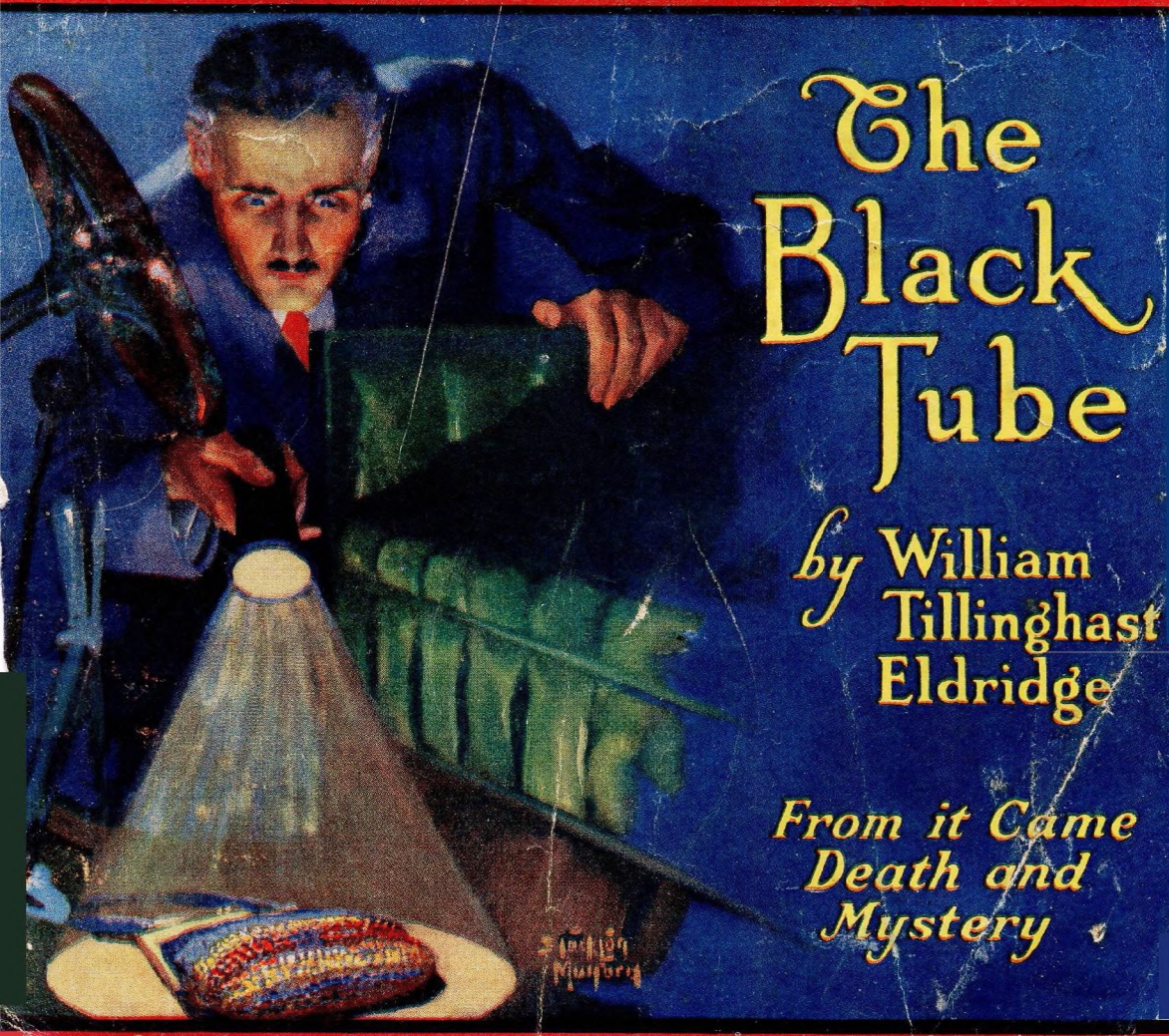
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The Black Tube

by William Tillinghast Eldridge

From it Came Death and Mystery

10¢ PER COPY AUGUST 11 BY THE YEAR $4.00

"THE WORLD'S FARE"

Discovers New Way To Teach Salesmanship in 20 Weeks!

After fifteen years an amazing new method has been formulated whereby it is possible for any ambitious man to get into this fascinating and best paid of all professions in 20 weeks.

By J. E. Greenslade

HERE is the biggest discovery that has been made since men first began to prepare themselves for selling positions through spare time study at home.

After fifteen years intensive study the National Demonstration Method has been perfected—and men can now step into a selling position inside of twenty weeks—with years of practical experience *in their heads.*

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For the sales problems which every salesman meets during his experience have all been charted and the most masterful way to handle each of these 64 conditions is shown you. In addition to the National Demonstration Method you will get the same wonderful groundwork of selling and business knowledge which has been responsible for the success of thousands in the past.

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This is the method that enabled Wagner—a fireman—without any previous business training or without any fluency as a talker—to exchange his shovel for a sample case and to exchange his poorly paid hard-working situation for the most fascinating of all professions; with a salary of $7,000 a year.

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are invited to write to the Employment Dept. of the N. S. T. A. No charge for this service to you or our members. Employers are also cordially invited to request details about the N. S. T. A. Group Plan of instruction for entire sales forces. Synopsis and charts sent without obligation.

After 3 months' study, in his spare time, at home, it enabled H. D. Miller, of Chicago, a stenographer, to step out of a $100 a month job right into a $100 a week position.

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Are you tired of doing routine work which wears a man out long before his time? Are you tired of the daily monotonous grind at a salary that makes it impossible to get any of life's luxuries whatever? Are you tired of the uncertainty of permanence which is always a feature of the average clerical position? Then why not decide to enter the profession where the earnings are high—where the constant demand for good salesmen insure that one may never fear loss of a position and where the work is so fascinating that it is like playing an interesting game and getting paid for it?

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This amazing new Demonstration Method—which gives you years of practical experience in less than 5 months—is all explained in an interesting book called "Modern Salesmanship." It also explains the wonderful opportunities which exist in the selling field and tells all about our free employment service. It should be in the hands of every ambitious man who wishes to insure that his future will be a bright and prosperous one. It will be sent free and without obligation. Mail attached coupon today.

