hat?"

"I was watchin' you from the brush," shamelessly replied Calamity.

"H-m." Cameron looked grimly at Calamity.

"Did you overhear anything that was said that day, Calamity?"

"Sure. I was pretty close."

"Calamity," said Cameron, "it seems to me that you hear too much."

"Ears is made to be used, ain't they? Well, I've used mine. An' I've seen things. You keep interruptin' me. I was tellin' you about how close you've come to trouble—an' never got it. It's sure astonishin'!

"The same day that Virginia put a hole through your hat you run into old Ballantine on the hotel veranda. I thought there would be trouble. There wasn't. You knocked Strong down an' took his gun

away. Nothin' happened to you. Strong showed yellow.

"Then you walked right over into Ballantine's yard an' defied him. Nothin' happened to you. Then you knocked hell out of that Kensington fellow—an' shot him. Nothin' happened to you. You blowed up Kelly's place, an' nothin' happened to you. An' them boys was ragin' mad. Then you shot old Ballantine—an' nothin'—"

"Calamity," said Cameron, "how do you know my bullet hit Ballantine?"

"I was settin' on one of the flat cars when you run the engine up to where Ballantine was standin'. When you stopped the engine I got off an' went around, out of range. I seen your bullet knock dust off of old Ballantine's shirt. It hit him kerplunk in the shoulder."

"Have you told anybody what you saw?" asked Cameron.

"Not yet. I've been a waitin'."

"Calamity, if you tell anybody what you have been telling me, you'll have more trouble than you have had all the days of your life!"

"H-m!" Calamity muttered. "Well, mebbe. But don't you go to threatenin' me, Mr. Cameron."

Calamity's voice had changed. There was some vindictiveness in it now, and a slight, strained eagerness.

"Don't go to doin' any threatenin', Mr. Cameron," he repeated. "It seems to me that you've been escapin' trouble pretty easy. It ain't in no ways natural that a man could keep on escapin' trouble that way right along, an' I've took a notion to be right on hand this time to see how you do it?"

"What do you mean, Calamity?"

Cameron walked toward Calamity, to seek an explanation to the other's cryptic remark. But Calamity retreated before him—down the slope of the hill until he stood on a little level amid some huge rocks.

There he halted and laughed lowly.

"I've been a heap curious about you an' trouble, Mr. Cameron," he said. "An' I've brought you here a-purpose, to see how you get out of havin' trouble. Seems you've sort of forgot that this is the seventh day, ain't you—the time Joe Gibson give you to leave town?"

Calamity laughed again, and dodged behind a big bowlder.

For a moment Cameron stood, rigid, alert.

It came to him that this was indeed the day. He had forgotten it; had forgotten Gibson's threat.

A sinister silence now seemed to envelop him. He felt the presence of an unseen menace, and he moved slowly down the slope of the hill, intent upon getting back to the office and White Star.

But he had just reached the level when he heard a sound in the darkness; dimly discerned the forms of a dozen men near him, surrounding him. His right hand dropped toward the holster at his hip.

But he did not draw the weapon. For directly behind him he heard a voice—Gibson's.

"Easy, Cameron," he said coldly. "There's too many of us for that kind of work! If you pull you'll be plumb through for the evenin'!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WHIZZER.

CAMERON detected the serious, warning quality in Gibson's voice. He had speculated much over Gibson, and he felt that the man was not to be trifled with.

And yet Cameron's act in reaching for his automatic was not the result of a conviction that he could successfully fight the dozen or so men who stood in a constantly narrowing circle about him; the movement of his hand toward the gun had been involuntary, an instinct of self-preservation. As Gibson spoke, Cameron folded his arms over his chest.

"It seems there is no room for argument, Gibson," he agreed. "I should have remembered what you said to me about to-day. But I had forgotten."

"Sorry to trouble you, Cameron," said Gibson. "If you'd have jogged your memory a little this wouldn't have happened."

"It wouldn't have made any difference, Gibson. I never had any intention of obey-

ing your order. That's why I forgot it. Get going!"

Gibson moved closer.

"We're wantin' your gun," he explained.

Cameron felt Gibson's presence. One of Gibson's hands came out, touched Cameron's shoulder.

Cameron dropped his right hand to the holster.

"That doesn't go, Gibson," he said steadily. "If my gun comes out it comes out shooting!"

"Let her rip!" sneered a voice. "If he wants shootin' we'll give him plenty of it! That's the quickest way to get rid of the damned fool, anyway!"

"You boys shut your rank mouths!" growled Gibson. "There ain't goin' to be no shootin' done until I give orders to shoot. An' that ain't goin' to happen if Mr. Cameron don't get to kickin' over the traces!

"Cameron," he added, "we're lettin' you keep your gun. But don't try to work it." He seemed to turn his head and issued a short command:

"Ed, bring my horse over here!"

There was a brief silence in a period of waiting, and then slow hoof beats. A black shape loomed out of the night and came close to Cameron. Gibson's voice, cold, peremptory, followed:

"Get up! I'm ridin' behind you!"

Cameron touched the horse, climbed into the saddle. He felt Gibson at the reins; sat silent while the man mounted behind him. Then the horse began to move away into the darkness, westward.

There was a stir, a swishing of the grass and weeds as of men running through them, then came the beating of hoofs, and Cameron knew that all the men had mounted and were trailing behind.

"Is Calamity a member of this party?" he asked Gibson.

"The agreement was that Calamity was to go along," Gibson replied.

"Rather a mean way to get hold of me, wasn't it, Gibson?"

Gibson did not answer.

"In the dark, Gibson. And through a trick. I had been thinking better things of you, Gibson."

"I ain't carin' a heap what you think of me, Cameron," Gibson declared, his voice sullen. "You ain't no angel yourself."

"Meaning what, Gibson?"

"Meanin' a lot of things! Puttin' aside the shootin' of old Ballantine, you've been performin' like a dog—or worse. Seems to me that man Kensington wasn't far wrong when he talked like he did about you an' that Fargo girl! An' all the while you're tryin' to make a fool of Virginia!"

"Gibson," said Cameron, "if you'll get down with me and keep the other men off I'll try to jam those words back into your mouth!"

"You'll keep a sittin', Cameron!" sneered Gibson. "This ain't the time for no four-flushin'! You'll keep a-ridin'. An' if you go to try any monkey business I'll blow you apart!"

They rode into the darkness of a level country. Cameron could distinguish nothing by which he might establish a sense of direction, but as they crossed the level and began to climb a slight slope he divined that they were going into the upland country westward, beyond the white ranch house.

He said nothing more, for it appeared there was no more to be said. He could hear the beating of hoofs behind him, the creaking of saddle leather.

After they had ridden for about half an hour he saw a luminous haze stealing over the east, heralding the moon. But they had ridden another half hour before the golden orb appeared from behind some distant mountains, and Cameron could distinguish the dim forms of the riders around him.

They had passed the range of hills at the summit of the upland, and were bearing downward, into a big valley. They had not traveled more than a mile or two down the sloping side of the valley when a brilliant moonlight flooded the place.

Far away, from east to west, were the two gleaming lines of steel that ran past Ransome. A train—a freight—was rumbling eastward, its signal lights blinking, the headlight of the engine throwing a long, bright beam into the night.

The rumbling of the train broke the tense silence which had descended. In a few

minutes the rumbling ceased, the lights vanished, and again silence engulfed the cavalcade.

Cameron did not talk. He was in no mood for conversation. He knew Gibson had misjudged him, but he was not going to argue with the man. Therefore, silent as the rest, he rode forward, Gibson guiding the horse.

They rode directly toward the railroad track. Their progress was leisurely, but steady, and after a while they reached a level beside the rails.

Gibson halted the horse, slipped out of the saddle.

"Get down, Cameron," he ordered.

Cameron obeyed.

The section was flat, desolate. Cameron judged they were at least ten miles from Ransome, for he could see the lights of the town twinkling remotely between two hills.

He felt he was not to be killed, for the men could have committed that crime without taking the trouble to ride here. That they had brought him to the railroad tracks was significant of their intention to put him aboard a train. But as he glanced around and saw the telegraph poles, with their cross beams not more than twenty feet above the floor of the flat, he was doubtful. The poles had a grisly appearance, reminding him of gibbets.

The other men got out of their saddles, and swarmed around him. In the moonlight he could see their faces as they watched him. They were all coldly hostile, although they said nothing to him.

Gibson, he perceived, was the leader. Whatever talking was to be done would be done by him. The men would obey him.

Two men stayed with the horses, the others surrounded Cameron.

"Cameron," said Gibson. "There's a train due here pretty soon. Westbound. We're goin' to stop her; put you aboard. We don't care where you go, as long as you don't come back to Ransome.

"I've got to tell you that you've had a pretty narrow squeeze. Some of the boys was for swingin' you. But I figured that was pretty stiff punishment for what you've done. We ain't goin' into that. But we're givin' you a choice.

"You can get aboard the train when we stop her, or you can stay here an' swing from one of these poles. I'm puttin' her straight up to you."

Cameron stood rigid, gazing at the faces of the men who stood near him. Grim, relentless purpose was reflected in the unwavering eyes that stared back at him. He could expect no mercy.

He would ask no mercy. These men were prejudiced, determined. They loved Ballantine and they meant to avenge the man. They were loyal to Ballantine, they were right in the measure of their ability to determine what was right.

They scorned all laws, believing in their fitness to do their own judging. They had given him a choice, and he would have to accept it.

But he could not control the resentment that filled him, the contempt he felt that a dozen of them should arbitrarily judge and condemn him.

He looked last at Gibson.

"I suppose I'll have to board the train," he agreed. "You seem to be running things." He continued to watch Gibson, who would not meet his gaze, but stood, staring downward.

"How soon will the train be here, Gibson?" he asked.

Gibson looked up.

"Listen!" he said.

The faint blast of a locomotive whistle reached the ears of the men.

"That's her," Gibson remarked. "She's passed the freight, at Ransome. She'll be here inside of fifteen minutes."

One of the men was lighting a lantern. Cameron was reaching into a pocket while the man worked with the lantern, and when the globe was snapped down Cameron spoke to him.

"Just come over here for a minute with that light," he said. "I want to write a note to my engineer. Is that all right, Gibson?" he asked.

"Sure. Write as much as you like. But I'm readin' her when you get through. If it ain't the right stuff it won't be delivered."

"Fair enough," Cameron rejoined.

He wrote with a pencil, while the man

stood behind him and held the lantern so that the light came over his shoulder.

Cameron appeared to be taking his time. He took so long that the man holding the lantern grew impatient and cautioned him to hurry. And Gibson stood, silently kicking into a hummock, watching Cameron's face in the light from the lantern.

What Gibson saw in Cameron's face caused his lips to straighten and his eyes to gleam strangely. For Cameron was taking it too calmly to be guilty of the things that, mentally, Gibson had charged him with.

A man with nerves as steady as Cameron's could not deal despicably with women. And that was what was behind Gibson's participation in this affair—a fear that Cameron had been trying to make a fool of Virginia.

Gibson continued to watch Cameron until the note was finished. Then, with the train rumbling toward them—now not more than three or four miles distant—Cameron stepped close to Gibson and gave him the note.

Gibson motioned to the lantern bearer, and in the light from the lantern read what Cameron had written:

> DELL:
>
> I am going West for a few days, on business. It seems imperative, right now. During my absence you will appoint Joe Gibson to act in my place, with full power to conduct the work according to the plans we have agreed upon. Gibson is reliable, and has the genius to handle men. You will pay him a salary of fifty dollars per day until my return—which will be within a week.
>
> JAMES J. CAMERON.

Gibson stood, rereading the note. A flush had stolen up his throat, had spread over his cheeks, to vanish into his hair.

The men were betraying signs of impatience; they were crowding forward, curious over the emotion that had brought the blood surging into Gibson's face.

But Gibson continued to stare at the note. He appeared to read it again, then he dropped his hands to his sides, the note gripped in his fingers, and stared at Cameron, amazed, incredulous.

"Cameron," he said slowly, "you ain't fourflushin' in this note?"

"It's straight, Gibson."

"You're meanin' to come back?"

"Within a week. Gibson, you don't think for one minute that you men are going to scare me away from my job! I'll take the train all right! But I'll be back as sure as shooting! Or, if you are cowards enough, you can hang me right here, and be damned!"

Gibson stared downward. The train was now not more than a mile distant. The engineer, evidently having seen the lighted lantern, had sent a sharp blast of warning. There now came another blast, short, piercing, inquiring.

Gibson did not move. The lantern bearer, anticipating Gibson's order to flag the train, was standing tense, expectant. The other men were muttering unintelligibly.

"Cameron," said Gibson, leaning close, "are you runnin' square with Miss Fargo an' Virginia?"

"Just that, Gibson. Miss Fargo is nothing to me—has never been. I love Virginia!"

Gibson stiffened, turned.

"Douse the light, Bill!" he ordered, sharply. "Cameron ain't goin' to take this train!"

The light went out. The engine, swinging around a curve, threw a blinding beam from its headlight fairly upon the group near the track. There came a long-drawn blast from the whistle, there was a rumble and a rushing roar, a confusing blur of lights—white and green and red—and then the train was past, and Cameron, Gibson and the other men were standing silent in the moonlight.

"That's all, boys!" said Gibson. "Cameron stays!"

He stood, leaning a little forward, peering into the faces of the men.

"We're licked, boys," he added shortly; "go back to camp."

He stood, not looking at Cameron, while the men mounted and rode southward, out of the valley. Then he turned to Cameron.

"I'm headed for the ranch house," he said. "If you ain't too darned sore over what's happened, you can ride back with me."

He walked to his horse. Cameron moved

with him, mounted. Gibson climbed on behind, where he had ridden on the trip out. Only one horseman remained. This man had not dismounted. He now sat on his horse and silently stared as Cameron and Gibson rode past him. Cameron observed that the horseman was Calamity.

They rode eastward, Calamity trailing behind. They had reached the rim of the valley when Gibson said slowly:

"If you want to bust Calamity's heart, Cameron, just tell him that us boys was tryin' to run a whizzer on you."

"Whizzer?" exclaimed Cameron. "Gibson, you don't mean to tell me you were bluffing?"

"Yep," answered Gibson. "You never tumbled. We thought you'd be tickled to get away. Nobody was goin' to shoot you. All the boys was in. But not Calamity. You got to give us credit for tryin'.

"Far as your givin' me a job goes—I don't want it; though turnin' down fifty dollars a day is a mighty reckless thing to do.

"But I'll trail along with Ballantine, an' when he's through, I'll get me a job herdin' sheep."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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ADVICE TO TIME

"BACKWARD, turn backward, O time in your flight;
Make me a child again, just for to-night."
Somebody burbled that buncombe to me
When I was tall as a grasshopper's knee.
I was impressed with it, just as I should—
Since, I have figured it isn't so good.
Time, if my wishes at all are consulted,
Still may face forward—I'll not be insulted.

Back in my childhood I ran all the chores
Out in the open and also indoors;
Those were the days when I'd colic and croup,
Measles and mumps and the cough with a whoop;
Discarded clothing of brother and father
Added its weight to my juvenile bother.
Many annoying and saddening things
Came ere the comfort that middle age brings.

Time, if affection for me you would show,
Face right ahead—yes, and keep on the go!
Steadily life has grown sweeter and kinder;
Friends to my faults have grown steadily blinder;
Bitterness, once that so readily came,
Comes far less oft with its burden of blame.
"Backward, turn backward, O time in your flight"—
Don't! Something tells me it wouldn't be right.

Strickland Gillilan.

Winnin' Ways wid Wimmin

By PAUL SEVERANCE

CAPTAIN ELKNUR set his jaw firmly. "Sorry, Mr. Forbes, but if they're not swinging logs aboard this packet by to-morrow morning—I sail!"

"They won't work, captain," the agent fretted. "Money doesn't even tempt them. I've sent four runners into the interior to bring out more hands. They may be here to-day, perhaps to-morrow—perhaps not for a week, if they come at all!"

The Eastern Breeze was steaming slowly into port, a broad, crystal harbor of an obscure mahogany export station on the African Gold Coast. It was noon and the tropic sea was slick. Heat waves danced up from the steel plates of the vessel's deck, colorless but real and visible as flame. Ashore, where a greedy jungle crept nearly to the water's edge, there was a scanty clearing and a cluster of a half dozen low, anæmic buildings flanked by the native village of brown grass 'kraals that shriveled in the sun.

Mr. Weldon Forbes, the exiled representative of the London shippers, was a small, lean, sallow man, white clad and helmeted. Burdened by the anxiety of the situation, he had been rowed far out to meet the approaching vessel and was on board with his troubles even before the port pilot. He laid his problem briefly before the skipper. The logs were ready, the ship was there, but no stevedores had come to load her.

The two men paced the upper deck by the thwart ship railing. The agent stopped abruptly, his interest held by the picture on the forecastle head. There stood a huge, gaunt negro, his long legs tangled in the chains of the railing and his torso stretched

precariously far out over the vessel's stem. Perched at a rakish angle atop his woolly crown, he wore a scarlet hat like a cardinal's skull cap. He was scanning the beach with a pair of binoculars.

"Aw, ma-a-an!" His voice was distinctly audible. "Lookout thah, black gal, 'fo' you gits youse'f all freckled! Uh-uuh! What I calls *a* steppah! Tha's the kine of woman Ise aftah—doan have to bothah 'bout no lawn'ry or nothin'!"

The agent smiled despite his irritation.

"That's my carpenter, Sassafras," the skipper explained with a chuckle. They would have dismissed the incident, but an awe-struck exclamation broke upon their ears:

"'Fo' Gawd, that niggah's walkin' thoo the watah!"

The white men's eyes sought the cause of the consternation. A native paddler had set out from the beach and was making toward the vessel, but there was no visible craft and the man seemed oddly enough to be sitting on the water.

"Here comes your pilot, captain," Mr. Forbes informed him. "He'll show you a suitable anchorage. In the meantime I'll step in the office and glance over the mail you brought."

As the pilot approached it could be seen that he sat astride a raft of leashed bamboos bound tightly fore and aft so that it tapered to a bow and a stern. The native's legs were treading water with a duck-like waddle to assist in steering and as a general auxiliary to his frail spoon oar.

The float was soon made fast alongside and its single passenger clambered with nimble ease to the steamer's deck. He was a wizen, dwarfish man with a round, pinched face that was oddly wrinkled. His single article of substantial apparel was a British military Eton jacket that draped rather than fitted him. There was a row of glistening buttons down the front and the sleeves were striped to the elbows with gay gold braid.

As the black man stood barefoot on the hot steel deck he began to shiver. He was escorted promptly to the captain, where the violence of the chill increased.

"Cold! Cold!" came the chattered explanation as the stranger pointed to his glossy, dripping legs and then to the sea.

"Cold! This water?" The skipper turned to the mate in frank bewilderment. "Could there possibly be a cold current right here on the equator? Go get the man a drink of liquor!"

This need supplied, the trembling knees stood firm. But the small man grinned up sheepishly as he glanced beyond the captain and saw the agent standing in the cabin door.

Mr. Forbes laughed silently. "So you fell a victim to Wamba's shimmy, captain! Well, never mind, there's many a drink he gets that way."

II.

WHEN the vessel had been nosed over to her anchorage, the little man who served both as official pilot and captain of the port, was given a second shot of liquor to guard against the possibility of recurrent chills. He bowed extravagantly and made his way below to the main deck, but he had scarcely reached the bottom of the ladder when he was confronted by the grinning Sassafras.

The two black men stood silently examining each other as children do in meeting. There was admiration in both pairs of eyes: Sassafras bewitched by the gaudy braided jacket, the man from shore transfixed by the size of the seaman and by the flaming cap the big man wore.

Sassafras broke the silence. "Too bad, now, yo' mammy nevah use' wool soap!" He laughed uproariously. "Pull down yo' ves' thah, Slivah, sonny! I 'clares, 'side from bein' knock-kneed an' the fac' yo' haid doan 'zackly fit yo' shoulders, you ain't such a bad lookin' lil man!"

The stranger grinned, his gaze still on the gay red headgear.

"Sortah laks mah bonnet?" Sassafras turned to register the full effect. "Come out the cargo," he explained. "Brung 'em down from the States. Fo' or five cases went an' got all busted so the man wouldn't take 'em." He paused judiciously on the verge of the confession that the admired hat was nothing more than the straw crown of what had once been a woman's bonnet.