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Dept. 2-K, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLIII CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 11, 1923 NUMBER 4

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS AND POETRY

COMPARED to a lifetime, twenty-four hours is not a long period of time. But in one fleeting day and night James Whitmore, of the inscrutable countenance, lived and died and had his life wrecked and repaired many times—and all because his wife Betty thought a rug was shabby! It takes a writer like **EDGAR FRANKLIN** to tell this kind of a story, and Mr. Franklin tells it in

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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

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Opportunity is here—this time in the form of that familiar I. C. S. coupon. It may seem like a little thing, but it has been the means of bringing better jobs and bigger salaries to thousands of men and women.

You *can* have the position you want in the work you like best, a salary that will give you and your family the home, the comforts, the little luxuries you would like them to have. No matter what your age, your occupation, your education, or your means—you can do it!

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

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50
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Sept 15th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close August 18th.

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TAILORING SALESMEN. ADD 50% TO YOUR PROFITS. Get the Wright line of MEN'S AND BOYS' CLOTHES. Lowest prices in America. Every customer for men's suit is a live prospect for a boy's suit. Women buy too. You double your sales and profit. Large samples of men's and boys' clothes in one outfit—handsome carrying case—FREE. Write for full particulars. WRIGHT & CO., Dept. C-22, Congress, Throop & Harrison, Chicago.

AGENTS—SOMETHING NEW. $3 to $16 daily easy. New Patented Cutlery Set. You take orders, we deliver and collect. Your pay daily. No experience necessary. Men or women. Full or spare time. M. H. MATHEWS, 1168 Kennedy Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

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AGENTS STOP WISHING—Work you can make $10 Daily selling Articles Everybody Needs. Particulars Free. Write B. & G. RUBBER CO., Dept. 339, Pittsburgh, Pa.

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NEW PATENTED ARTICLE. NOTHING LIKE IT. NO COMPETITION. SELLS ON SIGHT. Can use men and women Agents, part or full time. No experience required. Write at ONCE. Dept. 20, ARDEN PRODUCTS, 52 W. Van Buren, Chicago.

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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.

SELL MADISON "BETTER MADE" SHIRTS direct from our factory to wearer. No capital or experience required. Easily sold. Big profits. Write For Free Samples. MADISON MILLS, 503 Broadway, New York City.

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.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

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MYSTERIOUSLY guided by the behavior of a willow wand, sometimes a "dowser"—the water-wizard—tells where to dig a well which really yields water. Then much ado is made over the feat. But who ever hears similar noise about the dry holes, dug when the dowser flivvered?

Now and then, possibly, it just happens that people buy wisely without heed to advertisements. But the chances are against any one having such luck!

It does not "just happen" that advertised values are invariably genuine buying opportunities. They must be, because they are openly offered to every one who reads about them.

Advertised value must be true value. Else it could not keep on being advertised to a public so keen and critical as this public of ours.

Read the advertisements to be rid of guesswork!

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

Men and Women Wanted—Earn $5,000 to $15,000 Yearly in the dignified, pleasant professions of Bacteriology, Public Health, Osteopathy, Law, Pharmacy and Divinity. University degrees conferred. 15th successful year. Many splendid openings. Write to-day. National University of Sciences, 2025 Michigan Blvd., Chicago.

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USE INSYDE TYRES in your old casings and get from 3 to 5 thousand miles more service. Positively prevent punctures and blowouts. Used over and over again. Low priced. Big Money Saver. Agents wanted. Write for terms. AMERICAN ACCESSORIES CO., B-701, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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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.

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.

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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.

EDUCATIONAL

YOU READ THESE LITTLE ADVERTISEMENTS. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

Interesting Comments

from enthusiastic readers of the Munsey

"Somehow I can always count on MUNSEY'S, one is never disappointed, there are so many fine stories."

"I have taken MUNSEY'S for years and often find rest and relaxation in reading the bright, entertaining and virile stories published in your magazine."

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"I thoroughly enjoy every issue of MUNSEY'S and wait patiently for its arrival on the newsstands."

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLIII SATURDAY, AUGUST 11, 1923 NUMBER 4

The Black Tube

By WILLIAM TILLINGHAST ELDRIDGE

Author of "The Night Hawks," "River Robbers," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE LIBRARY RUG.

"YOU'RE ruined, Buckwell," came the sneering words.

There was not the slightest trace of feeling in the tone. Large of frame, heavy of jowl, massive—in a big, blond, flabby way—Willet Sands sat straight, his cold, calculating eye running over James Buckwell.

Buckwell was not a small man, but he seemed to wither, to shrink.

"You didn't think I sent for you to tell you this," Willet Sands laughed, as if, to him, there was something grotesquely humorous in the idea.

Buckwell gave no sign. He sat dumb, shocked, beyond speech. He had come to Brookmeadow, Willet Sands's country estate, because Sands had sent for him. He had hardly known what to expect, but certainly he had not anticipated this.

His tongue touched his parched lips. He tried to think. Which was the way out? How might he turn to escape?

His slowly lifting eyes reached Sands's face. There was no way out; he saw that

clearly. This man before him held the situation in the hollow of his hand.

Anger crept into his veiled eyes, his jaws set hard.

Sands brushed his heavy blond mustache with the back of his hand and laughed contemptuously, for Sands—no matter what might be said of him—was a fighter and abhorred the slightest sign of weakness.

Buckwell put his hands on the chair arms.

"I'm going," he said.

"Wait," snapped Sands, in that domineering tone which was a part of him and an insult in itself.

In answer to the bell Sands pressed there came into the library, from the room across the narrow front hall, a young man, John Deston, Sands's secretary.

He came quickly, quietly, with notebook and pen in hand. In his eyes was a sharp searching regard, but about his mouth there lurked the suggestion that geniality was lightly masked.

"Needn't take any notes of this," growled Sands.

Deston waited, silent, attentive. He had a clear mental picture of Buckwell without having looked in his direction.

"This man is done for," boomed forth Sands's deep voice. "I am taking over all his affairs. He's a beggar now, ready to start the fight anew at forty. We'll see how far he goes by the time he's my age. To-morrow he will resign the presidency of all the companies he is supposed to be running. Listen!" Sands swung on his secretary with a snarl so savage that Deston, as accustomed as he was to his employer's moods, was shocked. "This man knew my wife before I married her. She would like to get a divorce from me and marry him. Now he knows why he is broke—perhaps *you* know that I haven't been asleep."