He reached out his hand and stroked the

braided jacket. "I lak yo' coat. Shame, now, a man don't own it what c'n 'preciate it. Turn 'roun' heah, niggah. Hot damn! Jes' what I al'ays wanted." He took off his red cap and flashed it temptingly in the sun. "Might 'range a swop—that is, effin you was to boot me a-plenty."

His hand stole cautiously to his trouser pocket and he drew forth a pair of dice. He rattled them energetically and raised his eyebrows wtih a questioning stare.

The captain of the port smiled broadly.

"Uh-huh! I sees you done receive yo' proppah education!" Sassafras winked extravagantly. "I 'vites you fo'wa'd to mah pussonal qua'tahs. Mebby you wins mah bonnet. Mebby you don't—can't nevah tell!"

When the skipper and Mr. Forbes descended to the main deck they were confronted by the captain of the port who was sitting on the edge of a hatch with his chin in his hands, a picture of utter desolation.

"Why, Wamba"—the agent paused to challenge with mock earnestness—"where's your coat? My word, what will become of the dignity of your office!"

The withered little black man almost wept. He pointed aft where the resplendent Sassafras was strutting for the admiration of a laughing crew. The Eton jacket fitted the seaman snugly and the gold braid glistened in the sun.

The master scowled. "Go bring him here to me!" he ordered.

The white men again became absorbed in the intricacies of their problem of loading. They did not notice that Sassafras had reluctantly returned the coat to its rightful owner and stood behind them meekly awaiting the censure that he knew was due.

"The peculiar feature of the situation," Mr. Forbes went on, "is that the women are behind it."

"The women?" Captain Elknur stared.

The agent laughed dryly. "We draw our work boys from the tribes of the interior. We bargain with the chiefs—"

"Yes, I know, but you say the women?"

"Ah, that's the crux of it! You see, these boys wouldn't work, not even for their chiefs, unless they had some inspiration. They can hunt and fish and there's fruit for the picking. But they must have wives and the wise old dads sell off their daughters to the highest bidders.

"That all worked very smoothly, but we've had a run of tribal wars that has killed off the men. The result is a bumper crop, a national surplus, you might say, of marriageable women. And they don't relish the prospect of prolonged maidenhood any more than their fair-skinned sisters across the sea. But the gluttonous old fathers with a corner on the marriage market won't cut their prices.

"So, aye gad, the women struck! No definite organization, you understand, but there are hundreds of them that have slipped away from home. They're flooding the ports. Even here in this God-forgotten cranny, we're swarmed with women.

"The men won't work. Why should they? They can have their wives for the asking and let the world go hang!"

There was an unexpected interruption.

"'Scuse me, Mistuh Cap'n, suh, buttin' in on you gent'men's conversashum lak I ain't been trained no bettah. I been standin' heah listenin' at you-all talkin'. Co'se, now, you knows all 'bout runnin' steamboats an' sichlike, but if them thah is regulation niggahs—Mistuh Cap'n, suh, I done hatch me out a sho' nuf idea!"

The master's frown was followed by a chuckle. "If that's the case, Sassafras, I think Mr. Forbes will manage to excuse you. But be quick about it. What is it you have to say?"

III.

SASSAFRAS scratched his chin and ran a clumsy finger around his collar. "You sez the wimmin's 'sponsible fo' this heah turbulation?" He edged up closer. "Mistuh Cap'n, suh, I al'ays has had turruble winnin' ways wid wimmin—howsomevah, that ain't 'zackly mah argumentation, le'me—le'me sortah 'splain."

A low-toned consultation followed. The white men were skeptical, but yielded.

"I can't see that it's going to do any harm," Captain Elknur reasoned. "But, Sassafras, I hold to my point, if logs aren't swinging aboard to-morrow, I sail!"

The mate was called and preparations for Sassafras's plan began in earnest.

Sassafras climbed over the vessel's side. "Come 'long heah, Slivah, sonny. Ise done choose you fo' mah terprelatah. Hop on boa'd yo' lil ol' bun'le of matches an' trail 'long behine me 'speckful-like and proppah. Goin' to be big doings when we gits asho'!"

Sliver obeyed, and Sassafras took his seat in the stern of the agent's six-oared gig. Five bulky packages were carefully lowered and placed before him. Then the skipper called from the rail:

"That's all, Sassafras. Now are you sure you don't need me or Mr. Forbes?"

Sassafras shook his head. "Ain't meanin' no disrespec', Mistuh Cap'n, suh, but it's jes' lak I tol' you, I calculates Ise goin' to have mo' weight 'mongst them niggahs effin I acts direc'."

The boat shoved off and Sassafras sat up stiffly. "Aw, ma-a-an, this heah's what I calls sailah-farin' propah! Got six rabble niggahs to row me 'roun'! Speed up thah, ol' Blacker'n-I-Is!" Sassafras made a vigorous gesture as if he would rap the nearest oarsman across the crown. "Speed up lak Ise tellin' you, we-all ain't travelin' ha'f fas' enough!"

The party reached the shore and set off solemnly along the beach. Sliver was leading—lagging occasionally to catch a stimulating glimpse of the seaman's flaming bonnet. The oarsmen with the bundles followed.

"Go 'head, Slivah, you leads me to yo' res'dence," Sassafras instructed. "Us makes that headqua'tahs. Then you c'n go—"

Sassafras's speech broke suddenly. They had reached the first hut of the group of native dwellings. There was a buxom damsel lounging in the doorway. She was toying with a captive sand crab and her dark eyes lifted with a languid interest as the men trooped into view.

Sassafras nudged his frail companion. "Tha's her! Tha's her!" came a breathy whisper. "What I definates *a* woman! Uh-uuh! How she evah get all them iron lookin' rings on—reckons she evah takes 'em off to wash her neck?"

They reached Sliver's bachelor apartment: a small round kraal with a kennel door and not a single window. The cortège entered and the packages were deposited on the bare sand floor. The oarsmen were stationed as guards about the dwelling. Sliver lingered curiously.

"N'mind 'bout seein' what I got!" Sassafras objected. "You gits out an' drums up mah congregation. Wants ev'ybody present—'specially the wimmin. An', listen at me!" Sassafras led the wizen native to the door. "Fust off, you gits that bracelet-weahin' gal I pointed out to you. N'mind why I wants her. Pawk her jes' outside mah do'. Hurry 'long, now, sonny. 'Membah I give you back that coat you's wearin'!"

The small man departed and Sassafras set himself to the task of opening the bundles. He had scarcely started when the low, weird rumble of a tom-tom sounded close at hand.

"Wow! Sliver done got the fiahwuks started! Uh-uuh! Soun's turruble wile an' recklesslike! Wouldn't like to heah that thing in the night time when I didn't know what it was!"

Outside there arose a drone of voices. A crowd was forming and the noise soon increased. When Sliver returned he announced that all was ready. Sassafras pulled down his cuffs and adjusted his cravat. He strode forth grandly and a silence fell.

"Niggahs—cullud men of Af'ica! Ladies of this heah honorable community!" The speaker paused and turned to Sliver. "Ain't nary one of 'em c'n understan' a word I has to say?"

Sliver's brow grew troubled and he wagged his head.

"You tells 'em, sonny. I done 'point you superficial 'terpretator to 'splain mah plan." Sassafras took off his scarlet cap and placed it at a jaunty slant on the small man's head. "There now!"

Sliver's chest swelled proudly. A spontaneous ripple of admiration swept the throng.

"Go 'head, now, Sliver," the seaman prompted. "Tell these heah ign'ant niggahs Ise done arrive an' brung 'em special offerin's. Tell 'em I has gorgeous finements

what is goin' to make 'em plum' frog-eyed when they sees 'em. Tell 'em that lil ol' raid hat that you is weahin' is jes' a sample.

"Tell 'em I has a hat fo' ev'ry woman present—goin' to give 'em to the wimmin free fo' nothin'! Only makes one stipulation—men folks has to load mah ship!"

IV.

SLIVER blinked and faltered, baffled by the flood of Sassafras's English. But the germ of the idea penetrated to his understanding and he loosed his tongue.

Sassafras smiled and bowed whenever a pause in Sliver's speech afforded the slightest opportunity. The interpreter finished and a chattering tumult arose.

But Sassafras raised his hand with an impelling gesture and restored the calm. He strode into the hut and brought forth four gorgeous bonnets. They were a riot of spring hues.

The babble arose again with sharp accents of admiration. The seaman's hopes ran high. He addressed himself to the lady wearer of the iron necklets. "Stan' 'roun' heah, sister. I done selec' you fo' mah demonstratah. Lookout, I ain't aimin' to hurt you! Sliver, you 'splains mah honorable intentions. This heah gal's mos' turruble shy."

Sliver explained and the model conformed to the exhibition. She was reluctant at first, but the spell of the hats worked its fascination until she posed and preened and strutted with almost professional effect.

More hats were brought out as the enthusiasm mounted. There were squeals and shrieks and hysterical bursts of laughter. One woman was overcome by her emotion and had to be led away by the guards and dashed with water. As a fitting climax, Sassafras placed a glittering gold cloth turban upon the model's head.

"Oh, boy!" He stepped aside. "Done made mah pitcher! Slivah, now's the time to ast 'em. Ast 'em effin they 'cepts mah proposition. Tell 'em ev'y woman gits a bonnet. All they got to do is to agree that the men folks loads mah ship!"

There was an immediate response—an eager, shrill, soprano chorus.

"Wimmin favors," Sliver interpreted.

But in the moment's silence that had followed a bass voice croaked a dull interrogation.

"What the man say?" Sassafras's words were tense.

Sliver explained. The gentlemen of the community had raised the question as to just where they came in in the sharing of this reward.

Sassafras did not falter. "Co'se, now, they gits their reg'lah wages. 'Sides that—" He smirked and scraped and raised his brows with impressive innuendo. "I would sugges' we leaves that lil mattah 'tirely wid the ladies. Whah I comes from, we gent'men makes our off'ings on the sh'ine of beauty widout no talk of reewa'd!"

Sliver interpreted to the best of his ability. There was an earnest consultation. When the voices lulled it was patent that the community was divided.

A woman arose, a person of obvious weight among her sisters. She began to talk. Her enthusiasm mounted until it was necessary to drown her voice with the rolling of the tom-tom.

"What she say?" Sassafras queried.

Sliver shrugged. "Wimmin favors yo' plan."

"How 'bout the men?"

Sliver wagged a doleful negative.

Sassafras scratched his chin. "Oh, well, effin I knows wimmin—" A smile spread cunningly across his features. "You 'dress yourse'f to the ladies, Slivah. Tell 'em I's on their side. Tell 'em I stan's heah ready to len' 'em ev'y 'sistance. Ise a great believah in the 'bility of the suff'age pawty. But tell 'em effin they wants mah bonnets they has got to reso't to 'suasion; got to convince their gent'men frien's that the proppah course to take is to return to labah. Sooner mah ship gits loaded—quicker the wimmin gits the hats!"

The meeting adjourned in some confusion. It was a strange night that followed in the grass hut village on that usually tranquil shore of a tropic bay. Love songs were chanted; there was a constant drone of sugared, coaxing voices; black men of Africa had never known such tenderness.

They were fed and flattered, and fresh, fragrant leaves were gathered for their couches. The women cooed and lisped sweet nothings, indulging in those delicate, intimate little rhapsodies that only a woman can devise—and she with the hope of a new spring bonnet! No one slept.

When a new day dawned the beach was lined with sleepy men who, like Adam, had surrendered unto woman's pleading. The movement started and recruits soon swelled the ranks. The tom-tom rolled its stirring clarion, and while the sun still cameoed a fringe of palms against the eastern sky, huge logs began to swing aboard the waiting steamer.

V.

SASSAFRAS strode the beach with glowing satisfaction. On every hand he was beset with ravishing glances. Great heaps of food were brought and he was fed until he had to fight away their offerings.

"Al'ays had a winnin' way wid wimmin'," he confided in the attentive ear of Sliver, his faithful friend. "'Tain't the fust time I has had to bresh 'em off mah coat!" He paused to meditate upon the rapture. "Wimmin's mah downfall!" But he grinned. "Slivah, sonny, I might considah resignin' mah position on the steamboat an' takin' up mah res'dence in this heah woman infested po't!"

They were interrupted. A chattering group approached. It was a special delegation. Sliver strode forward pompously to receive them. He translated briefly. The crux of their petition was that inasmuch as the men had taken up their labor Sassafras might be lenient and pass out the hats without delay.

The seaman shook his head. He grinned. "I knows mah colah. Pay 'em in advance, and when the wuk time comes they ain't nowhere to be found!"

The women turned to Sliver for an explanation.

"N'mind tellin' 'em what I sez," Sassafras cut in crisply. "Le's see, now. You jes' tell them wimmin they's goin' to look so han'some when they weahs them bonnets that the men can't wuk no mo' fo' thinkin' 'bout 'em. Be sho' an' 'splain 'tain't that I ain't willin' to trust 'em. Al'ays trusts the wimmin.

"But the men's all wukin' on mah ship—sho'ly now, the ladies doan want to be struttin' 'round wid nobody to look at 'em? You tell 'em I thinks it's bes' fo' all that we waits till mah vessel gits her load."

Sassafras was feasted, waited on, and smiled at. Such popularity would have turned many a good man's head. It was the morning of the fourth day that he went on board for orders.

"Hold 'em till to-night, Sassafras," Captain Elknur directed. "If the work keeps up at the rate it's going we'll have our load by then."

"Got 'em in the pa'm of mah han'," Sassafras answered proudly. "Only them wimmin is gettin' turruble anxious and oneasy fo' to weah them bonnets. 'Specks, bein' as you is goin' to be thoo by to-night anyway, I might as well han' 'em out their prizes? Coaxinist wimmin, Mistuh Cap'n, suh. Effin I hadn't of been a bear fo' resistance, we might of got no mo' than half a load!"

Sassafras descended to the waiting Sliver. "Roun' up the wimmin!" he directed when they reached the shore. "Roun' 'em up, Slivah, sonny. Tell 'em Ise ready to boom 'em wid the bonnets. Hurry up, pa'dnah, I's sortah anxious mahse'f to see jes' how they's goin' to act."

The word was greeted with a wild commotion. There was a scramble for position, and the wizen Sliver was nearly trampled under foot. But Sassafras insisted upon order, and counted heads.

"'Fo' Gawd, Slivah," he announced when the count was taken. "Got almos' twice as many wimmin as I has hats!" But this was no time for procrastination. A brim here, a crown there, to one a pompon or a feather, to another a veil, a bit of ribbon or a gay rosette—Dame Fashion was in a fickle mood!

For the model of the first evening's exhibition, she with the washers around her neck, Sassafras reserved intact the gold-cloth turban. He placed it carefully upon her bushy head and watched her preen herself and strut to join the gay parade.

"Aw, m-a-n!" The seaman kicked the

sand with the vehemence of his growing admiration. " Somehow, there's jes' something 'bout a certain kin' of woman—" He clapped his small companion on the shoulder with a sudden zest that sent the scarlet skull cap flying. Sliver coughed and gasped for words. Sassafras rattled on.

" Slivah, sonny—uh-uuh! I 'mits Ise got me a gal back home, but I doan mind tellin' you Ise turruble tempted to make ma'iage wid that gol' hat woman yondah! Co'se, now, I'll keep you roun' to run mah errants an' to buil' mah fiahs—sho' 'nuff, pa'dnah, I ain't playin' wid you!" He turned his hungry eyes to the beach.

It was a gay parade that passed before him—a strutting, giggling, chattering throng —the sun's rays flashing on the gaudy bonnets. Conspicuous among the lot was the gorgeous goldcloth turban.

" Hot damn!" The seaman's animation grew apace. " Mos' sportiest one in the whole sheboodle? Ise done decided. Slivah, sonny, s'pose you goes an' terpretates mah proposition to the lady? Tell her I offers to clasp her han' in ma'iage—doan go pullin' none of this heah ' Speak fo' yourse'f, Jawn,' foolishness lak I read about in mah schoolhouse readah! Run 'long, now. I 'waits her answah ri' ovah yondah in yo' bachelor qua'tahs."

VI.

THE grinning Sliver started on his way, but the first huge raindrops of a tropic shower spattered on his naked shoulders. Sassafras caught his arm. " N'mind, now. Us waits till the storm blows ovah! ' Marry in the rain—life full of pain,' lak the sayin' is."

A low-hung cloud shut out the sunlight and the shower broke upon them. Sassafras scurried for the shelter of the hut.

Sliver followed. Squatting in the doorway the two men gazed out upon a dismal vista. But the women had not left the beach. Absorbed in their eager demonstration, they were heedless of such trifles as a tropic shower. They entirely ignored the downpour. A few men had left off logging and strolled over to stare wide-eyed with unmasked admiration.

" 'Fo' Gawd, Slivah, ain't them wimmin got sense enough to take their mill'nery in out the rain?" Sassafras squirmed uneasily. " Look-a-yondah, sonny—that feathah thing's done ruint a'ready! Uh-uuh! Yondah go anothah—purple color runnin' down her back lak she was a Injun!

" Run out an' tell 'em, buddy—you ain't got no creases down yo' trousers lak I is—run out an' 'splain. This rain's goin' to ruin ev'ything—" Sassafras choked. " Lan' sakes, look at that raid hat—all droopin' down lak a settin' hen what's been ducked in a rain barrel! You know, Slivah, somehow I feels lak I oughta be on boa'd mah ship!"

As the force of the rain increased the women worked themselves into a state of great excitement. Deaf ears were turned to Sliver's pleadings, and they glared into one another's faces and saw the havoc that the rain had wrought. A panic seized them. They began to mill like frightened cattle, screeching, moaning, wailing and threatening a stampede.

Sliver returned to the hut, drenched and defeated. Sassafras shook a doleful head. " I 'clares I sho' hates to get mahse'f all messed up jes' 'cause a passel of fool wimmin ain't got sense enough to come in out the rain! Slivah, sonny—"

A shrill voice rent the air. A woman confronted them at the doorway. It was she of much weight in the community—sponsor for the women in the original acceptance of Sassafras's offer. In one hand she clutched a faded, shapeless bonnet. She shrieked again, threw the hat upon the ground and stamped upon it. Her cries increased as she swung into a wild dance, pausing at intervals to shake her fists and hurl abuses at the two men in the shelter.

Sassafras gulped. The little Sliver groaned.

" What the woman sayin', pa'dnah?" the seaman asked. " N'mind, you doan have to translate no sich lan'wich!"

Around and around swept the frenzied dancer, her eyes grown strangely glassy, her wet face blotched with coloring. Others joined the mêlée until the sandy clearing before the hut was a howling, delirious sea of wild gyrations. The tropic rain beat

down its wind-blown curtains. Bass thunder rolled and lightning flashed, but above it all rose the shrill, mad cries of the women, their sleek, wet bodies streaked and mottled with variegated hues.

"Slivah, I feels lak I's about to leave you!"

Some one hurled a handful of wet sand.

"Ain't no doubt about it—I's on mah way! Sho' hopes they doan try to rough-house wid me. Mah ol' mammy learned me nevah to hit no woman—'ceptin' she tries to steal mah money!" The seaman started. He gripped his small companion's arm. "Dog-gawn, Slivah, yondah's mah gol' hat 'mongst them howlin' heathens! Uh-uuh, nevah thought that model gal was goin' to turn against me! Nevah you mind 'bout tellin' that iron bracelet woman nothin' at all 'bout mah ma'iage proposition! Done los' mah relish fo' all her kin'!"

VII.

SASSAFRAS buttoned his coat and turned up his collar. "So-long, Slivah!" The seaman braved the howling throng. The women closed in about him. "Look out thah, fat gal," he shouted to the leader. "I hates to have to bat you down!" But words were vain. On came the women, screeching, clawing, prancing, weeping. The big man ducked his head and charged.

The first ranks of his antagonist were scattered in confusion by the force of impact. But others rushed in blindly. A black hand clutched his tie. Another tore away his collar. Two husky amazons grappled with his coat tails, and the garment parted completely up the back.

Butting, pushing, elbowing, squirming, the bedraggled Sassafras at length emerged beyond the mob of fighting women. His coat was gone, his shirt in streamers, one eye was closing, and his face was scratched. But in his hand he waved victoriously the goldcloth turban as he headed for the beach and plunged into the foaming surf.