Deston's brows gathered. He realized Sands was speaking to him, not to Buckwell, and that there was a personal application in the words which he should grasp.

"It's a lie," thundered Buckwell, suddenly sensing the meaning in Sands's words. "Who in—"

A swift gesture on Sands's part silenced the angry man as it swept him toward the door.

"Get out," he snarled, as one might send a dog from his presence.

Buckwell looked Sands over, glanced at Deston, and walked across the room. He had squared his shoulders. At the door into the narrow front hall he paused. It was one step into the hall, another out the open door to the broad veranda.

"I'm not as near done for as you fancy," he said, striving to hold his voice even. "You and your damnable ways have gone the limit this time. You'll get yours, and your money will do you lots of good—in hell."

He went out, across the veranda, down the gravel walk and—after a little—his car whirled away into the night.

Deston looked at the clock and noted the time, as was usual; every caller at Sands's "office" was set down, the time he came and the time he left.

Willet Sands did not seem to have heard Buckwell's threat. He sat turning a paper weight in his big, hairy, freckled hand.

"You heard what I said to him, Deston?" he suddenly demanded. "You can walk up to the house, tell Miss Thurston I shall not be there this evening until late—she just came out—and you needn't come back."

"You have an appointment at nine thirty with Mr. Vrooman," suggested Deston.

"I'm aware of the fact. What has that to do with your not coming back?"

The tone brought a frown to Deston's face. It was his business to understand the slightest inflection in Willet Sands's voice or mood, and to-night he seemed wool gathering.

"You can deliver that message, I fancy, before you pack, can't you? You may use your room to-night if you wish, or you can have a car take you where you care to go. It is nothing to me as long as you are off the place by noon to-morrow.

"You needn't come back here to your work," he added as he noted Deston's growing surprise. "Is that clear now? I don't usually have to tell you things twice and then explain them."

"You mean that I am discharged?" cried Deston, utterly dumfounded.

Willet Sands looked the younger man up

and down, a sneering glance that was filled with insult.

"Good evening—sir," he snarled contemptuously and swung to his desk, his sensual lips set in a hard line that gave to his overheavy face a look of malignant cruelty.

An hour and a half later, Amy Thurston, Willet Sands's niece, halted sharply on the lawn at the side of the house. She had just come from the direction of the garage, and her footsteps were checked by the wildly alarming rush of footsteps within the house.

For a moment she stood tense, her invariably pale face taking on an added shade of pallor while her eyes, big and dark, grew seemingly more brilliantly questioning.

Swift action laid its hand upon her. In her light evening gown, scarf trailing behind, she leaped up the side steps and across the veranda.

A door stood open which gave into a narrow hall between the library—used by Sands as his office—and the dining room.

On the threshold of the library—no more than a step from the open outer door—she paused, breathless.

Her hand went out to the door casing; a terrible blackness swam before her eyes.

Before her, his back turned, stood John Deston, revolver in hand. He had not heard her, but, standing there bending slightly forward his gaze was set—with what expression she could not say, for his face was hidden under the brim of his soft hat—upon the sight that made the very blood in her veins turn cold.

By the exertion of all her will power she glanced down again.

There on the rug, a sprawling, grotesque and horrible sight, lay her uncle, his vest stained a deep, growing red—a froth of crimson on his lips.

CHAPTER II.

BANARD CRATON.

AWAY from the city rushed the big car bearing Howard Marsh, Willet Sands's attorney, and Banard Craton, to whom Marsh had turned instantly upon the receipt of the incoherent call from Brookmeadow.

Sands had been shot; Marsh had been told that and little more.

In his nervous, quick and jerky way of speaking, he had given Craton the substance of the information he had.

"What was the matter with the man who called you—or was it the connection?" questioned Craton in his well modulated voice.

"I don't know," frowned Marsh. "Deston, Sands's secretary, called—at least I presume it was he. The voice was no more than a whisper, but I caught a faint agreement when I mentioned his name and asked if he were speaking. In truth"—with a quick nervous fling of his hand—"I didn't wait. I gathered Sands had been shot, and I said I'd come."

"This man Deston been with Sands long?"

"Deston? Surely. Thirty-four or so; been with Sands ten years or over. Knows more about some of Sands's affairs than I do. Mighty important matters left to him."

"Trustworthy then?"

"Surely. Must be; Sands evidently thought so. Surely."

Craton gave a slow nod and turned to other questions touching upon Marsh's client and the big estate toward which they were rushing with maddening speed.

"I don't know; I can't say," snapped Marsh in answer to one of Craton's questions. "But it's known, any one who knows Willet Sands appreciates that he has enemies. You don't want me to try and guess now, before we even have the facts, as to who could have shot him?"

"No," agreed Craton, with the faintest sign of mirth on his firmly set lips. "I wouldn't want you to do any guessing any more than I would. I simply fancied from something you said that you weren't so surprised to hear Sands had been shot."

Marsh swung with a sharp lowering of his heavy brows and a quick set to the lean lips. His thin face took on a troubled, harassed expression as if the suggestion that he had implied such a possibility by any word or act was disconcerting.

"Well, perhaps I'm not," he admitted nevertheless. "It is startling; such a thing must be. Startling, unexpected, incomprehensible! And yet one might not be surprised, knowing Sands as I do—his ways, the men he has broken, the business enemies his driving, ruthless methods have made."

Craton comprehended. He knew quite a little of Willet Sands, for the man held a peculiar place in the business world and his way of doing things had placed him more or less in the limelight. As he considered this and other facts his speculative gaze searched the fast whirling landscape.

He was not a man to jump at conclusions. His experience as a detective proved that conclusively and he realized that Marsh—whom he knew personally—needed no assurance on that score.

When Craton had devoted all his time to the law he and Howard Marsh had been associated together in more than one case. Prior to that time they had known each other in law school.

For a number of years, following their graduation, they had seen nothing of each other.

Craton, declining to take his place immediately in his father's firm, had gone abroad. He had made a reputation at college and law school of doing the unusual, and his trip into some odd corners of the world was along lines that confirmed this reputation and gave full sway to the spirit of wanderlust that was always tugging at his heart strings.