"Reckon I c'n make it," he sputtered as his head came up beyond a line of breakers and he measured the distance to the Eastern Breeze far out at anchor. "Lawd knows I ain't much swimmah, but drownin' can't be no worser'n gettin' et up by a passel of hootin' wimmin!"

He struck out vigorously. The shouting on the shore grew fainter, but the huge dark bulk of the ship seemed hopelessly far away. Sassafras splashed and spluttered. "I knows I's a turruble no 'count niggah, but effin I evah gits mah foot on boa'd that steamah I ain't nevah, nevah goin' asho'!"

Sassafras was at the point of exhaustion when he felt a small hand grip his shoulder. The swimmer closed his eyes. "Lawd Gawd, they done swum out an' got me!" He gathered strength and courage for one final effort. Kicking, squirming, swallowing, choking—his feet struck bottom!

He stood up coughing and gazed into the anxious countenance of the faithful Sliver. Sassafras, with all his efforts, was not more than a hundred yards out on the gently shelving shore.

The wizen captain of the port pulled the exhausted seaman on board the bamboo raft and paddled vigorously toward the steamer. Alongside at last, the weary Sassafras mounted to the deck. The rain had ceased and the tropic sun shone forth in dazzling splendor.

Captain Elknur was on deck. "Just finished loading," he called. "Why, what the deuce!" He stared. "I wondered what that hubbub was on shore."

Sassafras grinned sadly and shook himself. "Jes' mah winnin' ways wid wimmin," he bantered weakly. "They-all raised a turruble 'sturbance, Mistuh Cap'n, suh, when I tol' 'em that I's bound to leave."

The black man's smile grew robust and broke forth in a roar of laughter. He sobered suddenly and, bending over the vessel's side, peered down into the upturned countenance of the doleful Sliver.

"You've done good work," the skipper declared. "I'll see that you're rewarded."

VIII.

THE negro beamed exuberant appreciation. "Thank yah, Mistuh Capn'n, suh—thank yah. But what I hates is to be leavin' po' Slivah behin' to git all martyrfied

by them fool wimmin. Doan reckon you got a lil job of some sort that you c'n give him?"

The captain shook his head. "Sorry, Sassafras, but they wouldn't let him ashore in the States if we took him."

The black man scratched his chin. A brass bell flashed and clamored as a messman strode on deck. It was five o'clock and time for supper. Sassafras's one good eye grew wide with sudden inspiration.

"Doan reckon now, Mistuh Cap'n, suh, you could gimme that ol' bell?"

"Bell?" the master puzzled. "You mean that dinner bell the boy is ringing? Why, yes. I guess the steward's got another."

Sassafras bolted. He snatched the bell from the astonished ringer's hand. He raced to the rail and, climbing down, presented his prize to the staring Sliver. Gloom left the little native's face.

"Hot damn! Now I done fix you!" Sassafras laughed uproariously as he clung to the swaying ladder. "Ary one of them pesterin' wimmin come round, you jes, ring yo' bell at 'em! They goin' to be so curious an' envyfied they'll forget all about them ruint bonnets! So-long, Slivah, pa'd-nah! You got somethin' thah that 'll beat a tom-tom all hollah."

The Eastern Breeze steamed out across the broad, smooth bay. The wizen little black man, still astride his bamboo raft, was absorbed in ringing the big brass bell. The last rays of a setting sun glinted from its burnished surface like heliograph signals.

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CLAY

ONE night I dreamed—I often do—
And in my sleep beheld
A mass of Clay, dull, drab in hue,
In varied forms dispelled.

"Alas! What is Myself?" it cried.
"Am I that vase of figure fair?
Or that thick goblet, brittle, dried?
Perhaps that ill-shaped jardinière?

And can I call that urn Myself?
Or can I term that pitcher Me?
Am I that bowl upon the shelf?
Oh, where is my Identity?"

To this the Potter then returned:
"You are them all—yet You are none.
So, by this lesson have you learned
That Self is naught—all selves are one."

Then I awoke and took my way
Among the crowds that thronged the mart—
Coarse, cultured, fair, misshapen, they—
And felt their kinship in my heart.

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.

The Black Tube

By WILLIAM TILLINGHAST ELDRIDGE

Author of "The Night Hawks," "River Robbers," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

A SICK MAN.

LEAVING Marsh at Brookmeadow Craton hurried back to town in his car.

Stopping at his apartment he found Jerry Mack awaiting him with numerous reports which took some little time to go over.

"What's the lay now, Mr. Craton?" asked Jerry.

Craton shoved a telegram across the table. It read:

> Stopped at Stamford. Margaret Holden one hotel. Stanley Jones another. Indications intend remaining. Made purchase personal articles. Instruct Stamford House H. H.

"Buckwell doesn't show much originality in selecting his names, does he?" smiled Craton.

"Buckwell Jones?" questioned Jerry, without showing the least surprise. He had long ago passed the point where he marveled at anything sprung upon him by his employer. Like nothing so much as a faithful animal, he believed Craton perfection and accepted his every move with blind faith.

"Better run out to Stamford first train, Jerry, and call on Jones—Buckwell. Just tell him I want to see him."

"Just that?" asked Jerry, picking up his hat.

"No need of anything more, I believe. If he should consign you to the devil you might tip him off as to what's in this." Craton passed over the report of the operator who had trailed Buckwell from his apartment to the meeting at Fifty-Ninth Street. "Houghton can tell you what happened

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from that point on. Good idea to phone Houghton at the Stamford House that you are coming and if they should move on he can get word back where they go."

"Keep after him until I deliver that message?"

"Surely. I'd rather you did it than Houghton. I have an idea you will find them both in Stamford."

"Shan't bring him back with me?" demanded Jerry, as if such a task, without the right of arrest, was an exceedingly simple matter.

"Oh, no. Just tell him he had better come. If he doesn't care to do so assure him I can get a warrant and that we'll have a man on his heels so as to know where to serve it. I think he'll about face when you ask him to do so."

"And Margaret Holden?"

"Mrs. Sands, I believe. She'll come with him, I hope. Might suggest to him that he have her do so. What you want to do is to make him comprehend that he and the lady were damn fools to run away as they did. Get the idea?"

"I do, and he will," nodded Jerry and went out.

Craton ran over his papers once more and clapped on his hat. With a swing in his walk he went down the cross street and through the park. It was a remarkable day and he hurried along, his tanned face touched with a rising color that made him look youthful. There was a keen sparkle in his eyes, and his lips, now and then, were puckered in a soft whistle.

He looked anything but a detective bent on rounding out a case in record time.

He gave his card to the servant who answered his ring as, with a bound, he mounted the front steps of a rather pretentious house and pressed the bell.

"Just say to Mr. Vrooman that while I know he is indisposed I feel it necessary to trouble him."

Craton waited in a small reception room for the servant's return. When the summons came he followed to the second floor and into a large room at the front.

It was obviously a room used both as living room and library. The furnishings were a little too ostentatious, but they only received a cursory inspection from Banard Craton.

"Mr. Craton," suggested the man who had risen from an easy chair before the fireplace.

Mr. Vrooman certainly looked ill. He was a tall, thin man, well past middle life. There were black rings under his eyes and an ashen pallor to his face. His hand trembled noticeably as he half extended it, but noting that his caller had not offered his, withdrew it again.

"Sorry to trouble you at a time like this, Mr. Vrooman," Craton apologized, "but it is one of those things that can't be left until another day. I presume you know my occupation?"

"I—I can't say that I do, sir. The name is very familiar, but I hardly think I have ever met you before."

"I hardly think we have met," admitted Craton, accepting the chair Vrooman indicated with a wave of his trembling hand. "I am a detective."

"A detective!"

Mr. Vrooman sat down heavily in his chair and his dark rimmed eyes were riveted upon his caller's face. "A detective. Ah, yes"—steadying his voice with an effort—"I do recall. Indeed. The Mr. Banard Craton, whose name is so well known. How does it happen I am honored?"

"You have seen the morning papers?" demanded Craton.

"I have."

"Have you seen the—but there is no need of my asking," he smiled, indicating the pile of extras on the floor at Vrooman's feet. "I am referring to the affair at Brookmeadow—Willet Sands's murder."

Mr. Vrooman's pale gray eyes turned to the littered pile of papers at his feet and his lips set hard.

"A terrible affair—terrible. I suppose it is because I was interested with Mr. Sands in some business matters that you have called to see me. You detectives have to follow every line, I suppose."

"We do," nodded Craton. "Every line, even when we know it won't lead us to a thing. I had to come and see you even if you were ill and I disliked to bother you at such a time."

Mr. Vrooman caught the slight emphasis on the word " ill " and he looked up sharply.

" How did it happen that you knew I was ill?" he asked.

Craton made an apologetic gesture. " I've been pretty busy, as you may know, since I went on this case and I can't do everything myself. I sent a man out to see if I could locate you at your office and he reported you were sick. He went a little further than I instructed him to do, but I fancy no harm was done—he called on your physician and learned you were suffering from a nervous breakdown. Under the circumstances I disliked to trouble you, but it was necessary."

Mr. Vrooman nodded, missing completely the fact that his physician would never have stated to a stranger the nature of his patient's illness.

" Exactly," agreed the ashen-faced man, " a nervous breakdown. I have suffered for some time; too much drive and no let-up these days. I have been getting worse, and yesterday I went to pieces completely. I don't know when I'll get to my office again. I may have to go away. Dr. Wentworth suggests a sea trip."

" Best thing in the world for your trouble," agreed Craton heartily, and he went rambling off on the joys of an ocean voyage, its benefits and even garrulously recounted some trips he had made.

Mr. Vrooman's hand seemed to become a little more steady as Craton talked on and a trifle of color crept into his cheeks, but he missed the fact completely that he was being studied minutely.

" Oh, yes," exclaimed Craton suddenly, " I wanted to know what time you were at Brookmeadow last night."

The question came unexpectedly, and Mr. Vrooman was startled. He sat straight, gripped the arms of his chair and his face blanched.

" Brookmeadow, sir—I wasn't at Sands's place last night."

Craton heaved a sigh. " Can you beat it?" he moaned, making his tone as vulgar as he could. " A blind trail again. I thought you were there."

Mr. Vrooman seemed to breathe again at the quick acceptance of his word.

" No," he assured his caller, " I got up late, feeling ill and while I dressed to go down town I gave it up. I stayed here and—" but Mr. Vrooman's voice trailed off weakly as he met Craton's eye.

" I didn't know," mused Craton, " but I thought that possibly you kept that appointment with Mr. Sands for nine thirty last night. Your note said you would call at that hour."

There came a sudden and swift change in Mr. Vrooman. He looked for an instant as if he felt he had blundered, as if the jaws of a trap had all but closed upon him.

In a second he got himself in hand. A smile touched his lips. " I didn't, Mr. Craton. I did drive out to Brookmeadow in the afternoon as I would have told you had you not interrupted me. I made the effort because I wanted to see Mr. Sands on some very important matters. Failing to find him, I did leave a note saying I would call at nine thirty, but feeling worse, I decided not to go. Is it quite clear to you now?"

" Not everything."

" I hardly see how I can be more explicit."

" You haven't given me all the facts, Mr. Vrooman."

" Sir, you are insulting," and Mr. Vrooman drew himself erect with much dignity.

" Hardly insulting. Inquisitive, but considerate. I am trying to save you from the necessity of testifying before the coroner's inquest."

" Testifying? To what?"

" To your actions yesterday from early morning until late at night. Excuse me, I see you have a pencil sharpener on your desk."

Without asking permission, Craton stepped across the room, placed a pencil in the machine, and gave a quick whirl to the handle. He drew the pencil out and examined it carefully.

Taking another pencil from his pocket, he held it out to Mr. Vrooman, who was watching him in amazement and with a little fear.

" Here is a pencil you dropped yesterday afternoon when at Brookmeadow, Mr. Vrooman. I notice that it is just like

those others on your desk, and there is a slight grove in the wood the same as in this pencil I have just sharpened. Your machine has a slight nick in one of the blades. I found this pencil in the telephone booth. You must have dropped it when you were telephoning. By the way, what time did you reach Brookmeadow?"

"About three," came the mechanical answer. Mr. Vrooman's gaze was riveted upon the pencil in Craton's hand. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"And what time did you leave?"

"Immediately. I wrote a note to Mr. Sands and left at once."

"After you telephoned?"

"Yes—I telephoned."

"To whom?"

"Mr. Craton, this is too much. I refuse to be questioned by you or any one else."

"Sorry, Mr. Vrooman, downright sorry." Craton's tone sounded as if he meant it. "But it won't do. No one called central from Brookmeadow between two and five yesterday afternoon. Why were you in the telephone booth?"

"What right have you to ask me such questions?" cried Vrooman.

"No right. I only ask your indulgence and answers."

"I think we will end this interview." Mr. Vrooman indicated the door.

"Very well," agreed Cratton amiably. "I suppose you would rather tell your story to the police." He paused at the door.

"I have no story too tell," came the faltering voice.

"Oh, but you have, Mr. Vrooman. Why did you wire Mr. Sands to come to the Biltmore, signing Mr. Gregg's name too the message? Why did you go into the telephone booth when you did not telephone? Why did you call Mr. Sands's office from Needham's grocery store at nine thirty-five last night?

"Why, Mr. Vrooman, did you happen to drop this pencil and "—he held a small black tube in front of the wavering eyes—"this in the telephone booth? Why, Mr. Vrooman, did you cut the wires to the desk telephone? The print of your blunt fingers are in the dust on the picture molding. Why, sir, did you stuff the ventilators in the top of that telephone booth full of paper? You have some story to tell, I think. Will you tell it to me or—"

But the arraignment ended. Mr. Vrooman had slipped out of his chair to the floor in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WELCOX'S OFFICE.

AT exactly three fifty Craton swung in through the entrance of the office building on Broad Street.

"How are you, sheriff?" he smiled. "We'll go up at once."

Homes followed to the elevator and the two men got off at the tenth floor. Craton unlocked a door at the end of the hall which bore no designation as to the occupant of the room.

"Have any luck, sheriff?" he asked, tossing his hat onto a table.

"Found every last one of them, and say, I don't know whether they tumbled for the story or not. Actresses, weren't they? Well," as Craton gave a nod, "I'm sure some were curious enough to come down here, for I saw three girls come in and take the elevator while I was waiting. Suppose they went to Welcox's office."

"Let's hope so. Now, sheriff, I want you to sit right here in this room close to the wall at this spot. If you put your ear to the wall you'll find you can hear everything that is said in the next room. I'll be in there, but don't bother to come in unless I ring for you. Bell right in that corner."

Homes cast his eyes at the chair he was to occupy and then at the bell near the ceiling.

"All right," he agreed, drawing a deep breath, "I'm ready for anything."

"Won't be any excitement," smiled Craton, "unless we have a case of hysterics or a fainting on our hands. Ever seen this before?" he demanded, drawing a small pearl handled revolver from his pocket.

"It's the pistol found in Sands's library."

"Look again."

The sheriff took the weapon, turned it over and shook his head. "Handle isn't cracked," he admitted, with a frown, "but otherwise—"

"If it looks the same to you I fancy it will to the owner of the other one. I just bought it on the way down town."

"The owner?" cried Homes, gripping Craton's arm. "Do you expect the owner of that gun found in the library here today?"

"I hope so," smiled Craton, pressing a bell. A young man stepped in through the door connecting the office with the one beyond and handed Craton a list.

"Miss Holbrook, Miss Fair, Miss MacKensie, Miss Wainwright," he read. "Just four. You called on six, didn't you, sheriff?"

"The six you had on your list."

"Well, we won't wait for the other two. Send them in in the order I've checked." Craton, placing a number against each name, passed the list back to his clerk. "All right, sheriff. Ready?"

"Are those girls here—are you going to see them?" demanded Homes.

Craton gave a nod and, indicating the chair by the wall, slipped into the next office.

With a frown the sheriff settled down, his ear to the wall at a spot which appeared no different from the rest of the partition. He heard a chair move, a door open, and the light fall of footsteps.

"Miss Fair," came Craton's voice, "please have a seat. Sorry to trouble you. Oh, yes, to be sure, I haven't introduced myself. Mr. Welcox, a lawyer, my dear young lady, and a friend of a friend of yours in the bargain. Funny combination, but this old world surely throws odd people together, now, doesn't it?"

"Sure does," came the laughing, soft voiced answer. "I didn't get the idea when that party called and said I was to come down to see you, but I beat it along; try anything once. Queer message you sent me, though."

"How's that?"

"To trot down here and get something a party left with you for me. I bit. What's the game?"

There was a moment of silence. Then the sound of a drawer being opened, and from Craton: "There is a package. If the contents is yours I am to turn it over to you. If it isn't, I am to give you this envelope to recompense you for your trouble in coming clear down here."

Homes, getting this conversation as clearly as if he was in the next room, heard the rustle of paper. Then:

"That isn't mine," in the girl's voice. "Never had a bag like that in all my life."

"Possibly you can tell me to whom it belongs?"

"Nix. Say, do you mean to tell me you brought me way down here to spring that old hand bag on me?"

Craton laughed softly. "I'm sorry to have had to do it, but this will perhaps allow you to buy a new bag of your own selection. A new crisp ten dollar bill is in that envelope, Miss Fair, and I won't bother you further, but thank you very much for your trouble."

"Say," came the puzzled question, "what's the idea?"

"Just trying to find the owner of this bag, nothing more. You can step out this way. Thanks for coming. Good luck." A door closed.

The sheriff sat back in his chair, but straightened quickly as he heard the opening of another door. The same conversation reached Homes, and again Craton passed his puzzled caller out to the hall.

Again the door opened and once more the sheriff followed the conversation up to that point where the package was laid on the table. Then there came the rustle of paper as the package was unwrapped and—silence.

"And how about this?" came Craton's sharp demand. A metallic article was laid down.

The sheriff felt the situation without being able to see what had happened. He stiffened in his chair, suddenly, appreciating the full significance of the scene that was taking place so close at hand.

The silence seemed endless when Craton's voice came to him.

"Steady. Don't scream. Drink this, you are pale. The bell in the corner tinkled,

For a second Homes did not move, so intent was he upon catching the faintest sound from the next room. Then the significance of the bell broke upon him and he threw open the door.

Craton stood with a kindly smile on his face. In a chair by the desk sat a pretty girl, a little overdressed, but with big, dark eyes and masses of blond hair. Her cheeks, despite the touch of rouge, were deadly pale and her glance—like nothing so much as that of a frightened animal—was turned upon Craton's face.

With the opening of the door she turned and cast a glance of fear and question at the sheriff.

Craton passed Homes two envelopes.

"Ask the others who are waiting—one more has come in—to excuse me for the day. Give each of them an envelope and get rid of them. Come back here."

Homes passed into the next office. When he returned there had come a change in the scene.

"If you think you're smart in getting me down here and springing that old bag on me I don't see it," Miss MacKensie was saying. "This guy comes around with a fine tale of bunk and I fall. I don't know what the idea is, but I'm going."

She flounced out of her chair and toward the door.

"Will you change your address, Miss MacKensie?" questioned Craton with a smile.

"What's that to you?"—with a defiant toss of her head.

"If you are going to move I shall have to have a detective follow you so I can tell the police where you go."

It was said casually, but it was a cruel stab.

At the mention of the police the girl swayed, clutched at the wall and sagged down; a trembling, terror-eyed creature, her face ghastly white again and more horrible for the blotches of rouge.

"I want to help you," offered Craton. "I want to save you from having to be bothered by the police."

The girl seemed to grasp at the suggestion of help, which was more in the tone than the words.

"What do you mean?" she managed to ask.

Craton took her by the arm and led her back to her chair. "Sit down," he urged, "and please believe me when I say that I want to save you from having to go before the police."

Her big eyes, their size intensified by the penciling, lifted to his face in question.

He sat down opposite her.

"I want to make a confession to you. That isn't your revolver."

"What do you mean?" she cried, staring in fascinated awe at the weapon lying on the desk.

"It is one like yours, not the one you carried with you last night when you went with James Sands to see his father."

"Not my revolver—that isn't mine," she whispered, hardly realizing that her words admitted much.

"Your bag, but not your revolver. Were you and Jim Sands going to that prize fight?"

She met his gaze and nodded.