To look at him one would hardly have imagined that here was a man who had gone adventuring, taking the knocks and the rough with a *sang-froid* few could display.

His ruddy face and well set up figure, clad with exceptional care, possibly a little too fastidiously—although there was absolutely nothing to find fault with—rather suggested the man of means and leisure.

Craton might have occupied such a niche had not his dynamic energy precluded the possibility.

With his father's failing health he had returned to New York, taken off his coat and gone at his profession with a drive that soon made its weight felt in an increasing practice. Then had come the time when he had turned, almost gladly, from his legal practice to the profession—and he made it a profession—of detection.

A rather notorious case had swung him in this direction and made his reputation as a detective far greater than had been his standing as a lawyer.

The newspapers had been filled for days with the account of a murder and the theft of a rare collection of jewels. There had been a number of arrests, but nothing to connect any suspect with the case to the extent of bringing an indictment. The police were growing ugly, for the newspapers were riding them with suggestions of incompetence.

A man named Jerry Mack was finally arrested. Craton noted the name in the headlines one morning and went straight to the Tombs to discover that this Jerry Mack was the same man he had known in South Africa. He appointed himself the personal counsel of the world wanderer who had been cowboy, miner, sailor, adventurer and what not in almost every corner of the globe. There was a strong personal bond between these two men at the start.

To clear Jerry Mack, Craton discovered that he would have to find the real criminal. The police had built up a first class case of circumstantial evidence; enough to convict unless the guilty man was found.

To accomplish his end Banard Craton became a detective.

The case had made his name well known. It had done something else to him; it had stirred his blood and shown him that adventure—for which his heart was ever crying—stood at his very elbow in New York. He turned to the new path that opened before him with avidity.

One case followed another through his hands, his reputation grew, and inside of four years he was obliged to shut himself away from the demands upon his time.

The big car swung from the main road.

"Sands's property," snapped Marsh. "Two thousand acres, all told."

Craton's eyes studied well trimmed woodland, broad meadows and rolling pasture with here and there a group of build-

ings. The magnitude and beauty was plain to be seen even at night.

"We are going in the back way," explained Marsh as the car swung into a narrow lane where the bushes flanked close. "It happened at the office, a big, old fashioned house at the lower end of the estate where Sands handles his business. He lives some distance above—a mile or more."

"I think I've been through the property before," nodded Craton. "Every one knows it for a show place."

"It will make some stir if—if he dies," muttered Marsh, tapping nervously on the car door with his fingers.

"It certainly will," agreed Craton.

The car shot down over a hill and halted before a big, white house alight from top to bottom.

Marsh was down and running up the walk almost before the car had come to a full stop.

CHAPTER III.

CUT WIRES.

JOHN DESTON, his jaws set, hardly a sign of blood in his drawn face, met them at the door.

"Well?" cried the lawyer as Craton came across the veranda.

"Mr. Sands is still alive. He is upstairs. Dr. Forbes is here with a nurse. He has sent for two specialists, although he thinks there is little hope. Miss Thurston is also here, upstairs—waiting."

He was almost mechanical in tone and words.

"Mrs. Sands?"

"Went to town early this evening, and we haven't been able to locate her yet."

"You said he was shot, Deston? When did it happen? Have you any idea who could have done it?" Marsh rushed on.

Craton, standing a little to one side, was studying Mr. Sands's secretary intently. He noted the least pause before Deston answered.

"I haven't any idea. I found him here in the library—" leading the way into the room. "I was upstairs when I heard the shot. I came running down the back way from my room and in here. He was lying right by that door. The revolver was just beyond his grasp. I had hardly reached him when Miss Thurston arrived."

"The revolver just beyond his grasp," frowned Marsh. "What do you mean, Deston? Willet Sands is not the kind of a man to commit suicide."

A startled expression flashed across Deston's face for a second.

"I hadn't thought of that," he admitted. "No, I hadn't thought of that." Then with a quick turn he pointed toward the huge davenport across the room.

"His son, James Sands, is there—dead, Mr. Marsh."

The lawyer drew back as if struck. For a second he was rigid, his horrified gaze riveted upon Deston's face. Then he was around the davenport, which flanked the fireplace on the right, and looking down at the spot Deston had indicated.

"Good God," he whispered, lifting the steamer rug. "Craton, look! Sands's son! He's been strangled!"

Banard Craton had moved to Marsh's side. He dropped to his knees and peered intently at the ghastly figure. His eyes narrowed.

James Sands was a man well past forty. A big, bulky figure like his father, but fatter, puffier, with the signs of dissipation clearly written in flabbiness of flesh and facial lines. Even in the death pallor upon his distorted features heavy black puffs were plain to be seen beneath his eyes, while his jowls hung soft for one of his age. Now his mouth was agape, his head thrown back, and on his throat were red lines and bruises where fingers had undoubtedly set hard.

"Both of them," whispered Marsh, turning away; and then, quickly: "Is Mr. Sands conscious? Can he speak?"

Deston shook his head. "I got him upstairs before I telephoned for the doctor and you. Miss Thurston stayed with him until Forbes and the nurse came. She is in the room above here waiting."

Craton dropped the steamer rug over the body and rose to his feet. He looked at Marsh.

"Yes," snapped the lawyer. "Mr. Deston, this is Mr. Craton, Banard Craton,

the noted detective. Pending Mrs. Sands's arrival I shall authorize him to investigate the case."

"Glad to meet you," smiled Craton, holding out his hand. "Nasty business, a thing like this. It shakes a man to the very core."

Deston nodded as he regarded Craton searchingly. His face was plainly haggard and deep lines had come to mark his features. He looked old.

"When did Mr. Sands's son arrive here?" questioned Craton. "I gather that he doesn't live at Brookmeadow."

"No, he doesn't. As to when he arrived I can't say. I was away, up at the main house. I got back here and went directly to my room in the rear, entered by the back door. I was up there when I heard the shot."

"How long were you away?"

Deston frowned at the clock. "It must have been an hour or more. Yes, surely all of that."

Craton turned to Marsh. "You'll want to speak with the physician, I suppose. Will you take him up, Mr. Deston?"

Marsh comprehended Craton's wish to have the room to himself, so signed to Deston.

As they passed into the front hall, closing the door behind them, Craton stepped into the middle of the room. With chin up, eyes narrowed, nostrils slightly dilated, he studied the scene slowly, carefully.

In front of him was a large, flat topped mahogany desk with usual appointments including telephone. Beyond the desk was an open fireplace of magnificent proportions. To the right of the fireplace stood the davenport back of which lay the body of James Sands. Beyond the body was a door, standing open.

The library was a corner room with windows looking out upon the grounds and lane which passed quite close to the house. To the left of the fireplace a door opened into a narrow hall from which two other doors opened; one to the dining room, the other to the side veranda.

In the right wall—besides the door behind the davenport—was a third door opening into the front hall.

The furnishings were rich but in exceedingly good taste; the pictures quite excellent, the books on the shelves worthy.

A quick sweeping glance on Craton's part gave him these facts. He turned to a more careful and minute consideration of James Sands's body.

Rising at last to his feet, he dropped the covering and turned to an examination of the room in detail. A pearl handled revolver, with one side of the pearl inlay cracked, lay on the mantel over the fireplace. Craton broke the weapon and saw that but one chamber had been fired. Placing it to his nostrils, he drew a deep breath.

He went on about the room searching carefully for any signs which might aid him. At last he dropped into the chair before the desk, and, drawing the telephone to him, moved the hook up and down slowly. He failed to secure any response. Replacing the receiver, he drew open one desk drawer after another, and his brows contracted with the faintest expression of satisfaction. The contents of the drawers were in a disorderly condition showing that they had evidently been searched by some one.

As he moved again about the room his searching glance noted a broken bit of plaster not a foot above the floor and between the fireplace and the door leading into the side hall. He was down on his knees instantly.

When he arose he passed about the davenport and paused on the threshold of the doorway behind it leading into a closetlike room some twelve feet in diameter.

Just inside the door and to the left stood a small safe. To the right was a hand basin. On the farther side and beyond the basin stood a double-walled telephone booth more than twice the usual size.

Craton's glance once encompassing the room, he swung back the door to the booth. With a shrug he noted the large spring hinges which held the door closed and required an unusual amount of strength to throw it open.

The booth contained a small table, upon which stood the instrument, and a chair.

Craton was answered by Central the instant he removed the receiver.

"Jerry?" he asked, as he got his number. "I'm at Willet Sands's estate, Brookmeadow. Better get right out and bring two men with you. You know the way? Good."

He hung up and drew a deep breath into his lungs. His brows clouded. Then he cast a quick glance about the floor, picked up a pencil and the top of what appeared a fountain pen, and scraped up a small quantity of wax which lay in a tiny spot on the floor under the table.

An examination of the walls of the booth resulted in his finding a single hair caught on a sliver close to the door; not over three feet from the floor.

Stepping out into the room, his eyes sought the telephone wires which ran from the booth to the desk extension in the library.

Standing on a chair, he discovered, back of the picture molding, where they had been cut and removed for a distance of four feet.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE HOUSE.

FROM the library Craton passed through the side hall and into the dining room. This room was long and wide with a high wainscoting done in dull white against which the richness of the mahogany highboy, the old fashioned straight backed chairs and the round table stood out with rich distinction.

In all details the house was furnished as one might expect to find a home rather than a building used as an office, which was virtually the sole use made of the old rambling house.

Ten minutes in the rear of the house, a quick trip around the veranda, and Craton passed through the library into the hall.

Marsh stepped from the room on the right, closing the door behind him.

"I've been upstairs. Sands is still alive. Miss Thurston is in the room right over the library. She is pretty well broken up, but I didn't suggest her going, thinking you might want to talk with her."

"I will in a little while. I want to get Deston's story first."

"He's in here"—nodding behind him. "I've been talking with him, and he appears quite frank, but he's nervous, and—well, judge for yourself."

There was that in Marsh's tone and manner more than his words which caused Craton's brow to lift.

"I want to go over the house, the upper part. Let Deston come with me. He might as well show me about. There seems to be no servants around, save the chauffeurs outside."

"There is only one servant, a fellow by the name of Akron," explained Marsh, as he opened the door at his back and spoke to Deston.

"He's in the kitchen, I suppose?" suggested Craton.

"Akron? He's out," corrected Deston. "He had a telephone call saying his mother was quite ill."

"Doesn't have much to do, I fancy," mused Craton.

"Not a great deal. Cooks my meals—I live here, you know—and looks after the inside of the house. Once in a while Mr. Sands has business friends here for luncheon or dinner."

"And this man Akron is the only servant?"

"The only one except a gardener who takes care of the grounds. He lives in a cottage up the road to the left, and comes down in the morning."

Craton nodded. "I want to glance over the house to get a general idea of the plan in my head. Perhaps you'll lead the way, Mr. Deston."

Marsh went back into the room on the right, used by Deston as his office, while the two passed into the library.

"Queer about that revolver," mused Craton, pausing at the mantel. "If he did shoot himself it is certainly odd; doesn't look like a man's weapon, a big, domineering man like Sands."

His glance was apparently upon the pistol, but his eyes—which had a faculty of seeing what they were not looking at—caught the change in expression on Deston's face.

It was slight, to be sure; hardly more than a tightening of the firm lips, the merest indrawing of the nostrils, possibly a slight contraction of the eyes such as a man might show catching his breath quickly.

"It isn't Mr. Sands's revolver," answered Deston slowly. "He has one which he keeps in the top drawer of his desk. It is most likely—"

"Never mind looking for it now. This revolver, then—whose is it?"

"It is the one I found lying just beyond Mr. Sands's grasp, as I think I explained. I picked it up and laid it on the mantel."

"Wondered how it came there," nodded Craton. "We'll go on through the house."

Deston led the way through the dining room into the kitchen and pantries. The rear stairs went up from a hall off the dining room and kitchen. Before mounting to the upper floor Craton excused himself and passed out the back door. He was gone for some time. When he returned he and Deston climbed the rear stairs.

Deston threw open door after door.

"My bedroom and sitting room," he explained. "This is Akron's room and these are extra bedrooms used when there happens to be more guests than can be taken care of at the main house. This room is the chamber Mr. Sands used when he slept here. The room in front is a sitting room he also used. Miss Thurston is in there."