"He stopped to get some money to be able to bet on the fight, didn't he?" ventured Craton.

She gave another little frightened nod, her gaze never leaving Craton's face.

"Just as I thought. What time was it when you drove up to the house?"

"I—I—who said I drove up to any house?" she faltered, trying weakly to escape from a trap into which she realized she was slipping.

"Well, you did, of course," smiled Craton. "Don't you see how I want to help you? If you tell me everything it will help me find the one who fired that shot and so save you from having to go before the police. You've read the papers and know that the police have been called in. They'll get the one who murdered Mr. Sands, but they might arrest you first. Now you tell me everything and I'll save you from a lot of trouble. Don't want your name in the paper over this thing, do you?"

She had blanched in terror at his words and a low moan broke from her lips as her head sank and tears flooded her cheeks.

"I didn't do it," she moaned. "I didn't do it."

Craton quieted her as best he could, talking in low, persuasive tones. In the end, after he had managed to quiet her—but not until she had cried her heart out—she gained some semblance of calm.

She looked up again, red eyed, dabbing at her face with a tiny bit of lace, a sick at heart, woebegone little creature, fearful of her safety, dreading to speak, yet feeling that in some way this man—who seemed so kind—could help.

Thus in the end, with careful questions, he had her story, told haltingly, but in detail.

"We were going to that prize fight," she admitted. "We went out in the car and stopped to see Jim's father. He wanted to get some money."

"Did he think he would get it?"

"I don't know. No, he did say he might not have any luck. Said he'd tried—that his father wouldn't give him what he wanted and there wasn't any use going to some one else."

"Who was this some one else?"

"I don't remember."

"Didn't he say he usually got his money through his father's lawyer, a Mr. Marsh, and that his father wouldn't give Mr. Marsh any more for him?"

"Something like that. Yes, he did mention a man by the name of Marsh."

"When you got to the house what happened?"

"Jim went in and I waited in the car. He was gone a long time."

"You don't know what time you got there?"

"I can't remember, but I guess it was around nine o'clock. Oh, I forgot. As we drove up our lights fell on the house and a woman ran along the porch. Jim said it was his mother, and from the way he spoke, I guess he didn't hitch with her any too well."

"Where was Mrs. Sands when you saw her?"

"On the porch. Coming out the front door, I guess. At least, she came toward us. We ran by the house, and Jim got down and walked out into the road. He was looking around. I watched him until he went into the house."

"Did he come out again?"

The girl gave a shake of her head and the tears began to fill her eyes.

"I never saw him again, alive," she whispered. "I waited—how long I don't know. It was all dark and woods around there and something Jim had said about his father made me think they might have had a quarrel. I got nervous and finally I got out of the car and started toward the house. I saw a woman on the porch looking in one of the windows."

"What time was this? You got to the house about nine."

"It was just quarter of ten. I looked at the clock on the dash."

"You had waited a long time then."

"So long I was getting tired. I was afraid, too. I decided I'd get Jim to hurry, and so I went up on the porch and looked in the window and it was then I saw—"

"What?" demanded Craton sharply.

She gave a start at the sharpness of the question. "Jim," she whispered. "He was all white, with his mouth open, and his father—I suppose it was his father, a big man, he looked like Jim—he was dragging Jim out of a door back of a big sofa. I don't know what I thought or what I did. I wanted to scream.

"I started back and then I saw that the front door was open and I ran in. I went right into that room and then I got a good look at Jim and I saw he was dead. I cried out—I screamed, I guess, and said something. I yelled at the other man, for I thought he had killed Jim, and he—he just dropped Jim and turned on me. Oh, he looked terrible. He started toward me and then—it was then that there was a shot."

"You thought Mr. Sands was coming for you?"

The girl nodded.

"So you raised your revolver," pressed Craton.

The girl's eyes, big and staring, rested on Craton's face.

"You had brought the revolver with you, taking it out of your bag and leaving the bag in the car," he went on, when she remained silent. "You had it in your hand. When Mr. Sands came toward you you pointed it at him."

"Oh, God, yes!" she cried. "I did! I didn't mean to shoot. I didn't mean to, so help me God, I didn't mean to do it, but it went off."

"Yes?"

"Oh, I just flung down the revolver and ran, just ran," she moaned.

CHAPTER XXII.

BUCKWELL RETURNS.

CRATON and Homes were alone.

"What do you mean by telling her she didn't fire that shot and letting her go?" demanded the sheriff, a decidedly puzzled man.

"How could she?" inquired Craton. "The bullet out of her revolver is in the wall. Sands fired off her revolver to attract attention, the position of the bullet and its upward course shows it was fired by some one lying on the rug. What she did was to fling her pistol at Sands as the shot rang out and then she ran, as she has said.

"What we get out of her story is just this: Sands was shot pretty close to ten o'clock. It is obvious from what he said to Deston and Miss Thurston that he believed—as did Miss MacKensie—that she shot him or he saw who stood back of the girl, and it was Mrs. Sands."

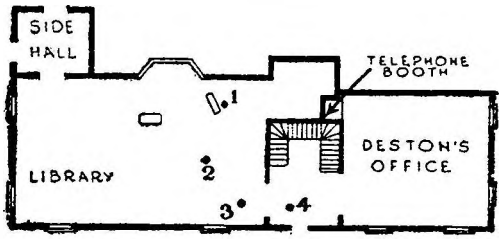
"But why are you so sure this girl didn't have anything to do with it when she herself, until you told her your theory, believed that she fired?" persisted Homes.

"In the first place Sands wasn't shot with a twenty-two caliber revolver. That's enough, but look here."

Craton drew a paper to him and sketched the library and the position of the different characters.

"This is the situation at the moment Sands was killed. Whoever shot him was in the front hall or doorway. He or she, I can't say which, fired past the girl. She thought that she had fired, which was quite natural considering the nervous condition she was in. Undoubtedly when the shot rang out and the poor girl flung her pistol from her she was frightened enough to stand stock still for a second, her gaze fixed on Sands as he crumpled at her feet. That pause gave the murderer time to leap out the front door and get away before Miss MacKensie turned and ran."

The sheriff bent to study the drawing Craton had made. He gave a slow nod as he pushed the paper aside.



1. Jim Sands's body
2. Willet Sands
3. Miss MacKensie
4. Murderer

"We are still up a tree," he frowned.

"We are getting along. We know that Mrs. Sands was at the house when Jim Sands arrived and hung around, only making off when Miss MacKensie started for the house."

"And she may have come back?"

"She was there when Deston came through the garden, and it is natural to suppose she was close by from the moment Miss MacKensie went into the house until she ran away. In short, Mrs. Sands either fired that shot, Homes, or she should be in a position to say who did."

"By gracious, yes!" cried the sheriff. "And she's not to be found. Looks bad for her now, doesn't it?"

"It looks as if she should be able to give us some mighty useful information," admitted Craton, drumming on his desk. He turned suddenly on Homes.

"I wish you'd get back to Brookmeadow at once and get hold of Sands's check books. I want them just as quickly as I can get them."

"Sands's check books? What now?"

"I've an idea there may be something there that will help us. Get them; I'll run out after them or phone you, and, sheriff, I'd hurry, some one else might want to lay hands on them ahead of us."

Craton swung in his chair as the door closed behind the sheriff and for a long time gazed at the view from his office windows. Finally he gave a nod, picked up his hat and hurried to the subway.

He reached his apartment, glanced hurriedly over a number of reports that had come in and telephoned for his car.

He drove straight to Brookmeadow and reached the lower end of the estate just before dark. Instead of driving to the office he ran his car into a field up the lane and started to walk along the road.

With the greatest care he traced the tracks of all automobiles that had been along the lane, but he found difficulty, except where a car had turned out of the beaten track. In one or two places he discovered where cars had done so and evidently been left for some little time. He made a careful note of the tracks, as to tire tread, and then went back to his car and drove to the office.

Deston and Homes were seated on the veranda. They both jumped up as he stopped.

"Mrs. Sands is back," called Deston. "Miss Thurston just telephoned me."

Craton laughed. "Telephoned you!" he smiled. "Why didn't she come down to see you?"

Deston flushed. "You are a queer stick. Oh, I took your advice and walked up that way this afternoon."

"Nice walk?" inquired Craton with a far-away look in his eyes.

Deston held out his hand. "You may congratulate me if you want to," he said, his eyes bright.

"I do, heartily," declared Craton, gripping the younger man's hand.

"And I myself," nodded Deston, "and in more ways than one. You certainly have treated me royally when I know perfectly well there was plenty of reason for suspecting me."

Craton chuckled. "Not one single reason when you take the facts and shake them all out in the breeze. Those who aren't guilty are chaff to me, and I winnow them as I go."

"What have you left for grain?" queried Homes.

"Just a minute," begged Craton and hurried to the telephone.

"Got those check books?" he asked, coming back.

"Mr. Marsh took them," explained Deston, "before the sheriff arrived. He wanted to get a line on the exact condition of the ready cash in hand and to try and check up the standing of Mr. Sands's contracts."

"Good," nodded Craton. "I'll see him and get what little information I want from them. Well, sheriff, want to take a ride?"

"I'll go anywhere if you say the word. Getting hot on the trail?"

"Can't say. I just phoned my apartment and I find Mr. Buckwell is there waiting for me. I'm going to have a talk with him."

"But there's Mrs. Sands," protested Homes. "Don't you want to see her now you are right here?"

"I'll not bother her now. She can't really want to talk with me and I've an idea I'll learn all she knows from another quarter."

"But," frowned Homes, "she was right here—so that girl said—right here at the very time the shot was fired."

"Well she's come back, hasn't she?"

"Sure."

"Can't we figure then that she is innocent?"

"Well, I don't see how, when we don't know where she's been or what she's got to say for herself."

"But when she ran away and came back it looks as if she might be innocent."

"But Sands said: 'She shot me, A—'"

"True, and I think he intended to say: 'She shot me, that actress,'" replied Craton.

Homes shook his head doubtfully.

"Did Mrs. Sands run away?" demanded Deston.

"She did. Or at least—this is not to be told—she thought some one else shot her husband and tried to get him to run away. He thought—finding out what had happened here from a telegram—that she had done it and was either willing or persuaded to have her run away. But they both thought better of it and came back."

"I don't see how you get at just what Mrs. Sands and Buckwell thought when you haven't talked with either of them," argued Homes.

"Then come along with me and we'll find out just how near I am to being right."

Homes gave a nod of agreement and the two climbed into Craton's car.

When they entered the detective's apartment a big, bulky man with a tired, harassed expression on his rather strong and handsome face arose to greet them.

"Mr. Buckwell, glad to see you, shake hands with Sheriff Homes," said Craton.

"The police already," frowned Buckwell, attempting to make his tone care-free.

"Surely. In an affair of this kind the police are bound to appear. If you have anything to tell us we'll listen, but of course—as the sheriff would advise you—it can be used against you if necessary."

"I've a deal to say," cried Buckwell, "and I'll get it out quick. I've had a hell of a day and—I was damn glad when that bow-legged man of yours came along with your message. It just simply proved what I'd been arguing until I was black in the face—no good to run."

"Thought he might help you to turn the scales if you were arguing that way. If you weren't, well, his tip might show you the folly of running farther. Let's hear what you have to tell us."

Buckwell, his massive shoulders hunched, turned across the room, peered out the window, and wheeled slowly, collecting himself. He stood with his hands on the back of a chair looking the two men over.

"I've got two stories to tell," he said finally. "My own and another's. That is, I will tell mine, and then you can judge if you want more—from me."

He hesitated, flung the chair about, and sat down. Bending forward, forearms on his knees, he lifted his chin and an almost ugly expression touched his face.

"I lived in the West," he began abruptly. "I was an engineer. While engaged on a big irrigation project Mr. Renwood, the chief capitalist behind the enterprise, came out to look at the work. With him were his wife and daughter. I fell in love with Miss Renwood and she with me. We became engaged, but when Renwood heard of the matter he put his foot down. He left for the East at once, and for three years I never saw Miss Renwood, although I heard from her regularly. Then the letters became less frequent. About that time Willet Sands and I met in San Francisco. I had finished the work I was on when I met Miss Renwood, and was then engaged on an undertaking with Sands's money behind it. Sands made me an offer to come East. I was to build and manage an electric plant he was going to finance on the Connecticut River. The details are immaterial, so I'll pass them by. I accepted. Possibly you gentlemen may imagine one of my reasons; I wished to see Miss Renwood again. I took up my duties here in New York and endeavored to locate her. I heard she was away. The next I heard she was married."

Buckwell paused as he straightened and drew a deep breath.

"To make this entire matter quite clear," suggested Craton, "you may as well mention whom she married."

Buckwell gave a nasty laugh and a nod.

"Willet Sands," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOUBT.

HOMES straightened sharply at the admission, but Craton merely smiled.

"I don't know," resumed Buckwell, "that there is any use of my going into my feelings. I'll say this: Miss Renwood was virtually forced into this marriage by her father."

"You mean to save her father?" questioned Craton.

"Exactly. I didn't know at the time, but I do now. Renwood was in Sands's power, and the only way he could get out was to pay or hand over his daughter. He did the latter, and the daughter agreed—for the sake of her father. At the time I knew none of this or I would have chucked Sands's job like I'd drop a red hot coal. I only knew he had married the girl I'd loved, and that perhaps wasn't reason enough to throw up an undertaking I had half completed.

"I'll admit I was bitter toward Miss Renwood—more so then than toward Sands for winning out ahead of me. But let that part go. I went on with my work, but finally gave it up and undertook to finance some undertakings of my own. I was pret-

ty successful for a while. Then I got into financial difficulties and—well, I couldn't get money at the banks."

"So you went to Sands. Go ahead," put in Craton.

"Yes, I went to Sands," nodded Buckwell. "I met my payments with him until recently. Then, having to fall behind, I went to see him to ask for an extension. He refused me. He had heard then—so I understand now—that I had once been in love with his wife, although, gentlemen, I want to say this to you, I had never seen Mrs. Sands from the day she was married until a month ago. However, failing with Sands, I tried Mr. Marsh, his attorney. I had to do all I could to save myself. Marsh listened to me where Sands wouldn't, and agreed finally to do what he could.

"He notified me a week after I saw him that I could make payments every six months instead of every three, and it would be all right. I did so, sending the money to Marsh, as he instructed me to. Of course, I had nothing binding on Sands, and I knew perfectly well I was in a position to be closed out any day if Sands saw fit to move. Marsh, however, had shown him clearly my position, and I think satisfied Sands I had never seen his wife. I think he went so far as to assure Sands I cared nothing more for his wife. If he did, that was his way of getting Sands to give me time; it wasn't the truth, though what my feelings were I kept to myself.

"However, Sands sent for me yesterday. I went out to see him, and he told me I was done for—that he was going to close down. I was shocked, I assure you. I was angry, raging mad at him when I got my senses back after the truth struck in. I held back my feelings pretty well, I think, but when I left I told him he'd gone too far this time and he'd get his. I was bitter."

"Just what did you mean by that threat?" demanded Craton.

"I don't just know," admitted Buckwell. "It was the yelping of a beaten man more than anything else, although I was wondering if there wasn't some way for me to force him to live up to the agreement I had made with his attorney. I wasn't thinking very clearly just then, for I tell you it's a staggerer to be told you are wiped out all in a minute, and I knew Sands would do it; he was that kind.

"I went to my car. As I started to climb in Mrs. Sands came running toward me. She had been listening at the window and had heard all that was said. She told me then that she was going to get a divorce from her husband; that she had the evidence, and that she would go ahead at once, unless he retracted his statement to me.

"I can't see that there is much gain in my telling you all we talked about. I got mad with her; I told her I'd have no woman standing between me and my fate, and a lot more. She left me suddenly, and I drove away. I came straight back here to my rooms.

"I think, in view of what has happened, that is the one main fact that interests you. I didn't go back and fire that shot, though God knows I could have done it; I'll admit that. I came home. Mr. Marsh came to see me this morning. I agreed to come here to meet you, Mr. Craton, and at the time I didn't know what had happened. As I was about to start I had a telegram from Mrs. Sands. She asked me to meet her at once at the Circle on a matter of life and death. I went to her instead of coming here.

"She was very excited, and while, at first, she didn't make it clear to me, what she thought was that I had gone back and killed her husband. She insisted upon my going with her, and I got into the car. We drove to Stamford. On the way I got the full facts of what had occurred and understood that she thought I was guilty. I assured her I was not, but—this is her story now, Mr. Craton—she insisted she had seen me fire that shot."

"She was at the house at the time it was fired?"

"She was. She had started to town in the evening, but first she drove to the office to see her husband."

"Just a minute, Mr. Buckwell. This is to be, if anything, a frank statement of all facts. Did Mrs. Sands say she drove to the office?"

Buckwell made a quick gesture of impa-

tience. "No, she didn't. She drove to an old shed on the estate, left her car, walked across the fields and down to the office through the woods."

"That's better," nodded Craton. "I happen to know she did that. One of my men tracked her and I went with him over the ground. We found one of the workmen on the estate who, returning home late at night—he lives near this shed—saw Mrs. Sands and recognized her. Now go ahead."

"She went down to the office because she had heard that a certain woman was going to call on her husband that evening."

"From Akron, I suppose," suggested Craton, turning to the sheriff.

"Yes, from Akron," agreed Buckwell. "She told me on the ride to Stamford how Akron had been keeping her posted."

"With some truths and some lies, I fancy," smiled Craton. "Anything to earn his easy money."

"I've no doubt. It was excusable, I think, because she was bound to get free from that brute. But wait. I'll hold my feelings in check. Mrs. Sands arrived at the office, saw me in the library, and listened. She and I talked at my car, as I have told you. After I left she went back, looked in the window, saw Sands there alone, and as she hesitated outside a car arrived. It contained Jim Sands and a woman. Mrs. Sands ran away and hid. She came back and was listening at the window when the telephone rang. Mr. Sands went to the desk phone, but it would not work."

"One minute. What were Sands and his son talking about?"

"Money. Sands refusing, young Sands demanding. A lovely squabble and a usual condition, I suppose," replied Buckwell, in a tone of contempt.

"Did Mrs. Sands tell you exactly the words her husband and stepson were employing—just what was said? It is important, Buckwell. If this story of yours is the truth I have got to know what Sands said to his son."

"You'll have to ask Mrs. Sands. It didn't strike me as important and I didn't ask her."

"All right. I'm going to see Mrs. Sands, of course. Go on."

"Mrs. Sands only told me that she heard her husband call to his son to go and see if the switch was off—the switch that cuts off the desk phone from the booth."

"And that switch is in the booth," put in Craton, turning to Homes. "Put there, of course, so that if Sands was talking in the booth and any one was in his office he could turn off the switch and prevent any one listening in."

"I see," nodded the sheriff.

"The point is," went on Buckwell, "that that is all Mrs. Sands knows about Jim Sands. She saw the son go into the room containing the booth and then she heard a sound from the direction of young Sands's car. The woman had got out and was coming toward the house. Mrs. Sands fled again. She saw this woman go to the window, look in and then enter the house. As she was about to start toward the veranda again she heard some one coming down the road."

"Walking?"

"Yes. A scuff of a boot—nothing more—was what she heard. It was enough to make her pause. Then a figure loomed up in the darkness, crouching, sliding along, she says. She watched. The man went to the front door and fired the shot that killed Willet Sands."

"And the man's name?" demanded Craton calmly as the sheriff bent forward, every nerve tense.

"I do not know; Mrs. Sands does not know."

"She says so?"

"What do you mean?"

"Has it occurred to you, Mr. Buckwell, that there was no man, that Mrs. Sands crept back to the open front door, that she was angry, chagrined, revengeful. Sands had ruined you, the man she still loves. A strange woman was going calmly into the house where her husband was. Has it occurred to you that what really happened was that Mrs. Sands crept back up the steps, along the veranda, reached the front door and—"

"Stop!" roared Buckwell on his feet, his face aflame, his eyes raging pools of anger.

"Why?" queried Craton in an even voice.

"Because it is a damned lie," snarled Buckwell.

"Why did Mrs. Sands run away to Stamford?"

"Because she thought I'd killed her husband. I say she didn't know the man who came down the road because she thought it was me, and it wasn't. She went to Stamford, taking me along because she wanted to get me to run away; it was her first wild idea. I had just about persuaded her I was innocent and how foolish the act was, innocent or guilty, when your man called on me."