"We won't disturb her," suggested Craton.

"Here is a bedroom and in front, the corner room, nearer the head of the stairs, is another. I carried Mr. Sands in there."

Craton stepped back and motioned Deston to go ahead. As they entered the darkened chamber where the ashen-faced figure lay so still and deathlike the detective's glance was on Deston rather than the gray face on the smooth pillow.

A white capped nurse sat silent, watchful, Willet Sands's huge hand in hers, her finger resting upon the pulse. By the window Dr. Forbes and the two hastily summoned specialists stood talking in low tones.

It was a big room with many windows, and through them, thrown open to the soft night, a fragrant current of air stole in.

Craton crossed, spoke a few words with the physicians and came back to the bed. His fingers closed over the limp wrist, and as he caught the faint pulse he lifted the hand and turned it over.

Reaching across the bed he lifted Sands's other hand and glanced at it.

"Have his hands been washed?" he questioned in a whisper. The nurse shook her head.

CHAPTER V.

DESTON'S STORY.

CRATON and Deston rejoined Marsh.

"How about notifying the authorities?" questioned Craton.

"Never thought of it," admitted Deston.

Craton turned to Marsh, who picked up the telephone, got the connection and finally hung up.

"I was talking with Coroner Sutton," explained the lawyer. "He said he'd be along at once and bring the sheriff with him."

Craton sank into a chair and settled back with a sigh. He had the appearance of being quite unruffled and with ample time on his hands. Slowly he turned and looked at Deston.

"I want to say one thing before I have to be asking questions. What success I have is because of system. I can't look a situation in the face and tell you offhand what has happened. I may be able to do some guessing—if I care to—but I can only be certain of the truth when I know. To know means facts, all the facts. Get the idea, Mr. Deston?"

"In other words," answered the younger man, looking the detective over calmly, "you expect me to give you every incident I can recall no matter how trifling it may seem to me and allow you to judge of its value."

"Exactly. You get my idea because you can appreciate the sense in it. More, you are one who can read men and you know I'm not talking for effect—that I mean just what I say."

"Possibly," admitted Deston with no change in expression.

Marsh, who, in his nervous manner, had begun to pace the rug, shot a look at Mr. Sands's secretary. The lawyer was a keen reader of human nature and he fancied he caught a note of hostility in Deston's tone. His eyes turned on Craton. If the detective had sensed anything of the kind he gave no sign. With a smile and a nod of apparent satisfaction he settled back in his chair.

"Now that that is understood, let's get to it. You ought to know where to begin."

Deston considered just a second. His lean fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the arm of his chair as his eyes regarded the opposite wall. He seemed quite oblivious of the two men watching him so intently.

"I imagine," he said, speaking slowly and without shifting his gaze, "that I had as well commence with Mr. Buckwell's call. Mr. James Buckwell, Mr. Marsh."

The lawyer gave a curt nod as he halted in his pacing and regarded Deston questioningly.

"He was here this evening. Mr. Sands sent for him. He left at eight forty-five. What they talked about during the first part of the interview I have no idea. I was in here. Mr. Sands rang for me and I went to the library. He then stated that he had ruined Mr. Buckwell."

"What!" exploded Marsh.

"Those were his words, Mr. Marsh," went on Deston. "He said that Mr. Buckwell would resign the presidency of every company to-morrow."

"But why? Why should Sands have done such a thing?" cried Marsh.

A shade of annoyance crept into Craton's face, but he kept silent.

"Mr. Sands stated to me in Mr. Buckwell's presence that he did so because Mrs. Sands wished to get a divorce and marry Mr. Buckwell."

Marsh sank into the nearest chair in dumb amazement. "You are sure—he said that?" he asked.

Deston nodded.

"Is it true?" demanded Craton sharply.

"It might be," admitted Marsh reluctantly. "Mr. Sands has for some time had the idea in his head that Mrs. Sands was going to sue for a divorce and that she wanted to marry some one else. He has talked with me about it and I know—it was against my advice—he has had his wife watched. He never told me it was Buckwell."

"Could Mrs. Sands have found grounds for a divorce?" questioned Craton.

Marsh looked a little troubled. "I—I suppose grounds could have been found. Mr. Sands was a man who thought of nothing but business, Craton, except at times. Sometimes he—he—well, he ran wild. He would have these moments. He drank then and I've never gone farther into those periods, I haven't cared to do so."

"We'll drop them unless we have to look that way," suggested Craton. "Go on, Mr. Deston."

Deston considered a moment. "Where was I? Oh, yes. Mr. Buckwell left. As he went out the front door he told Mr. Sands that he had gone too far this time, that he would get his for what he had done. His exact words as near as I can recall them were: 'You have gone the limit this time, but you'll get yours and your money will do you lots of good in hell.'"

Marsh started to his feet, but sank back at a quick sign from Craton.

"Did you take these words down?" Craton asked.

"No, but I recall them clearly."

"Then what?"

"Mr. Sands turned to me and told me to go to his home—it is about half a mile from here through the woods—and tell Miss Thurston he would not be up until late. He had an appointment at nine thirty with Mr. Vrooman. I do not know whether that appointment was kept or not. I left to do Mr. Sands's errand. I—well, I had as well admit it, I was considerably disturbed for Mr. Sands had told me he would not want my service any more; that I was to leave here by noon to-morrow."

Marsh bent forward like a shot. "You mean he discharged you?" he cried.

A faint smile touched Deston's lips, a smile that came very close to being a sneer, while a gleam of smoldering anger flashed for just a second in his eyes.

"I do," he said quietly. "It may not be a pleasant admission to make and it may,"

with a nod for Craton, "sound damaging, but it is the truth."

"Go on," sighed Marsh, and got to his feet.

"I went to my room and then up through the woods following the path out of the old flower garden in the rear. Miss Thurston was not in the house. I looked for her in the garden, and failing to find her left the message with the butler. I started back and I—I met Miss Thurston in the path. I—I think—you see, there are several paths that converge just below the pond—they come from different parts of the ground. I think—that is, she came out of one of these side paths, the one that runs off around the pond toward the east side, where there is a large grove; yes," with a nod, "that is the path she came along. I gave her Mr. Sands's message and returned here. Entering by the rear door I went straight up to my room and had not been there long—I was packing—when I heard the shot.

"I raced down the back stairs, through the dining room, and found Mr. Sands as I have already told you. I picked up the revolver and had hardly done so when Miss Thurston came into the room. Is that in sufficient detail, Mr. Craton?"

"Why did you pick up the revolver?" came the calm question.

"Why?" Deston frowned and a rather mirthless laugh touched his lips. "I can't say unless it was right at my feet. I think I nearly stepped on it."

"You recognized it; isn't that the reason?"

"Recognized that revolver! No!" snapped Deston.

Craton considered a moment, not at all unconscious of a slight hostility in Deston's manner.

"Miss Thurston—by which door did she enter?"

"From the side hall, the hall between the library and dining room."

"She was in the house then?"

"Certainly not. Of course she wasn't. She undoubtedly came in the side door—these three doors are all together. She came in the side door and right into the library. You enter one and you are at the other."

"You saw her enter from the veranda?"

"No," admitted Deston hesitatingly, "and yet—now that I come to think about it—I am very certain I heard her steps on the veranda floor. I did not see her, however, until she pushed by me."

"I think I understand now," admitted Craton, with the slightest hint of apology for not grasping the facts more quickly. "Do you fancy, Mr. Deston, Miss Thurston could have heard the shot? Isn't it just possible she was attracted by the sound of your footsteps on the stairs as you raced down the back way? You'd have come on the jump, of course."

"Surely. I cleared the stairs three at a time."

"And you would have made considerable noise. No," with a shake of his head, "I'm afraid I'm wrong there. You wear rubber heels and that would have deadened the sound of your steps."

Deston turned one foot sidewise and Craton bent forward.

"To be sure, rubber heels, but not rubber soles. Well, perhaps the point is immaterial. Now what followed?"

"I stood dazed, dumfounded, incapable of doing anything for the moment."

"Natural condition," sympathized Craton.

"When I did get my senses I leaped across the room and ran out the front door, which stood open."

"Was the back door open when you returned after searching the flower garden?"

Deston shook his head. "The doors in the front of the house were, but that is not an unusual condition, for Mr. Sands always keeps the doors and windows open, despite Mrs. Sands's warning."

"Warning against what?"

"I can't say. But I have heard Mrs. Sands tell him he should pull down the shades."

"Lately?"

"No," confessed Deston, "some time ago; quite a while ago, in fact."

"Then 'quite a while ago' we are to assume Mrs. Sands had reason to fear her husband stood in some danger?"

"I have heard her tell him he knew that he had a great many enemies."

"He's always known that," put in Marsh. "Sands was a man who made enemies because he did things and did them in a rough, driving way. He crushed some as he went up; all big men do."

"Go ahead, Mr. Deston," Craton said.

Deston passed his hand across his forehead.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. Miss Thurston dropped to her knees at her uncle's side, and I ran across the room, out the front door and down the walk. When I got to the end of the gravel I realized the folly of trying to look for any one in the darkness and came back. As I entered the room I noticed James Sands's body for the first time. I covered it with a rug and said nothing to Miss Thurston. She had had enough of a shock. I doubt if she knows now that he is dead."

"And then?" urged Marsh, leaning forward, his eyes riveted upon Deston's face.

"I got Mr. Sands upstairs. Miss Thurston had gone for some clothes and a basin. When she came back I telephoned Dr. Forbes and Morrison, Mr. Sands's butler, telling him to try and find Mrs. Sands, and then to you, Mr. Marsh."

Craton studied the rug a moment. "What did Miss Thurston say when she saw her uncle?" he questioned.

Deston hesitated just a second and then said very quietly: "She asked me how I could have shot him."

Marsh came to his feet as if a shot had been fired. He stared at the younger man.

"Do you mean to tell me, Deston, that she charged you with murder?"

"I hardly see how her words could be otherwise construed."

"What did you say?" asked Craton.

"I made no answer, and since then we have hardly exchanged a dozen words, in fact, I have hardly seen Miss Thurston. She did come downstairs just as I got through telephoning to find out where I was. She said something then about my taking a long time."

"And you were a devil of a time," fumed Marsh. "What was it, poor connection? Central kept telling me to go ahead, and I kept calling for you and you never answered."

"You were telephoning from the library?" put in Craton.

"From the booth. The desk telephone was out of order. In fact, when I went to telephone I found the receivers of both phones off the hooks."

"Both? By the way, Mr. Deston, why did you go into the library to telephone instead of into your own office?"

Deston looked at Craton as if he was at a loss to comprehend such questions.

"I don't know," he answered shortly.

"Didn't know but what this telephone might be out of order?"

"Mr. Marsh just used it."

"True, my mistake. How about the length of time it took you to do the telephoning? Any reason?"

"It wasn't the poor connections. I got Dr. Forbes in an instant, telling central it was an emergency. Then I got Morrison. I gave your number, Mr. Marsh, and I heard you answer. The next thing I knew was lying across the table in the telephone booth hanging on to keep from slipping down. I had the receiver in one hand and I could hear your voice, but it sounded very faint. I managed to tell you Mr. Sands had been shot and then I went faint again. When Miss Thurston came down to see why I was so long I was just picking myself up off the floor. My feet were in the telephone booth, my head outside, and the door against my body."

Craton's eyes were set on Deston's face in a searching stare that seemed to cleave to the very depth of his soul.

"Inclined to faint, Mr. Deston?" he asked.

"Never did before in my life."

"Excuse me a moment." Craton jumped to his feet and hurried from the room.

He went through the library and into the room containing the telephone booth.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNANSWERED QUESTION.

CRATON stepped off the chair he had placed close to the telephone booth and from which he was able to make a careful examination of the top.

As he set the chair back against the wall he yanked the door of the booth open, stepped inside and drew a deep breath. For fully five minutes he stood perfectly still, filling his lungs rapidly with deep inhalations.

"Too late," he snapped, a shade of disappointment in his voice.

Drawing the instrument to him he took down the receiver.

"I dislike to trouble you," he explained when central answered, "but I wonder if you can tell me how long this line has been out of order during the evening."

Central had listened in when Deston called for Dr. Forbes and added it was an emergency and so she was partly aware of what had happened at Brookmeadow.