"Why so foolish if innocent?"

"Why? What you mean is it was foolish if guilty."

"Well, Buckwell," mused Craton calmly, "you know just what I'm thinking because you are thinking the same thing."

For a second the big bulk of a man stood over Craton with flaming face. Then pallor slowly crept into his features. With a low moan he sank into the nearest chair.

"God, yes," he whispered, "I am thinking it, but, Craton, it's a cursed thought to have—a doubt no honest, decent man should have—a man came out of the darkness and fired that shot, as she says. Say I'm right, man, say I'm right!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW JIM SANDS DIED.

BUCKWELL was gone. Again Homes and Craton faced each other, a troubled frown on the sheriff's countenance.

"I don't want to interfere," said Homes, a little uneasily, "but it seemed to me, Mr. Craton, you accept the stories these different people tell you too readily."

"It may look that way," admitted Craton, "but I only do so when the facts substantiate what they say."

"Then you have facts enough to eliminate Deston, Miss Thurston, Akron, this MacKensie girl, Buckwell, Vrooman, and Mrs. Sands. Who then could have done it?"

"As Mr. Marsh and I agreed—as I think we all agreed—there is a chance that any man who had a contract with Sands might have done it."

"That means some hunt, then. We've got to sift down every man who had business dealings with Sands."

"We may. I will know by morning or by to-morrow night at this time. Now I think we'd better take up one phase of this case and get it out of the way."

"What do you mean?"

"I refer to the death of young Sands. I'm going to give you the name of the man who was responsible for Jim Sands's death, and you can make an arrest if you find him alive."

The sheriff wheeled on Craton sharply. "Well?" he demanded.

"Samuel Vrooman, sheriff. He and Willet Sands had many business deals together. Vrooman got into Sands's power—I have this from Vrooman himself, so we can accept it for the truth. At one time Vrooman was president of the West Side Trust. He looted that bank. He claims he did it under Sands's instructions, misappropriated trust funds and allowed Sands to use the money for other purposes.

"What the actual facts were is immaterial. The truth is that Sands made good the money in the end when an exposure seemed inevitable. He did this only after Vrooman had signed a confession admitting that he, and he alone, had misused those funds. You see, it was either up to Vrooman to sign or go to jail for he couldn't prove that Sands was implicated. Sands had that statement and he carried it with him, as he did those contracts. Lately he has been forcing Vrooman to do certain things for him, threatening an exposure. Vrooman, who, by the way, has a weak heart, was growing positively ill, fearing Sands would turn on him any minute and ruin him. He decided he had to have that confession at any cost.

"He went to a chemist, a friend of his, whose name he absolutely refuses to divulge. I didn't insist upon it because it is immaterial in a way. You can get it if you want. Vrooman swears, however, that he didn't tell the chemist the purpose for which he wanted a small quantity of gas which

would put a man down and out if released in a small space and inhaled by a person.

" This gas was placed in a small black tube which resembles the top of a large sized fountain pen. In the end of the tube was a chemical that would melt the wax used to seal the tube in a given length of time. Vrooman wired Sands in Gregg's name to go to the Biltmore and bring a stenographer with him. This would mean that Sands and Deston would both be away from Brookmeadow at a given time. Vrooman went to Sands's office, made an excuse to get into the telephone booth and left the black tube on the floor. He dropped a lead pencil at the same time. This helped me determine he was the man. He then cut the wires to the desk phone and left a note for Sands, saying he would call on him at nine thirty, the exact time the wax would be melted and the chemical released in that telephone booth, all the ventilators of which he had stuffed full of paper.

" The springs on the door of that booth are so strong that the door closes quickly and tightly. Vrooman, of course, had no intentions of calling on Sands at nine thirty. Instead he drove to Needham's grocery store at that hour and called Sands up."

" I get it, I get the idea," cried the sheriff.

" Of course you do," nodded Craton. " Vrooman got to Needham's grocery store at nine thirty-five, and being just five minutes late, five minutes behind the time that gas was liberated in the booth, he was excited. He rushed in, nervous, impatient to get his call quickly. His manner was enough to attract attention, and the owner of the store was able to give one of my men a description that left no shadow of doubt who he was.

" As we know from what Buckwell has told us, Mrs. Sands heard Willet Sands send his son to see if the switch was off in the booth when the desk phone failed to work."

" Good Lord," cried Homes, " and young Sands got the gas!"

" He did. He got the full force of it the minute he stepped into the booth. It was never intended by Vrooman that the gas should kill Sands, but only leave him senseless so he could search him without trouble. As it happened Jim Sands had a weak heart and while his father could have gone into that booth, been knocked out by the gas and recovered afterward, the son wasn't able to stand the stuff; it got him quick.

" Strangling for air, he slipped down, rubbed his coat against the booth, and caught and pulled out one strand of hair on a sliver near the floor. Finding this single hair, noting his coat shoulder and the side of the booth against which he fell, satisfied me he had collapsed in the booth. The further fact that Deston got the late effects of the gas when he went to telephone, and that he was short of breath and tore at his throat, substantiated my theory. Young Sands made those marks on his own throat. I knew that fact the minute I examined his finger nails."

" It seems simple now," admitted Homes.

Craton gave a short nod. " Willet Sands, waiting impatiently at the desk phone, was some little time, a few minutes at least, before going to the telephone booth. Then he found his son dead or dying. The marks are on the floor of that small room showing where young Sands was dragged by his father into the library.

" We know what happened then. Miss MacKensie rushed in, faced Sands, revolver in hand, and then came the shot that killed Willet Sands. Miss MacKensie, very naturally, in her excitement, thought she fired the shot. Willet Sands thought so, too, or—as I have already said—he looked beyond her and saw who it was that fired."

" And if he didn't believe Miss MacKensie shot him, it means Mrs. Sands fired the shot."

" It does. It certainly means Mrs. Sands is guilty of her husband's death in that case."

" How are you going to prove whether she did or didn't shoot him?"

" She says," mused Craton, speaking more to himself than too the sheriff, " that a man came to the front door and fired."

" She would, naturally, if she was guilty."

" To be sure, but there is this side of the affair to substantiate her story; she actually thought Buckwell guilty. That seems clear to me in her trying to get him to run away, about the first thing a

woman would want the man she loved to do. Second judgment might have made her act differently, but she acted on the spur of the moment."

"It might mean that," admitted Homes.

"But more than that, I have Vrooman's story, which I got out of him after I had brought him out of a dead faint.

"Vrooman drove from Needham's grocery store to Brookmeadow. He had a flat tire on the way and reached there, he asserts, to find Willet Sands dead—at least he claims he thought Sands dead. Now, of course I am ready to admit this; Vrooman may have reached the office and shot Sands, finding the gas hadn't got him. But somehow I believe he was telling the truth when he said he arrived there to find Sands shot. Just the same," mused Craton, "there is one more hole in Vrooman's story."

"And that?"

"Neither Miss MacKensie nor Mrs. Sands seems to have seen Vrooman near the place. I doubt if Miss MacKensie would have, for she ran the minute the shot was fired. Mrs. Sands might have seen Vrooman, yet if she didn't, it is explained in this way: Vrooman left his car on the upper road, the one over which the coroner went after the car we heard when Akron fired that shot. Vrooman came toward the house from the left as you face it, and he asserts he entered by the side door after looking in the side windows. He found Sands, searched his pockets, and secured the confession.

"As he did so he heard a sound at the front of the house and the rear. The sound came from the front first. He retreated to the dining room and when the sound came from the rear—Deston returning by the back door—he dodged into a large closet off the dining room. Marks on the floor of that closet, slight signs of muddy boots, confirm this statement.

"When Deston went straight upstairs Vrooman slipped into the kitchen and ran for his car."

"The sound at the front?"

"I can only believe it was the one who shot Sands. If it was a man he leaped out the front door the instant he fired and hid until Miss MacKensie was well out of the way. It must have been he who returned to search the library and Deston's office. Remember we found both rooms had been turned upside down. Vrooman insists he only rifled Sands's pocketbook for his confession and"—Craton paused and looked at the sheriff—"why would Mrs. Sands have searched those rooms?"

"She might have wanted the reports her husband had of her movements. He had had her watched."

"Yes," nodded Craton, "but I can't see that Mrs. Sands had done anything she might fear to have known. Sands didn't have grounds for getting a divorce from her. No, Mrs. Sands didn't search those rooms, in my judgment, which makes me believe here story of the man."

"Well, suppose you are right—what did that man want?" demanded Homes.

"What he was after would, if we knew, indicate the murderer."

Homes looked at Craton one long minute.

"You told me all the contracts between Buckwell and Sands are missing."

"Yes."

"Then wasn't it Buckwell, as Mrs. Sands believed? Didn't he fire that shot and steal those contracts?"

"I have got to find out if that might not be so," admitted Craton.

"How'll you do that?? You as good as told him you were satisfied he was innocent."

"Surely. But I also let him believe that I considered Mrs. Sands guilty."

"To get him to confess to save her?"

Craton nodded. "But he didn't confess."

"No," admitted Homes reluctantly, "but that doesn't prove him innocent. He may figure that Mrs. Sands can prove her innocence and he'll sit tight for the time being."

"You are right. I'm going further into that point."

"Can I do anything? If not, I should move in the Vrooman matter."

"You had better do that. We know he is guilty of Jim Sands's death, even if he intend to kill him."

Homes jumped to his feet with a nod.

"I want to say this much more to you, sheriff. Vrooman is a sick man. He fainted when I showed him I knew just what he had done. He collapsed twice while he was making his confession and went completely to pieces when he came to the end. I sent for his physician, and waited for his report. He told me Vrooman wouldn't live a week; that his heart was in very bad shape. The man has been under a terrific strain for some time, fearing Sands's power over him, while discovering Sands dead when he got to Brookmeadow pretty nearly shocked him to death. Now, with the knowledge that he is liable to be arrested—well, I don't know. You better go to his physician first, I think. No telling, he may be beyond the law even now."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ADDRESS ON THE ENVELOPE.

CRATON never stopped for dinner. He drove straight to Brookmeadow, sent in his card, and was with Mrs. Sands for half an hour. From Brookmeadow he drove to Marsh's apartment, and an hour later was at his own rooms again.

His face was set and hard now, such a look as was seldom seen upon his features. He flung himself down in front of his desk and began to write. When he found he had finished he rang for his servant and dispatched him with a letter. Then he turned to the telephone. Three minutes later he was speeding away from the city in his car.

When he drew up in front of the rambling old house by the winding lane Deston was watching for him, in response to Craton's telephone call.

"Well?" questioned Deston as Craton went into the room on the right of the little hall.

He saw something vital was impending. There were harsh lines in Craton's face, a look in his eyes that was anything but pleasant.

Craton was never theatrical. He sat down quietly and looked at Deston.

"Have you any idea who killed Willet Sands?" he demanded.

Deston shook his head.

"And yet you haven't been frank with me," growled Craton.

"I wasn't at first. In the end—"

"You were not in the end. You held back certain essential points. Deston, I am going to tell you. You can let Miss Thurston know. I'm not going to see her or Mrs. Sands again."

"What do you mean?"

Slowly, painstakingly, Craton explained how James Sands met his death, giving in detail the facts confessed to by Vrooman and ended the statement with: "He is dead—heart failure—died this afternoon."

Deston sat as if carved in stone. He had no words to utter and, too, he felt more was coming and he dreaded, somehow, the whole truth.

Craton drew a deep breath. "I told a man to-day that I knew the murderer. I told him how I made the discovery, although it wasn't the truth. I said that the murderer came here in a car with nobby tread tires and that three of the nobs were gone from the tread of one of the rear tires. I had sneaked into his garage and sliced off three nobs. No harm if he wasn't the one—the quickest way to make him confess if he was.

"Inside of half an hour after I told him these facts he had changed the tires on his car. He gave himself away by that move. And yet I had enough to prove him guilty. I wrote him a letter, Deston. I had no right, but I had my own reasons for wishing to give him—"

The telephone rang.

Craton picked up the instrument. He listened for a moment and his eyes closed slowly as he answered: "I understand."

He hung up and sat down. "The man that shot Willet Sands, Deston, is beyond the sheriff. He got my letter and he has made the one move. I hadn't the right to give him that chance, but I did it."

His manner changed a little. "Marsh called me into the case because Willet Sands had left instructions that if anything happened to him I was to be retained. Did you know that?"

"I did. It seems Mr. Sands told his wife, Marsh, Miss Thurston, me, and—in fact—let it be generally known that you were to be retained. That was why I wasn't at all surprised to see you here so quickly with Mr. Marsh."

Craton gave a weary nod. "I am told he did this as a matter of protection, believing that if it were generally known that I would handle the investigation if he went as he did, it might deter the act. It seems my ability—such as I have—was not rated very highly. However, this letter. Here is a copy, read it."

Deston took the paper and began to read slowly.

> You selected Thursday night because that was the night Deston was invariably away and Sands was likely to be alone.
>
> You went to Brookmeadow with the intention of murder; I can see no excuse for a deed done in cold blood, planned and executed without a thought save of self. Murder in anger I can explain, murder such as you did allows of but one outcome. The law has its penalty and will exact it unless you see fit to place yourself beyond the law's reach.
>
> You faced exposure for money stolen. Money collected by you which belonged to Mr. Sands, but was never turned over. Money given you by Mr. Sands to be given to his son, but never paid to him. These were your reasons. I had the facts, but the changing of the tire on your car settled the matter without controversy. I could say a great deal more, but I decline the opportunity. I have no desire or wish except to say, in sorrow—good-by.
>
> BANARD CRATON.

Deston looked up. He felt between the lines of those brief words the hint of pathos, the sorrow in which they had been written. He was white of face, silent.

"I sent that letter," said Craton, "and the telephone call tells us what has been the result. It is best as it is."

He arose slowly and picked up his hat.

"But, Craton!" cried Deston, shaking himself out of the chill of horror that seemed to rest upon him. "This letter! To whom was it sent?"

"Is it possible?" questioned Craton. "You, who declined to tell me who collected Mr. Sands contracts! You must know!"

"But I don't. I always suppose Mr. Sands handled those collections himself."

Craton put on his hat.

"I am going. Good night. That letter was addressed to Howard Marsh."

THE END

ʊ ʊ ʊ

AT LAST

AND when I die,
I want no man-made park,
Or a granite headstone, tall.

An iron fence high,
A street lamp for the dark,
Near a marble fountain's fall.

But a lone wolf's cry,
A pine tree for a mark,
And starlit hills for a wall.

Earl W. Scott.

Jim the Wise

By CYRUS CHAPIN

JIM OLIVER, alias Jim the Wise, paced the floor of his comfortable library while the wind howled without and storm-driven sleet flicked against the windows. His socially ambitious wife, despite the weather, had bought her way into the charity ball and was gone with friends for the evening. A generous fire burned in an old-fashioned grate. Of late Jim had been reading evenings and enjoying peace and contentment.

To-night there was a plan to be evolved and from his thoughts tranquillity fled to make room for clamorous war!

Why, what a fool he was to back another job! He had enough. Yet there was just one more thing he wanted, and this would solve the problem. What Jim longed so to possess was a country place like the one where he was born. It must have neat, green hedges, apple trees, a hive or two of bees, a piece of woods with maples, hickory and walnut trees, a creek running through and a swimming hole with a grassy bank.

The eminent impressario of crookdom sighed, and brought his thoughts back with a jerk to the present and the job, which was to be his last. Besides, he must not forget that in the plot to be hatched there might be a chance to even up scores for his old friend, Bill the Brute, with that snitching stool, Ikey the Crab.

That day had come to Jim the Wise the two remarkably efficient Andover twins, Bob and Tom. Jewelers by birth and training they had long since graduated in their particular forms of thievery, but among the countless fraternity, for honor and veracity they stood unquestioned.

When they had first approached Jim with their plan, he had scouted it as being absolutely ridiculous and preposterous. Then the very audacity of the twins aroused his admiration and interest, and he had consented to talk details.

"Boys," said Jim, "do you actually think I'm strong enough to pull off a stunt like this, or are you just trying to see how far I'll experiment for your benefit?"

"We knows you can do it, Mr. Jim," an-

swered Bob, who always did most of the talking for the pair. Tom signified his absolute confidence in the great "putter-up of jobs" by nodding his head emphatically. Jim looked from one to the other and smiled.

"By George, it's wonderful, that kind of faith! Really, boys, you flatter me. I have always admired you twins very much. In your way you are positively brilliant. You've never served time—no more have I, but I've stood in the wings, as it were, and directed performances, principally. You boys have helped many a poor devil when he needed it, and you've always been good to your old parents and your little crippled sister. Really, in a way, I feel kind of in duty bound to advise you to quit the crooked game and go straight."

The twins frowned and shook their heads violently. Bob shrugged his shoulders and turned two appealing eyes toward Jim.

"Each time we goes honest, we goes broke. No more for me nor for Tommy, huh, Tommy?" He flashed a glance at his brother. Tom shook his head decisively.

"All right," replied Jim, "we'll take that matter up perhaps at another time. Now, to the business in hand. You twins say that you want to start a diamond palace here in Chicago, stock it up with diamonds, bought from Maiden Lane on credit—loot the place, sell the stones in New York to Ikey the Crab, and beat it for foreign parts. And—you say—*all* you want to accomplish this piece of business is *Credit!*"

"Uh-huh!" signified Bob. "That's all."

"That's all," repeated Jim the Wise quietly. "Right at this point let me call your attention to the fact that credit is about all nine-tenths of the world wants—that credit is tantamount to coin of the realm and gold coin at that. You might as well come to me with the proposition that you want to start a nice little bank and all you lack is a million dollars to start it with. Will Jim Oliver please arrange so you can get the million? And, supposing I should be able to arrange this credit for you, at just what particular station does old Jim alight from the diamond palace limited, after you squirrels have beat it for Pahree or some other nice, comfortable village?"

Then Bob hastened to explain that because of the fact that Mr. Jim would have the most important end to carry, they, the twins, would not only commit the actual theft and attend to the disposal of the swag, but if it came to a showdown and their backer had to do it to save his own skin, it would be with their consent and approval that he could turn State's evidence and save himself. This was an unusual arrangement, but the whole thing was unusual, anyway, and because of this element, and because of the farm and the cows and the bees, and still further because in the thing Jim saw or sensed the opportunity to punish Ikey the Crab for double-crossing Bill Wallace, alias Bill the Brute, perjuring him into hell for ten long years—Jim the Wise decided to back the twins and not only back them, but manage the job as well, as was his custom.

Action following swiftly upon the heels of decision, the following morning there appeared in the leading Chicago daily, under the heading of Financial, the following advertisement:

> WANTED—To borrow fifty thousand dollars on bank or other gilt-edged security; liberal interest payable in advance. Suite 1134 Great Eastern Building.

The skillful use of money, the invaluable services of his old servitor, Black Sam, accounted for the rapidity with which Mr. Jim Oliver acquired a magnificent suite of offices, furnished in quiet but forcible elegance, and was ready to do business under the pseudonym of Selwyn Eddy, Dealer in Precious Stones, by eight thirty the morning the advertisement appeared.

That afternoon about three o'clock, Sam announced:

"Mr. Bertram Appleby."

The owner of this name, an elderly, well preserved man of the retired business type, heavy set, gray of hair and eye, followed the dignified Sam through the front office, where two stenographers were too busy to look up for the purpose of noticing a mere caller—through an adjoining room where all that particularly caught the eye was a frosted glass partition screening two-thirds of the room from observation and behind

which could be heard and smelled certain peculiar and mysterious evidences of what might be presumed to be a laboratory—and finally into the third room, where, behind a massive mahogany desk sat Mr. Selwyn Eddy himself!

Sam seated the caller with the utmost deference—to the right of the desk and directly facing the diamond merchant, and then withdrew.

"I came in answer to your advertisement concerning a loan of fifty thousand dollars," said Appleby.

Mr. Selwyn Eddy bowed. "May I ask what bank you do your principal business with?"

"The National Trust and Savings Bank," replied Appleby.

"Very good," signified Mr. Eddy, whose tone might be described as conservatively affable, and unconsciously yet pleasantly convincing. "I have an account with the Wheat Exchange Bank. In case you wish, you are at liberty to ask them if my business with them has been satisfactory. I am about to back a new diamond store, or palace as it will be called, here in Chicago. To make the proper showing, we must buy a large quantity of perfect diamonds. These stones will be bought mostly on credit. In order to establish that credit without tying up my own independent operations in precious stones all over the world, I wish to have in the National Trust and Savings Bank, in my name, the sum of fifty thousand dollars. Not as a checking account, understand. The fifty thousand dollars will remain intact. I desire that you go to the bank with me, draw out fifty thousand dollars with which I shall buy a certificate of deposit in my name, indorsing it over to you to hold as your security."

"Well, I'll be damned!" remarked Mr. Appleby, quietly. Then smiling: "Pardon the interruption, Mr. Eddy—pray proceed."

"That is all," continued Mr. Eddy, "except that I propose to pay you one per cent per month advance interest. I want the accommodation for ninety days with the privilege of an extension of ninety days."

Mr. Bertram Appleby looked at Mr. Selwyn Eddy, and then he allowed his glance to encircle the room, finally coming to rest at some point upon the ceiling. Mr. Appleby appeared to be thinking. Suddenly he let his eyes fall and encounter the steady gaze of his companion.

"By thunder, I like your nerve! I'll do it."

Appleby rose from his chair, and Mr. Eddy rose with him. The two men shook hands as gray-headed Sam, in response to an invisible buzzer, opened the door for the visitor to pass out.

"Meet you at ten to-morrow morning, at my bank," said Mr. Appleby, and he was gone.

II.

THE diamond palace blazed its glittering way into business prominence, near Madison and State. The Andover twins under the name of Cahill, with Selwyn Eddy as their partner and private backer, garnered the coin of the realm, and gave value received. The business thrived. When the stock was bought, after certain selections were made by the twins, who were experts, all questions of terms were referred to their silent partner, Mr. Selwyn Eddy, that mysterious but evidently world renowned connoisseur in jewels.

"As to this question of credit," Mr. Eddy would, without exception, reply to the salesmen from Maiden Lane, "I never have and I never will make written statements concerning my affairs. It is against my principles. It is true that I am backing this firm. If you wish to know whether or not I am good for these orders, take a walk with me down to the bank and we'll ask the cashier about it."

Arrived at the bank, Mr. Eddy perhaps unconsciously engineered the conversation to suit himself. With the salesman he would approach the cashier, and ask the latter kindly to state approximately how much money, he, Mr. Eddy, had in the bank. The cashier would invariably reply that Mr. Eddy had in the bank right at that particular time something over fifty thousand dollars! Each and every time this happened, the salesman was satisfied, and in turn satisfied the house he represented and the diamonds flowed into the diamond palace direct

from Maiden Lane, in a small, silent stream of wonderful perfection, until the twins were satisfied they had enough.

A certain Saturday night arrived. Monday would be a legal holiday. This meant that the diamond palace would be closed from nine o'clock Saturday evening—this happened in 1895—until nine o'clock the Tuesday morning following. Accordingly, after closing the store, the twins boarded a Pennsylvania train bound for New York. The train had been moving about an hour when there was a knock at the door of their compartment.

"It's Mr. Jim," said Bob, shooting the bolt. Jim entered.

"All's well that ends well," said Jim. "After you finish your business with the Crab, I suppose you'll beat it at once for the ends of the earth!"

"Yeh," nodded Bob; "we got a clever get-away if we does say it—ain't it true, Tommy?"

Tommy smiled and nodded.

"Well, don't tell me, boys, what you're going to do or how you're going to do it. I want to warn you—be careful of the Crab. I don't know what it 'll be, but he'll try some dodge or other. In his slimy way he's dangerous."

The black eyes of Tommy narrowed and he looked at his brother. Bob frowned and stuck out his lower jaw.

"He's got the coin," growled Bob, "right in the dump with 'im. We don't do no bizness 'less he's alone. He's got to do it our way. Main thing we knows is he's got the price right there—an' he's crazy after what we've got to sell 'im."

The next night Ikey the Crab was preparing to lock up his pawnshop for the night, when Bob and Tom entered. The Crab's beady eyes snapped turtlelike and his greenish yellow teeth showed in the semblance of a grin.

Without any ceremony, the Crab led the way to a large room in the rear of his shop, rubbing his dry hands together as he went. In this room the Crab cooked in one corner, slept in another and transacted important business at a heavy rosewood table. Portions of the walls were covered with pictures of divers ages and values, mostly hung crookedly. The floor was covered with a wild array of old rugs. The place looked as though it was never swept, and the Crab looked like an unclean shellfish that would cease to breathe if draggged from his den into the open air.

Ikey closed the door and drew chairs up to the table, and Bob sat down opposite the Crab, while Tom dropped on his hands and knees and looked under the bed.

The Crab's lips curled back over his yellow fangs. "Ain't yeh always been safe here?"

Tom deigned no reply, but continued his hunt behind trunks and boxes until he had made a complete survey of the room. Then he sat down next to his brother and also facing the Crab.

"Where you boys been?"

"Never mind that, Ikey," replied Bob, "an' while we're here we might as well tell you, we don't trust you since you did for Bill the Brute. Far's that goes we didn't have no love for you before that, but now it's a case of comin' to you to do business, just because you're one of the few what's got a roll that's big enough. If you want to do business with us to-night you'll have to have seventy-five thousand dollars in cash right here with you. Otherwise, we see's a private party where we can get action quick."

"Seventy-five thousand!" exclaimed the fence, entirely ignoring their reference to Bill the Brute. "You expect me to have seventy-five thousand dollars in a place like this?" His voice took on the quality of a whine. "I might get it at the bank Monday if you have somethin' worth while, but—"

Bob interrupted him with a rough gesture. "Never mind all that stuff, Ikey. We know you've got the money. And it's in this place. You think everybody's as crooked as you are. That's why you won't trust a bank."

Simultaneously Bob and Tom rose to their feet as though about to leave. The Crab weakened and fairly fawned upon them in his fear that they would get away.

"Sit down, boys, sit down," he whined. "Tell me what you've got. Show it to me —show it to me."

Bob drew a heavy leather pocketbook from inside his vest, and started to remove the rubber band from around it. The Crab's eyes were fixed intently on his every movement.

Bob opened the pocketbook and laid it flat upon the table. There were six rows on each side, twelve rows in all, of brilliantly beautiful and evidently perfect unset diamonds! They ranged from a karat to five karats in size!

Ikey the Crab's mouth hung open and his eyes rolled upward from the diamonds to the faces of the twins and then back again. He put a trembling hand to his forehead and did not notice the drops of icy sweat that trickled down his fingers. Then he dropped both hands upon the table and clawed at the old green cloth with which it was covered.

"My Gott!" he whispered hoarsely—"you wonderful tvins—you wonderful tvins—where on earth did you get 'em?" He stood up and his hands fluttered soothingly over the stones and then dropped down upon them tenderly. Bob and Tom looked at the old man wonderingly. Here was one who actually worshiped what they only admired and knew the value of.

The Crab sank into his chair again, his eyes still glued upon the stones. He repeated the question: "My Gott! Where did you get 'em?" He seemed to have difficulty in getting his breath. He hissed more than he talked.

"How much for all them stones—how much?"

"Seventy-five thousand dollars for those and another book like it."

"Another book—like—that?" screeched the Crab, looking at the brothers as though he could not believe such a thing possible. "Where you been, you—"

"Never mind where we been or where they come from—you shell out seventy-five thousand and they're all yours."

Ikey the Crab stumbled to his feet and started for the door. Tom sprang after him and caught him by the shoulder.

"What in hell you doin'?"

"Nuthin'," snarled the Crab. "Come along with me if you want tuh—I'm goin' after the scales—an' maybe after the money—but the scales an' my glass first—an' we'll see—we'll see."

Tom accompanied him to the outer room and they returned with the scales, closed the door again, and placed the scales upon the table.

"Now see here, old man," broke in Bob, "make this thing short. If you think we're goin' to spend the night here while you monkey 'round with your damn glass an' your damn scales, you're dippy. You been in diamonds all your life, same's we've been. You knows 'em with your eyes shut. You know them stones is worth a hell of a lot more'n we're askin' of you—and you know you want 'em and are a goin' to have 'em, so what's the use o' foolin'. Get busy."

"I must weigh 'em—anyways some of 'em," came the nasal twang from the Crab; "it won't take but a minnit."

"You hurry now," admonished Bob; "size up a few of 'em an' then make your estimate—we got no time to lose."

Ikey carefully weighed and examined through the glass one entire row of the stones, and the row contained twenty-five diamonds.

"That's enough now," exclaimed Bob, tearing the book away from the pawnbroker's grasp. "Get a move on or the deal's off."

Thus admonished, Ikey gave the remainder only a cursory examination, occasionally taking an odd one up and giving it a thorough inspection. He knew they were all diamonds and he knew they were good ones.

"The other book—you say you have another book?"

"Here it is," and Tom laid it on the table before him unopened. The fence opened it himself, and almost fainted when the contents lay scintillating before him. Many of these stones he looked at closely, and others he simply held the glass over for an instant. Then he ran the glass up and down the rows. At last he seemed satisfied.

"How much?" he questioned. He was regaining his composure.

"I told you once," answered Bob. "Seventy-five thousand bucks. And see here, Ike, don't try jewing us down. It

won't go. It's seventy-five thousand and not one dollar less; cough it up now or we quit."

"I gives you sixty-five thousand," began the Crab, and just as Tom reached for one of the pocketbooks and Bob for the other, he gave in.

"Come, you robbers—a hell of a time I'll have gettin' rid of a swag like that—seventy-five thousand—come, I'll get you the money." The boys started to follow him. "No, you wait here," said the Crab. "You wait here—it's only right you don't see where I keep it. I have that right—and I give you the money in five minnits."

"We won't do it, Ikey—we don't trust you." This from Bob.

"It's because you snitched on Bill the Brute, Ikey," added Tom, desiring to rub it in as much as possible.

The Crab was accustomed to abuse. He shed it as a duck sheds water. "You stand in the door then, an' watch me. But don't come too close. It's the combination of my safe I don't want you to know. I have it in the safe—after to-night understan' I puts all my money in a safety deposit—no more safes, understan'—it goes in the safety deposit—"

"Hurry," and Bob gave him a shove. "Blast you and your money. We'll stand here in the door and watch you. No tricks now, or we'll crack you."

Ikey shambled into the pawnshop and went to the safe, and after turning the dial a few times the door opened and his head was hidden from the watchers. Finally his whole body was lost to sight behind the door. Tom gripped Bob's arm and started as though to say something. Then the pawnbroker's head appeared and then his body, as he swung the safe door to and came toward them, holding a small bundle crushed against him under his coat. "I got it," he whispered.

Once more in the back room, with the door closed, Ikey the Crab counted out to them in currency mostly of large dimensions, and in gold, the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars. It lay in a heap upon the table.

"You count it, Tommy," said Bob. Tom did so and nodded his head, signifying the sum was all right, and hid it away in his pockets. Then they handed Ikey the two pocketbooks containing the diamonds. Ikey looked at them again and seemed satisfied. He placed them in the bag from which he had taken the money and held that against him under his coat preparatory to putting them away in the safe.

He seemed anxious for them to go.

They started toward the door. "Remember, Ike," said Tom quietly, "somebody or other 'll croak you one o' these fine nights, for snitchin' on Bill the Brute."

The Crab shuddered and motioned them to be gone. "Good night," he croaked. They walked through the shop to the street door, the Crab following.

"Good night," said the twins, and they were gone.

The door closed behind them. They started across the street and walked along leisurely. Bob looked at his watch. They still had an hour before they were to meet Jim the Wise at his hotel.

Tom spoke. "When I grabbed your arm I thought I heard somebody—somebody besides us three, I mean."

"Where?" said Bob.

"I don't know. I couldn't tell where. Maybe I just imagined it, or maybe it was a rat or somethin'."

"Maybe," answered Bob, and they walked quietly on toward the scene of their appointment.

Ikey the Crab locked and bolted the door after the twins left, and then he started across the room to the safe, still hugging his recently acquired possessions against his bosom. He intended to put his purchase in the safe, but he could not resist the temptation to look at the stones again. Ah, how he loved diamonds. Extinguishing the light in the front part of the store, he groped his way into the rear room, closing the door behind him. In the darkness he felt his way to the table and there reached up and switched on the light. He placed the two leather cases on the table and sat down preparatory to examining the contents at his leisure.

He thought he heard a step behind him. The blood seemed to chill in his old veins, and he trembled until his teeth clicked

against each other. He managed to turn his head—and there stood the figure of a man wearing a horrible black mask through the two round holes of which gleamed eyes that seemed to flame with vengeance. In his right hand the figure held an automatic pistol pointed directly at the Crab. His time had come. This was the very thing Tom had warned him about a few minutes back. Was it only a few minutes? The voice in the black mask spoke.

" Hand them over, Ikey the Crab—you snitching stool. You did for Bill the Brute. Now it's your turn. Hand them over."

The Crab made a noise as though he was strangling—his hands shook and the bag started to slip out of them toward the table. The hand of the unknown reached out and took the cases and pulled them across the table. The Crab fell toward them and his claws reached out and tried to grasp them. The other had them now! They were gone! Wild eyed the Crab looked at the eyes that seemed to be burning into his. His mouth hung open as though he would scream for help—and the figure held up a hand commanding silence.

" Stay where you are—don't move! If you make a noise, or move from that spot —until one hour from the time I leave this place—you'll die like the rat you are."

And the figure backed out of the room, as the Crab fell into a chair and blubbered like some crazy thing. A long time he crouched limply in his chair—then reason seemed to return and he got up and staggered, his legs trembling under him, to the outer room and finally to the door that opened onto the street.

He opened it and looked out into the darkness. The street was deserted. Then he heard a policeman's club striking against the pavement, warning some lawbreaker who enjoyed police protection that the majesty of the law was passing. He would call the policeman, Ikey would—he would sound the alarm and summon aid, and—no, wait—he must think! Police? No—they hated him as he hated them. He would have to tell his story—and it was a tale that would not stand the telling to the police.

He slunk back into his shop and closed the door, and locked it—breathing heavily —sobbing, in fact, until he finally reached the inner room and fell upon his bed in the corner.

II.

THE twins waited in the lobby of the hotel where Jim the Wise had said he would meet them. It would soon be daylight, but that made no difference. They would have plenty of time in which to make their get-away.

Then they saw Jim enter the hotel. He stopped at the desk and got his key, and then motioned to the twins. They joined him at the elevator, and went with him to his suite. A bellboy entered and served them with drinks and cigars and then left them.

" Well, boys," began Jim, " I apologize for being a little late. But I had a rather important business matter to attend to and couldn't get here. I knew I could depend on you and that you'd be waiting when I got here. Great thing, that feeling of dependence. I trust you boys implicitly. You said you'd be here, and I knew you'd keep your word."

The twins smiled. Tom took a bundle of bills out of his inside coat pocket, and without a word began to separate them money into three piles. When the division had been completed each man pocketed his share of twenty-five thousand dollars.

" Now," said Bob, " the job's done, an' we must fade fast."

" We got still to-day for the start," put in Tom.

" Yes—but we'll need it," answered Bob.

" Boys," said Jim, looking at them affectionately, " I'm no preacher, but I wish you'd go into the legitimate business once, and see if you couldn't make a go of it."

Bob shook his head, and Tom frowned. " We've tried it," said Bob, " an' every time we tries it we goes broke. It can't be done—with us nohow."

" Supposing I show you how it can be done?"

The twins looked at him in surprise. " What in hell chance would we have now, anyways?" exclaimed Bob.

" Supposing we had a diamond store in

Chicago, similar to the one we started—supposing we had seventy-five thousand between the three of us, which we have, and the diamonds we had yesterday besides, which we could keep in stock or return to Maiden Lane, as we saw fit, or any portion of them—what would you twins say to going into the legitimate business?"

"In that case," sighed Bob, "which is too good except maybe for a pipe dream—we'd do it, wouldn't we, Tommy?"

"I should say so," answered Tommy with an echoing sigh. America was a pretty good country, after all, and now they were leaving it—forever.

"All right," continued Jim, "since you boys cotton to the idea, we'll do it."

"Do it?" cried Bob. "What you mean—do it?" The eyes of Bob and his brother fastened on the face of the man they so much admired and respected as though they actually began to suspect he was losing his reason.

"What you mean, Mr. Jim?" whispered Tommy.

"This is what I mean," replied Jim, reaching into the inside pocket of his vest. "This will explain matters better than I can."

Quietly he placed the two pocketbooks side by side on the table, and opening them exposed to the bewildered gaze of the twins those diamonds that two short hours ago they had sold to that famous fence Ikey the Crab for seventy-five thousand dollars!

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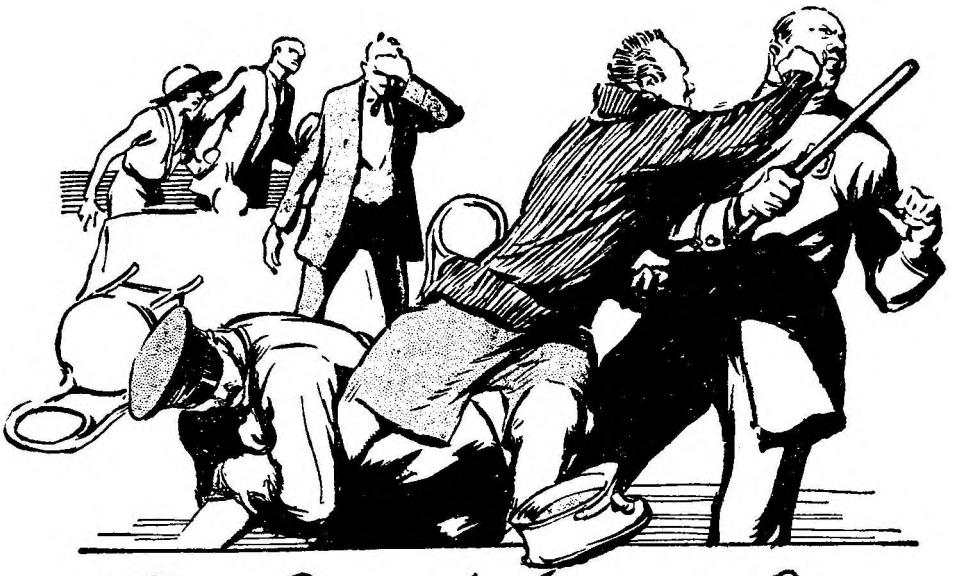
THE QUEST OF ARCADY

LONG I looked for Arcady,
Sought it high and low—
Where green boughs wave high and free,
Where calm rivers flow.
"It has vanished," I made moan;
But, you see, I looked alone.

"Silver streams hath Arcady,
Radiant, shining skies,
Flowers that could not fairer be,
Seen by human eyes."
By these tokens still I sought—
Lonely, all my search was naught.

Scarce I dreamed of Arcady
In a city street,
Where no breath of balm could be,
But—her eyes were sweet!
When they softly on me shone
Arcady was all my own!

Ethel M. Colson.



Ol' Murph—Prelim Boy

By JOHN S. GOTSHALL

"THEY'VE gone and locked one of my pugs up in the hoosegow. What'd I better do about it, Four Eyes?"

I looked up from my desk, and there stood Ed Alwards—Calamity Al, we called him in the land of things fistic. His always serious face was elongated about a foot more than usual. As I glanced at him and then back to my typewriter, where I was trying to beat out some snappy boxing notes for the *Morning Mail* sport page, he reminded me of an old-time graveside mourner who had come for his fee.

"I don't know why it is," he whined on, "but it seems to be just one thing after another. They went and raised the rates down to the Elms Hotel the very day after we got here—an' then Nick Dodson, that's promotin' the scrap, is goin' ter make me weigh in Battling Travaine at one hundred an' thirty-five pounds—an' you know what that means; he can't hardly make it an' have anything left to fight with— an' then he went an' got an old cut opened over his right eye, boxin' with some of these sage-brush hicks here—an' now they've gone and pinched one of my boys. It's just one thing after another—I was tellin' Tom Ryan yesterday that of—"

"Who have they picked up and what was he doing?" I snapped in. Until I got used to him, Calamity Al always made me mad on sight, but now I don't get peeved until he starts to talk.

"They've went and jugged poor Ol' Murph," Calamity moaned.

"What Murph?" I demanded. You never can tell who a pug is until you get

his full fighting name, and then you may find a " young " or something tacked onto it making the " beware of imitations " rule apply.

" Nobody but poor Ol' Kid Murphy from Pueblo! You knew Murph?" Calamity pleaded.

" Poor Old's right," I conceded. " He was beginning to slip five or six years ago. What's the old man doing down here? He ought to be spading the garden up at Pueblo—he must be thirty-three or four by now."

" Yes, but he ain't clear gone yet—he's been grabbin' off a bout now and then. I had him and ' Two Round ' Gutierrez booked for the curtain raiser here."

" For the cutain raiser! Hell's fire! Kid Murph from Pueblo isn't fighting curtain raisers, is he?" It had only been a few years since I'd seen Murph slap the ears off Punch Nixon and then only get a draw with him—the luckiest and yellowist dumbbell that ever copped the welterweight belt by a fluke and held it by a series of rotten decisions.

" They's a lot of pretty good prelim boys nowadays," Calamity reminded me. " But I been gettin' Ol Murph a few scraps lately. His old woman ain't feelin' good, and then they got a kid what fell outa the cradle an' got curv'ture of the spine or some such—an' now they've gone an' jugged him, an' when I went to see the chief of police, thinkin' mayhaps I could do something, he balls me out from hell to breakfast an' says if I said another word he'd throw me in fer bein' a vag—which I ain't."

" What did they pick him up for?"

" Oh, nothing much," and I saw right there that Calamity intended to lie about it. " You know Ol' Murph," he continued. " He wouldn't hurt a baby—but of course he's always pulling off some fool stunt.

" He come in last night on a freight an' I put him up at the hotel an' told him to step out and do his road work at five o'clock this morning. His leg cords is gettin' sort of tight. Well, he started out from the hotel—wasn't wearin' much but trunks and three or four sweaters. The boob, he ain't never been here before, an' he picks the main stem to perambulate down.

" Passin' a restaurant, he decides to stop in an' have a quart of hot water an' a glass of milk. It was the milk that got him in bad. O' course, not havin' on no clothes to speak of, he didn't have no money with him, an' while he was tryin' to explain to the waiter a cop drifts in and, o' course, Ol' Murph, bein' peaceful like as far as disposition goes, walks right down to the station with the cop an' they throws him down the hole."

" Are you sure that's all there was to it?"

" Well, now, that's the way I got the story," Calamity claimed. " You know flat-foots is down on pugs as though they was poison in this town—'specially the chief."

I admitted that, but I had doubts about the rest of the story. Knowing Murph, I had misgivings about what happened at the restaurant, but Calamity kept whining around the office until it was a case of go over to headquarters and see the chief or go crazy. I chose the former, feeling I was already making too much progress on the latter route.

As we opened the chief's door at the city hall, a string of cuss words flew out of his private office that would have floored any heavyweight in the world. The chief was slinging them. Feeling that we'd picked a poor time for the interview, I tried to back out, but he'd seen me.

" Come in, Four Eyes," he said, " and leave the door open."

Then he turned his attention back to a couple of the jailiest looking birds I'd lamped in an age.

" Now you two beat it before I throw your pants back in jail," he yelled at them. " You can't threaten me and get away with it. I know you're the birds that threw those bombs down at the shops, even if I couldn't stick it onto you—and don't you ever think I don't! You can't come in here telling me! I'm giving you half an hour to get out of El Paso, and take it from me, the boys 'll sure be looking for you when the time's up. Now beat it."

The two yeggs shifted uneasily.

" You'll be mighty sorry of the day you ever sent us up," one of them mumbled.

"You'll be a hellofasight sorrier you opened your trap at me, if you don't beat it while I'm in a good humor," the chief yelled—and they seemed to decide he was probably right.

"Four Eyes, there's two of the dirtiest coyotes that ever hit the Mexican border," the chief claimed. "They're bad actors, take it from me. They've been threatening me for ten years—but I've managed to keep them locked up most of the time. They're the birds that tried to blackjack me over in Juarez last year, if you remember. What can I do for you—anything in particular?"

"I want to introduce you to Ed Alwards," I explained. "Mr. Alwards is one of the leading prize fight managers, chief, and I'd—"

"Yes, I met him this morning," the chief snapped and wheeled around to Calamity Al. "Didn't I tell you I'd jug you if you ever came whining around here again?" he demanded, and then cut loose with the best five minutes of cussing I'd ever heard. The chief had some command of the English language. He'd learned the most of it in a cow camp over in the Panhandle and then had joined Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders as a sort of finishing school.

"Now get this," he added after he had satisfied himself that he had made a proper impression—" I'm cleaning up this town of thugs and the like—and that includes prize fighters. I'm going to make the burg too hot for them to stay in—never did have any use for 'em anyhow. Those two jailbirds that just left are a fair example and—don't argue with me!" he snapped as Calamity Al tried to get in a word. "As long as I'm chief of police here, prize fighters is going to have a mighty hard row to hoe."

Calamity Al and I digested this.

"But, chief," I remonstrated, "the license has been issued for this card, and it seems that through some misunderstanding one of the policemen happened to pick up Ol' Murph, that's going to box the curtain raiser, and threw him in jail. It seems he hadn't done anything in particular, and I was wondering if—"

"Hadn't done anything! Hungarian hell! Why, he's plumb nuts and came near ruining my police force! He was running around town with only a pair of drawers on and he got into trouble down at a restaurant and nearly killed a couple Greeks, and then when Pat Dugan went into arrest him he took Pat's club away from him and—and— Hell, no! Not after him making laughing stock out of the police force—of course I won't let him out.

"He's a tough customer and a vag besides, an' it's the chain gang for him. I'll teach these prize fighters they can't come in here and run this town—not as long as Bill Smith's chief of police. And that's final!"

"All right, chief," I said as Calamity Al and I started to leave—"I'm sorry you couldn't strech a point though—ah—by the way—I was talking to the telegraph operator over at the office and he said the new rule about no one being allowed in the telegraph booth while he takes the world series report next week wasn't intended to apply to you and the mayor and some of the other city hall fans that could be relied on not to tip off the plays before they are flashed on the electric board. So come over—we'll save room for you."

I slammed the door behind us.

"Chief of police wants you to call him," the city editor said when I got back to the office.

"Hello—that you, Four Eyes?" the chief asked after I got the connection. "I've just been considering that case," he added, "and after investigating it, I guess maybe it isn't as bad as I thought. I'm letting this Ol' Murph out of jail and turning him over to you. I hope to the Lord no more of these fighting thugs are friends of yours—'cause I'm sure going to make this town hot for 'em."

"Thanks, chief," I said, "but you'll find some time that they aren't as bad a lot of boys as you figure them."

"Hell they aren't!" he shot back. "But say, Four Eyes, who's pitching for the Giants to-day?"

II.

"THAT there chief flat-foot is sure some down on pugs," Ol' Murph claimed as he slouched into my sport sanctum and tried

not to act embarrassed at me catching him in jail and booked as a prelim boy for a curtain raiser bout. "He says if I'm a ham an' egger an' don't show my appreciation of what he's done for me, he's going t' throw my pants back in jail fer a month —an' maybe he would anyhow—"

"Well, you needn't worry, Murph—you're no ham and egger."

"No—I ain't runnin' that high," Ol' Murph replied. "I'm a ham or egger—I ain't aimin' at any of these expensive combination meals just now."

"What's the matter, Murph? The last time I saw you or heard of you, you were going like a house afire."

"That's the last time anybody's heard of me, Four Eyes—I seem to be just—sort of—I don't know—slippin' somehow. I ain't even drawin' much as a prelim boy no more."

"The devil you aren't!" It was a feeble remark to make, but what are you going to say to a bird that you saw slap the nose off a champion, and only get a draw decision, and then a few years later you see him fighting curtain raisers?

I've got an overdeveloped soft spot for these leather pushers, good or bad, so I let on I was busy writing the head to a baseball story while I swallowed my Adam's apple a couple of times thinking of poor Ol' Murph being just a prelim boy now! And he was a likely sort of Irishman, too. Always sort of reminded me of an overgrown bulldog pup—only not so good looking in the face.

He sat twirling his cap—occasionally dropping it. I saw he wanted to talk, so I made the opening pass.

"What's all the trouble? Lost your wallop, Murph?"

"No—not exactly—I don't know—just seemed to pick up a horseshoe wrong and keep a holdin' of it that way. I—I pulls three straight draws after I drawed with Punch Nixon in the championship row, an' then Eddie Kelley swings a lucky one and catches me in the plexus for a knockout in the second round—an' I'm blamed if Nick Bradley, what you know couldn't whip a male society reporter, didn't pull the same bunch of luck about a month later!

"Arter that—sure an' ye know how it goes, Four Eyes—but I'm pickin' up a fair bunch of fifty and seventy-five berry curtain raisers an' such—had a semifinal fer a hundred and a quarter a couple of months ago at Tucson—but—"

"Don't you care, Murph, old top," I tried to cheer him up. "You've traveled with the best of 'em."

"Yea—but that was some time ago. I'd try to get into something else—watchman or something like that—always sort of wanted to be a bluecoat, only I ain't got flat feet—but the ol' woman—you know how women folks is—she just won't stand for me givin' it up, spite of me being thirty-three. You know how they are, Four Eyes. But it ain't their fault their brains is back of their left ribs.

"An' then I sort of need the mazooma —specially since the kid went an' fell outa the cradle last year and sorta twisted his back like—but pretty! Four Eyes, you'd oughter see that kid's mug! When I'm home I spend most of my time jest a lookin' at him—the ol' woman does, too. So—so—well, hell! I don't mind these prelim kids slappin' m' ears off when it's averaging me more'n a hundred berries a month an' expenses."

Ol' Murph, his battered face beaming, picked up his cap from the floor and backed toward the door.

"If you're ever up in Pueblo, Four Eyes, drop in an' see us," he invited. "Take it from me, that kid o' mine is some bird! But of course he won't make no fighter—with his back that there way.

"You ain't never lamped the ol' woman neither, have you? She'd be tickled stiff fer to see you. She—she ain't no more'n a featherweight, but—take it from me, she packs a terrible wallop—'specially with her eyes. Sure, I'll be careful, Four Eyes. I won't get into no more trouble with the police here. I—when I get back to Pueblo I'll send you a pitcher of the ol' woman an' the kid—I had some enlarged."

III.

Two Round Gutierrez, in spite of the fact that he was just a sagebrush boob

with the gloves, had a following among the Mexican population of El Paso that would have put a champion to shame. In half a dozen recent bouts he had knocked out his man, and every Mexican in the city that could beg, borrow or steal the price of admission went to the show to see him repeat on Ol' Murph.

They figured Two Round could whip any one from Dempsey to Buffalo Bill, and the noise they put up when he climbed into the ring sounded like a million tugboats trying to signal the Statue of Liberty out of the way during a daybreak fog. Putting reverse English on their cheering, they let Ol' Murph know exactly what they thought of him and where he was going to land about a second after he shook hands.

Murph was too old at the leather pushing game to let this bother him; he just enlarged his map of Ireland with a grin and leaned down toward the press box and asked us if we thought there was any chance of them starting a revolution.

"Not unless you happen to knock him for a goal," Billy Treat told him, and Ol' Murph looked serious for a moment.

"You better get a line on the exits, then," he said, "'cause I draws down seventy-five plunks if I win, and only fifty if I lose." We could see he was thinking seriously about it.

"Weight—weight? What's the rate of poundage?" A lot of fans bellowed as the announcer started to leave the ring.

"Welters—one forty-five each," he claimed, and the Mexicans seemed satisfied, but the gringoes weren't, and they let the world know it. Any one could see that the Mexican was almost above the middleweight class.

It looked for a minute as though it was going to be a riot, but the bell turned the storm into a nervous silence as Ol Murph and Two Round Gutierrez touched gloves.

About a thousandth of a second after the gloves touched, Ol' Murph whipped over a wicked left to the nose. A couple specks of red flew clear across the ring and landed on my shirt front. The rest of it flowed down and formed an inartistic pattern on the pair of loose yellow satin trunks Gutierrez was wearing.

I've never seen the bird yet that could fight with a pair of those "best girl" made panties on—especially if an initial is handworked on them. That was the kind Gutierrez was sporting, and the way he got mad when he saw them all covered with red indicated that he thought they were class a foot deep.

He let out a snort like a Mexican bull, put down his head and made a pass at Murph that, if it had landed, would have knocked him clear across the international bridge. But it missed and whirled the Mexican clear around twice before he lost his balance and skidded his nose into half a pound of resin that hadn't been powdered any too well.

When he got up, he looked more than peeved and in spite of the fact that he didn't have on anything but those trunks, I was expecting him to draw a knife from somewhere and start in to end it right now.

"*Carramba!*" He hissed and called a shot for Murph's mouth. Murph was standing there grinning and almost swallowed the glove.

The gong stopped the slugging bee before either of them was killed.

The second round started where the first left off.

Ol' Murph wasn't big enough to stand up and swap punches with this bird, but it was a case of do that or run a Marathon around the ring and drop the decision and the extra twenty-five bucks. Murph took a chance of winning them or losing them like a man. After kissing the canvas three times the gong saved him taking the count the fourth.

The Mexican fans were cheering loud enough so that the State officials down at Chihuahua probably thought a new revolution had broken out at Juarez. The gringoes were hooting the management for matching a giant with a welterweight and demanding the fight be called off and the money split even.

Murph was about ready to cash in his checks and while the roustabout rubbers in his corner were shaking a wet towel at him and trying to patch him up, I could see the old boy was doing some heavy thinking

trying to figure out a way to annex those extra twenty-five sinkers that were to go to the winner.

Two Round Gutierrez opened the third frame like a house on fire. Murph was barely weathering the storm when he got caught with a left hook square on the chin. Instead of crumpling to the canvas, he was lucky enough to fall into a clinch, and in spite of the referee, he held on until he got his bearings again.

Whipped to a frazzle, his native Irish rushed to his rescue. The fans were cheering and hooting, depending which way they felt about it.

"Stand still, you big boob!" Murph whispered into the Mexican's ear as he hung on in the clinch. "It's your pants they're making fun of—they're split an' comin' off!"

Consternation registered on Gutierrez's face as he pictured those precious, monogrammed satin trunks—torn and coming off. His mitts flew to his hips to save them.

Ol' Murph stepped back and leveled a right to the jaw and a left to the stomach. Both landed. The referee started counting over the fallen Mexican.

Pandemonium broke loose. The Mexican fans gasped—then, figuring the only way their marvel could have been floored was by a foul, let out a storm of protest as he was counted out and started to leave their seats and settle the matter to their personal satisfaction.

Hooting, yelling, screaming, fighting Mexicans and gringoes seethed around the ring. Bluecoats clubbed their way through the frenzied crowd, restoring peace and making a few arrests—including Calamity Al and Ol' Murph, neither of whom had taken a hand in the disturbance.

A police captain laid down the law at the top of his voice; the patrol wagon enveloped the prisoners and the next bout was announced just as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"Yea—they're both in the hole," the police sergeant said when I dropped over at headquarters after I'd put the sport sheet to bed. "No—they ain't no chance, Four Eyes. Chief said them fighters was bad hombres an' fer me not to set no bond on 'em. They'll have a hearing at ten o'clock in the morning. Chief claims he's going to make this town hotter'n 'ell for prize fighters—I reckon they'll soak these two pretty hard."

I had a long talk with Chief Smith next morning before court, but it didn't do any good.

"We don't want that element in town," the chief said.

"But, chief," I remonstrated, "prize fighters are just like any other class of people—ninety-eight per cent to the good."

"Then I've never seen any but the other two per cent," he replied. "And, besides, we're shutting down on 'em—got a petition the other day—no—sorry, Four Eyes, but I gave this one bird a chance for you the other day—and here he is right back again."

We walked into the court room. Ol' Murph and Calamity Al were standing in front of the judge trying to plead not guilty."

"Judge, I want to make an example of these two men," the chief said. "We're trying to clean up the town and it can't be done with a bunch of thugs and prize fighters around—and we want to let the world know it."

"Six months on the chain gang at hard labor," the judge decided.

Calamity Al's chin hit him on the chest, but Ol' Murph took the knockout without a sign. Out in the hall he asked me if I'd go and get the seventy-five berries that were coming to him on the bout.

I made the promoter come across and took the money over to Murph.

"What do you want to do with it?" I asked him.

Ol' Murph let on he was wiping his nose with his sleeve, but he was really dashing some moisture from his eyes.

"Send it to the ol' woman, Four Eyes—she an' the kid 'll be needin' it. I—I wisht you'd mail it to her—an'—an' fer the love a' Gawd, Four Eyes, don't let her know I'm in the hoosegow."

IV.

MONTHS later, I decided to leave God's country, as some bird that has probably

never been west of the Hudson River started calling it, and take a vacation in the East where you can play golf on the grass instead of through Russian thistles and where you can keep both eyes on the ball instead of on a lookout for rattlers.

I didn't get back to the Pass City until the middle of the winter.

The first thing that caught my eye when I landed was a life size sign on the billboard over by the station announcing that "Knockout" Brown, Philadelphia lightweight, was going to meet Battling Tim Mulligan, of Denver, in the main event of a card to be staged at Liberty Hall that night under the direction of Ed Alwards, local promoter.

As my taxi flew past I almost ruined my nose against the back window, trying to read the rest of the advertisement.

"Who's the chief of police here now?" I asked the driver.

"Billy Smith; he's been chief here for an age—and you can take it from me, he's some popular boy! Lately he's been putting this burg on the prize fight map, I'm tellin' you."

"But—I—I thought he was against boxing?" I remonstrated.

"What! Chief Billy Smith against boxin'? Lord, no! I guess he did use to be at that, but he's makin' 'em put 'em on right now; best boys in the country is showin' here this winter."

Before I could digest this information, I reached my hotel, where I bought a newspaper and turned to the sport page.

There was a flag line across the top of the page announcing the scrap and a two-column interview with Chief of Police Billy Smith, who claimed the event promised to be the snappiest twelve round bout ever staged in the Southwest!

I rushed across the international bridge and got a drink—just to make sure I was in the right town—and then streaked over to the City Hall and located the chief in his private office.

"Well, I see you've got another prize fight booked here, chief," I said. "Tonight, isn't it?"

"Yea—and take it from me, Four Eyes, she's going to be a pip. I've been watching them pretty close, and this Knockout Brown is faster'n streaked lightning, but I tell you he really hasn't got a wallop, any one can tell that by giving him the once over. But he'll outpoint Tim Mulligan a mile—that is, of course, if Tim doesn't knock him for a goal; that boy can sure hit!

"We just weighed 'em in," he spouted on. "You see, I'm head of the new city boxing commission, an' we watched 'em weigh in and take their physical exams. Doc Foster says every boy on the card is in the pink of condition."

"So—ah—you haven't been able to keep 'em out of town—eh? I started kidding him.

"Keep 'em out of town! What 'd I want to keep 'em out of town for? I tell you, Four Eyes, we're putting this old burg on the sport map. We've got boxers coming here from all parts of the country."

"But I thought you considered them a bad element to have in the town?"

"Bad element, hell!" the chief exploded. "You can't come in here and fill me with stuff like that! I know these birds."

"I've known them for twenty years, but you'd never let me get you acquainted," I shot back. "What—how did you happen to get wise to yourself?"

"You remember Ol' Murph and Calamity Al, don't you?"

"Yea—I remember when I left here you were making the Pass City hot for boxers and had both of 'em in jail."

"Poor devils!" the chief exclaimed. "You hadn't been out of town a week before Ol' Murph got a letter from his wife.

"He hadn't had it a minute before he wanted to talk to me, and I had the sergeant bring him up. My two kids were here when he came; they were teasing for something—say, you wouldn't know Ellen, the way she's grown up. I can't imagine she's eighteen, but—well, Ol' Murph came in and fidgeted around a minute and then handed me the letter.

"That poor little crippled kid of his was dying, and not knowing Murph was in jail, his wife was wanting him to come home.

"'What do you want me to do about it?' I asked Murph.

" ' You ain't never seen that kid, chief, or you wouldn't be askin' of me,' Murph said. ' Honest to Gawd, he's that purty you jest want to sit an' look at him! An'—an' the old woman—she—she'll be sort of expectin' of me.'

" I didn't know what to do, so I handed the letter to Ellen. ' Here's a prize fighter thug,' I told her. ' What would you do about it?'

" I saw right away I'd made a mistake—because she read the letter and then started crying and talking at the same time. It all ended up by me taking Ol' Murph down to the railway station and buying him a ticket to Pueblo.

" ' Maybe I'll have a chance to do you a good turn some day, chief,' Murph said as he got on the train.

" ' If you ever do, you'll shy from it like it was a rattlesnake—I know you birds,' I told him, about half regretting what I was doing.

" A couple of months passed without hearing anything from him and I began to figure he'd put that letter over on me, so I thought I'd look him up when Ellen and I drove up to Pueblo to visit my brother. I asked Chief Rouch up there about Murph—and it was straight goods—the—the kid had died—poor little chap.

" Do you remember those two jailbirds that were trying to threaten me 'cause I'd sent 'em up, that day you came to see me about getting Ol' Murph out of jail? Well, blamed if I didn't run plumb into them there in Pueblo! The cops later told me they'd been watching 'em for a week, but couldn't get anything on them.

" They handed me a dirty look—and I have a hunch they followed me—they'd been trying to get me for ten years, but I didn't think much about it, and Ellen and her kid brother took the car that night and drove down town to a movie.

" About half past ten a police car came tearing up to the house and Chief Rouch yelled for me to jump in.

" ' Don't get excited, chief,' he says as the driver turned the car around and shot down the avenue,' everything's all right—but your kids sure had a close call—couple of thugs stopped their car down by the railway tracks—bounced the boy out and tried to make off with the car and the girl—but they're all right now—don't worry none—some bird happened to be along there when it happened an'—man! It must 'a' been some scrap! He beat the two of 'em into a pulp—with his bare fists, I'm tellin' you! An' both of 'em pumping lead into him as fast as they could get a chance to pull the trigger. But I guess the poor devil's a gonner—he's plumb shot up.'

" I had a sort of weak feeling deep in my stomach, but before I could ask any questions, we landed down by the tracks on a side street and there was a gang of people and two or three cars and the patrol and ambulance. The kids were there, scared half to death, but not hurt much, and the cops were lifting the two jailbirds that had tried to pull the job into the patrol.

" Who do you suppose they were? Nobody but them two yeggs I'd seen earlier in the day! They were both still unconscious—the other fellow had sure used 'em up!

" He'd put up a hell of a fight with his fists, but they'd both riddled him with bullets before he clean whipped 'em. We took him to the hospital, and I got the best surgeons in Pueblo. He—he—they pulled him through, but—poor chap—he lost an arm and almost a leg out of it."

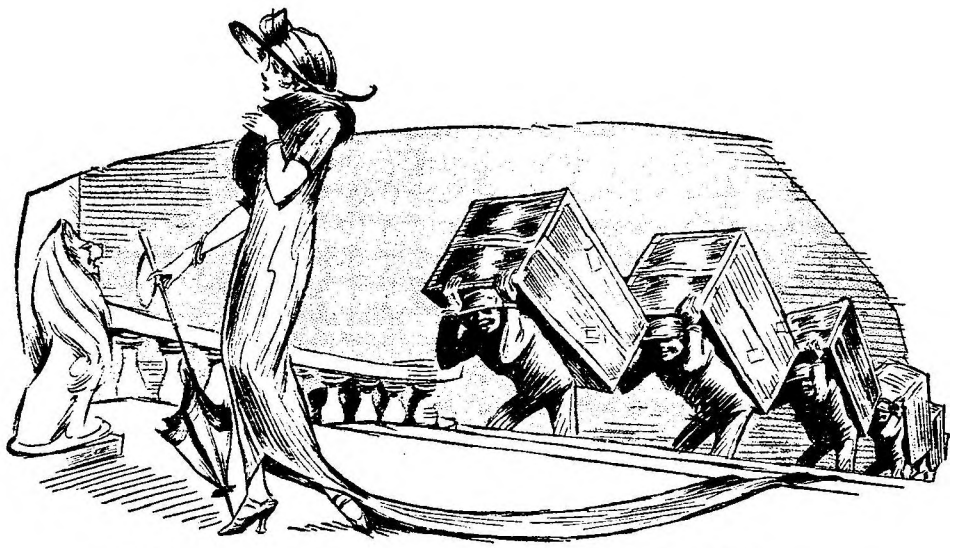
" How did he finally come out and who was he?" I asked.

" Well, there wasn't much I could do for him, but he'd always sort of wanted to be a policeman, so him not having but one arm and being lame, the best I could do for him was to bring him down here and make him a desk sergeant; an' he's a blamed good one, I'm telling you! Yes, I knew him—I guess he was a friend of yours, too—if I remember right."

The chief led the way into headquarters office.

" Sarg," he said to the Irishman back of the desk, " here's a fellow that used to take a particular interest in you."

" Lovin' bullrushes! How are you, Four Eyes?" Ol' Murph exclaimed, and getting up from behind the sergeant's desk, he limped over to me and we shook hands—both leading with out left mitts, Ol' Murph lacking a right.



Cat Eat Cat

By ROLAND KREBS

CELESTE ST. CYR blew into the city looking for a victim, accompanied by seven trunkfuls of talkative clothes, enough jewelry to outfit three rajahs, and a mess of money that resembled the public debt.

Celeste was a broadminded sort of lady thief who believed that the best results were obtained by spreading it on thick—or, if you prefer your words cold starched, affecting wealth and position. Never hold out a closed hand was her motto. For that reason this St. Cyr person always managed to pack a pretty well bloated roll of currency around with her.

There were many valuable attributes about Celeste, but that which was worth the first three millions was her innocent air and infant stare. To look at her you would think she would find the June picnic of the township grade school a thing filled with pitfalls and chance. In a word or two, Celeste was the kind to whom one might say: "Girly, this hundred thousand is all I have. Keep it for me until I come out of the ether."

That pose of innocence was of pronounced good use to Celeste St. Cyr in both of the "gags" she used as a means of livelihood. One of these was purely green-shoes work—confidence games, if that's any plainer. She would loaf around some expensive hotel and lead a rich dumb-bell along until she could alienate the affections of most of his bankroll. And the other gag—ah, the other.

Celeste had invented it herself, and had used it for years with great success. It had proved more reliable than the confidence game, because year by year the hick towns grow up and their residents get on to the mysteries of tapped wires and fixed races. Her trick was simply this, that she would get herself a position as a maid in one of the best of homes, let her innocent air festoon the place, and when the right

time came, clean it out from cellar to garret of everything valuable that she could carry.

To the simple that sounds decidedly simple, but to any one who has ever tried to get a position as maid in "one of the best of homes," it's intricate business. Our best people are not prone to engage burglars as butlers, poke snatchers as footmen, or gun molls as maids. References nearly as extensive as Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son are required.

That's where Celeste shone her brightest —with the reference racket. She always came to apply for a position armed with enough references to get her into a plenary session of the council of ambassadors. And this is how she got them:

After making a killing in a certain town, Celeste St. Cyr would move onto another far away, where she would set herself up in style in an apartment or transient hotel to live off the proceeds of the haul and lay plans for the next. She could easily afford a maid, or a whole colony of them if necessary, most of the time. So she would insert this advertisement in the "Help Wanted" columns of the newspapers:

> MAID—Only applicants who can supply written references from former employers of excellent repute will be considered. Apartment 718, the Melbourne.

Then all the little stupids who had worked for good families would apply for the position and bring their references along. Celeste, posing as Mrs. Worthington James or Mrs. Cabot O'Rell, would look at the letters very, very carefully and then scrutinize their owners. For a scene like this she just evaporated "class," acting in spring as though she just had returned from St. Moritz, or in autumn as if she were bound for Pinehurst. It always went over with a dull thud among the maids. They put her in Class AA, and each hoped she would get the job.

Finally, after assuring herself that the girl was the proper person, Celeste would engage one. Very slyly she would keep those references, sometimes for weeks and weeks. Then one day she would decide to go to Europe or Honolulu, or who knows where, and unfortunately the poor, dear girl of a maid would be out of a job.

Celeste would put away her finery, adopt her innocent air and baby eyes, and then herself turn maid. If, for instance, the last girl she had employed were named Elizabeth Malcolm, Celeste would become Elizabeth Malcolm, and, to her prospective employer, exhibit Elizabeth's credentials from Mrs. Soandso and Mrs. Whomsoever, living out on the Drive. Invariably she got the position, coming so well recommended.

When her chance came, Celeste St. Cyr would clean out her mistress's jewel caskets, trunks, wall safe — well, the whole shanty. Then to another town to try the gag again. It worked wonderfully well, and its inventor had her whole heart in it because she had thought it out herself.

Of course, like most anything, it did a flop once in a while. She had been caught once or twice, and her game was known to the police of several big cities, who treasured her portrait and finger prints; but we all know what Mr. Barnum said about the birthrate of a certain species of gullible human. It worked well enough to furnish her with a handsome living. To "work well enough" is all we ask of even a flivver, so Celeste was well satisfied with her scheme.

Now that we all understand each other, let's pick up the thread again and go on.

Celeste blew into town, as has been chronicled, looking for another victim. Her last term in service had been exceedingly profitable. The loot she had brought away with her she carried always in a rather large seal hand bag. It was fattened with:

> Nineteen hundred and seventy-eight dollars, mostly in fifty dollar bills.
>
> Four diamond rings that probably could set Morgan & Co. up in business all over again.
>
> A brooch of sapphires of about thirty thousand watt brilliance.
>
> A few "trinkets" well worth having.

With such an assortment, Celeste felt that the wolf could camp outside her door for some time to come and she could ignore his presence. Still, get what you can while the getting is good was another one of her mottoes. So, when she came to the city she moved into the St. Regis Apart-

ments and kept both eyes open. That went for her ears, too.

Each day she read the society news columns of the papers and here and there made tactful inquiries. Celeste observed in time that wherever a bridge party was mentioned, there usually appeared the name of Mrs. Davison Wall.

A peculiar thing about Mrs. Davison Wall was that she played to win, not because she had any illusions about the game being sociable. What's more, she nearly always won, too. Sometimes these games were "fast" and hotly contested. They were the kind Mrs. Wall liked, because she knew that chance doubtless would send her home with a pair of earrings won or a ring or cash.

She didn't need the money. Davison Wall's bridge construction company made all that he or she would ever need. It was just that gambler's spirit in her that cried to be satisfied. Therefore, each time Mrs. Wall came home, she added another bauble or two to her collection. All this Celeste found out. Women find out everything.

Celeste knew what the servant problem was, so she contented herself with the conviction that certainly within a few months, Mrs. Davison Wall, like every one else, would find herself again without a maid or a butler or something. That would be the chance that Celeste St. Cyr was waiting for. She hoped the wait wouldn't be long.

Meanwhile, she had to tussle with the servant problem herself and get a maid. Her customary advertisement went into the newspapers and brought the customary flock of applicants. Some of these she dismissed after a word or two, others after a longer examination. Her efforts at last weeded the group down to two. These Celeste found interesting, the one because she was bland and of a snap-o'-my-fingers type, the other for her apparent meekness and good behavior. It didn't take Celeste St. Cyr many minutes to decide on the second, because she wished to study that girl and adopt some of her mannerisms. It was this kind of girl that Celeste always had hoped to be able to ape.

"Your name, girl?" asked Celeste after dismissing the bland individual.

"My name is Patience Blow, madam," answered the applicant.

"And do you think your references are of sufficient bearing?"

"Indeed, madam. In fact, I think they are a bit unusual. Won't you look at this one first?"

Celeste accepted the proffered letter and noticed with satisfaction that the stationery was plain. The writing said:

> This is to tell what a satisfactory servant I have found Patience Blow to be during the two years that she was my maid. She understands her duties very well and never once has been the cause of any annoyance whatsoever. She is truly demure and quiet, scrupulously honest, and it has been a genuine pleasure to have her about. I would be as quick to recommend her as a companion as a maid.

The note paper was signed with the name of Mrs. Harrison Stilwell, whom Celeste knew to be a woman of the exclusive set and a civic worker of some reputation. The words that caught Celeste's eye were "scrupulously honest." She felt that she would find that handy when she came to call upon Mrs. Davison Wall in quest of a position.

Patience Blow's other references were nearly as good as that from Mrs. Stilwell. Celeste was mightily pleased, but careful not to let Patience see it. On the contrary, she looked the girl over rather critically and then engaged her.

II.

THINGS came along evenly and nicely for Celeste St. Cyr as she waited her time in the expensive St. Regis Apartments. She found it interesting to observe the rich women who lived there, and, better still, the not so rich blessed with the ability to appear that the world was their oyster.

She maintained a discreet courtesy toward every one, but kept quite to herself. By doing so she managed to have not too many acquaintances. Had she been working her other gag, the wider circle of friends the better. But, one thing at a time, says the Moslem proverb.

Meanwhile Celeste had found her new

maid to be all that the references indicated. Her taste was excellent, and more than once Celeste relied upon it in the matter of dress when unable herself to reach a decision. Such advice seldom was volunteered nor was it requested. It seemed just to come natural.

Patience's manner was invaluable to Celeste. She moved about so quietly that often her mistress did not know she was in the room. She never hummed to herself. Once before Celeste St. Cyr had employed a girl who nearly drove her frantic with undertone melodies. Patience Blow moved with catlike grace, and her eyes, like a cat's, saw pretty much everything that went on about her.

Early in their relations Celeste thought only once or twice about Patience Blow's being "scrupulously honest," and half wondered if she ought to put that virtue to an acid test. While she was debating it, the test itself came.

Each Saturday night she paid the girl. One Monday morning Patience surprised her by giving back a ten-dollar note.

"Madam paid me too much Saturday, and I did not notice it until after I had left," said the maid.

Celeste had not been aware of the mistake in her calculations, and thanked her for her honesty. Thereafter, she considered Patience Blow fitted to occupy any post that the United States Treasury Department has to offer those in America who are still honest. She let the girl take care of her jewelry, and even wear it in the apartment on one or two occasions when both were in the humor for such drolleries. She warned her of the need of being careful about who was admitted to her quarters because of the large sum of cash she kept about her.

"I travel quite a bit to escape boredom, my dear," she told Patience Blow, "and banks are so messy and funny."

"Yes, madam, I shall be careful."

On a drowsy summer afternoon toward sunset, Celeste St. Cyr left the St. Regis for a stroll up and down the boulevard before dinner. She frequently sunned herself just very slightly on a bench here or there where she could watch the swans in the park lagoons, the children with their toy balloons, or read an evening newspaper for its society gossip if she chose. This afternoon she chose to read the newspaper.

Before she tossed it away, Celeste turned to the classified advertising columns as was her practice, and ran her eye up and down the "Help Wanted, Female" list. She nearly cried out her joy at the discovery of the thing she had been waiting for so patiently. It was:

> MAID—With only the best of references. Apply 11 A.M., Thursday, Mrs. Davison Wall, No. 7 Hillcrest Terraces.

"11 A.M., Thursday," meant to-morrow morning. Quickly she put the newspaper aside and arose with some of that catlike grace she had acquired by watching the slender Patience Blow. She would have to act quickly. Only one story seemed plausible enough to tell the maid as an excuse for her sudden dismissal.

Celeste had decided on the spur of the moment to take a run out to California and play around a bit. That was her home, you see, and her mother, who lived in Pasadena, kept quite a household full of servants, where another maid would hardly be required. She would pay Patience two weeks' salary for the inconvenience caused her. It would be worth it, because Celeste had craftily kept the references that Patience had brought, and it was those references that were going to get her a position with Mrs. Davison Wall.

When she let herself in by her own key, Celeste St. Cyr found the apartment quiet, as it always was. She'd never have guessed the maid was present. She passed from one room into another. Patience was not there, either. Out in the corridor, perhaps, exchanging gossip with other maids or bantering with the men in service. Celeste went to her dressing table to dab at her face with powder.

She observed that a tiny silhouette in a jeweled silver frame that usually hung beside the mirror was absent. Celeste looked on the floor with the thought that it might have fallen from its perch. It was not there. Oh, well, she'd ask Patience about it. The thing wasn't so awfully valuable.

The principal thing just now was to be sure of herself when she approached Mrs. Davison Wall. She wished to affect a manner that would cause Mrs. Wall to single her out immediately from the other applicants with the silent observation: "That's the girl I want."

Celeste began to practice before the mirror, drooping her eyelashes and standing like a small bundle of innocence. There was too much powder on her nose. That would never do with Mrs. Wall. Celeste's hand reached for the little gold and platinum powder box. It was gone. Her eyes scanned the dressing table. Her ivory and emerald manicure things, too, were missing. The seal bag was not there.

But there was a note, left by Patience Blow. It said:

> I've heard a lot about you and this maid-servant stunt you claim to have invented. You poor fish, I was pulling this gag when you were sweet and simple in high school—if you ever had a high school education.
>
> I just wanted to show you that you were too thick headed to recognize the brace. I've skipped out with your diamond rings, your nineteen hundred dollars, you brooch and all the other stuff. You thought I was honest when I gave you back a ten dollar bill, didn't you? You never gave me ten dollars too much in the first place, you simp. But I knew it would give you a good impression.
>
> Let me warn you once more to stick to your own racket and lay off of this reference stuff of mine, because I got it up and I have the rights on it.
>
> IRENE DAILEY.

Celeste crunched the note in her palms. She was angry—angry as a woman can be.

First it vexed her to have had the wool pulled so thoroughly over her eyes by a fellow thief—a "redhot." But she was not a bit angered over the loss of her money and jewels. She'd soon get others. The thing that made her grind her teeth was the accusation that she was stealing some one else's stuff.

"The little cat," she said. "I stole her stuff! She's a liar by the clock, and I'm going to tell every dick from New York to San Francisco."

So, you see, while the Moslem proverb that "there is no honor among thieves" may be true, scribble it into your hatband that there is a lot of pride among them.

WHEN MARY WAS A LASSIE

THE maple trees are tinged with red,
The birch with golden yellow;
And high above the orchard wall
Hang apples rich and mellow;
And that's the way through yonder lane,
That looks so still and grassy—
The way I took one Sunday eve,
When Mary was a lassie.

You'd hardly think that patient face,
That looks so thin and faded,
Was once the very sweetest one
That ever bonnet shaded;
But when I walk through yonder lane,
That looks so still and grassy,
Those eyes are bright, those cheeks are fair—
When Mary was a lassie.

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Equipped with 3 of the latest type of dry battery tubes. WD 12 tubes use only ¼ ampere. Most perfect tube both for detecting and amplifying. Battery expense reduced to the absolute minimum.

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Remember, this is not a price on the bare set alone, as radio sets are usually sold. You get everything you need to install your set and start operating without the investment of one more penny. Just $5 is all you send. Get your outfit and start enjoying it. Even a free trial is yours if you take advantage of this unprecedented offer.

This is the satisfactory way to buy. Seize this first and last chance to get a Radiola at less than half former price. Have a set that all your friends will envy. Pay a little each month as you enjoy it. The greatest radio season yet known is here. Get ready!

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Just mail the coupon. That's all. No obligation. Find out all about the greatest radio bargain ever offered, Act at once and be sure of your chance. No more at this price when these are gone. Send the coupon NOW!

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Address.....

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Many users of Listerine have never discovered the unusual properties as a perspiration deodorant, peculiar to this well-known antiseptic.

Many times you don't have access to—or time for—a tub or shower. Yet so often your fastidious inclinations will not permit you to be comfortable in going out without considering these things. Right there Listerine steps in as a friend in need. You simply apply this dependable antiseptic with a towel or wash cloth. Note how delightful and exhilarating the effect really is.

It is an interesting thing that this scientific preparation that has been used for so many years as a surgical dressing should possess these remarkable properties as a deodorant.

Moreover it is absolutely safe. It will not irritate the most sensitive skin nor injure the most fragile fabric. You will be delighted with this new use.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, U. S. A.*

LISTERINE
– the safe antiseptic

Where One Is Safe, Four Others Pay

Bleeding gums— the telltale sign

Tender, bleeding gums should not be neglected. They mean that Pyorrhea is on its way. Surely, you can't afford to take chances when four persons out of every five past forty, and thousands younger, contract it.

The best preventive is Forhan's For the Gums. If used consistently and used in time, it will check Pyorrhea's progress, keep the teeth white and clean, and the gums firm and healthy.

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