"I didn't know that the line had been out of order," she answered, her curiosity making her only too willing to talk.

"The receivers were both off the hooks," he explained. "Could you look up your records and see when you called this number last or when you had a call from here?"

"There doesn't seem to have been any call since six," came the answer after a few minutes. "At six there was a long distance call for Mr. Deston, but he wasn't there. At nine thirty-five there was a call for Mr. Sands; you know Mr. Deston's phone has a different number from Mr. Sands's. That call came from Needham's grocery store in Stonebrook. I rang a number of times, but no one answered, although they did take down the hook. The next was when Mr. Deston called Dr. Forbes."

"I think that covers what I wanted to know," said Craton. "Thank you very much. I'll send some one up to get those figures exactly."

"All right, sir, but you know having the receivers off the hooks isn't anything strange. Mr. Sands takes 'em off lots of times when he don't want to be bothered. Our orders are just to tell who ever calls the lines won't answer when the receivers are off."

"I see," agreed Craton, and hung up.

He rejoined Marsh and Deston with an apologetic smile.

"Have to excuse me for running off like that, but I forget things sometimes I should have looked up. Now, Mr. Deston, you said, I think, that you keep a list of all callers. Will you give me the names and addresses of every one who was here yesterday and to-day? While you are making that out I'll step upstairs a minute."

Craton returned before Deston had quite finished, and the detective sank into a chair to contemplate a cigar he had just drawn from his pocket.

"Thanks," he smiled, glancing over the paper Deston finally handed him. "Now, Marsh, put any information you can against each one of these men." He passed the list to the lawyer. "I notice," turning to Deston, "you had no callers this afternoon."

"Mr. Sands and I were both away. Mr. Sands went to the city to see a Mr. Gregg at the Biltmore and took me with him."

"A social call?"

"It was on business. Mr. Gregg wired he would be in New York for just an hour, and asked Mr. Sands to meet him if possible and to bring a trustworthy stenographer along. That is why I happened to go."

"Would you feel you could tell me the matter Mr. Gregg—it is the Mr. Gregg who is interested in a certain large mail order house in Chicago, is it not?—could you tell me what was talked over at this interview?"

A faint smile touched Deston's face; an amused little twinkle came into his eyes.

"Guess we can settle that quickly, as there was no interview; Mr. Gregg failed to put in an appearance."

Craton blew a cloud of smoke and laughed.

"Up a blind trail, eh?" he nodded. "Well, let's see; what time did you get back from town?"

"Half past eight. Mr. Buckwell was waiting. Mr. Sands went right into the library with him. I came in here."

"Sands pleasant during the drive?"

"He was very quiet. At the time I thought nothing of it, for he is often moody. Now, I suppose, he had already made up his mind to discharge me, and so didn't care to have much to say."

"Didn't Mr. Sands use his desk phone as soon as he got back?"

"I can't say. He went into the library and closed the door."

"Cordial to Mr. Buckwell?"

"Very short. Buckwell was on the veranda when we arrived."

"Then you think he had his mind made up as to what he was going to do to Buckwell before they talked at all?"

"I suppose so."

"Hadn't they had a misunderstanding in some business deal and that was really why he broke Buckwell? What he said about his wife was just a bluff, wasn't it?"

"I should hardly say so, but of course I can't be certain."

Marsh passed Craton the list he had gone over, and the detective slipped it into his pocket.

"The next thing," mused Craton, "is for me to make out a time card. You see"—turning to Deston—"I always make out a card for every person who is in any way connected with a case. I set down what facts I gather and keep adding to the information until in the end I have a pretty complete record about every single individual who has anything to do with the affair.

"It helps," he added, crossing to Deston's desk, "because I can go over and over these cards, over and over the movements of each person, their reasons for doing as they did, their reasons for not acting differently until in the end—well," with a shrug and a nod, "somehow just studying the cards, when they are complete, makes it possible for me to get at the truth. The first card I like to make out is one covering the time different events happened. You can help me, Mr. Deston, if you will."

He sat down at Deston's desk and drew a piece of paper toward him.

"We will start with eight forty-five, the time you say Mr. Buckwell left. After that you talked with Mr. Sands—that was when he discharged you—and then you left here and went up to his house. What time did you leave here?"

"I should say it was about nine o'clock. I talked with Mr. Sands not over ten minutes and then went to my room."

"Then we'll say you left the library at eight fifty-five and reached your room at nine. You didn't stay there long?"

Deston shook his head and drew his chair closer to the desk. When the time was set down for the different moves Deston had made, Craton had a list which read as follows:

James Buckwell left	8.45
Deston left library	8.55
left his room	9.00
reached Sands's residence	9.15
back at house after looking for Miss Thurston in garden	9.45
stopped at garage	9.50
met Miss Thurston by pond	9.55
left Miss Thurston	10.00
reached his room	10.25
heard shot	10.35
reached library	10.37
carried Sands upstairs after picking up revolver, running out front door and discovering James Sands's body	10.40
called Dr. Forbes	10.50
called Mr. Marsh	10.55

Craton slipped the card into his pocket.

"Miss Thurston came back with you, I believe?"

Deston shook his head. "I simply gave her Mr. Sands's message and left her. I was in a hurry. I wanted to pack and—get out."

"Naturally," agreed Craton. "I can understand your feelings perfectly. Yet Miss Thurston evidently followed you."

"I hardly think it is correct to say that she followed me, Mr. Craton. I suppose when I told her her uncle wouldn't be up at the house she decided to come and see him. She could tell you better than I could."

"Of course she could," agreed Craton, as if it hadn't occurred to him that he should question her on this point.

"I don't like to interfere," put in Marsh, "but I'd like to know, Deston, what your idea is about your discharge. Why should Sands have done such a thing?"

For once Craton welcomed the lawyer's interruption in view of the question. He sank back in his chair, his eyes on Deston's face.

For a moment Mr. Sands's secretary held silent. "I—I hardly have given the matter much thought, Mr. Marsh," he confessed slowly. "So much has happened that my own affairs have hardly been considered."

"You were surprised to be discharged," suggested Craton.

"I was."

"Were you provoked?"

"You mean was I angry—mad," snapped Deston, turning almost savagely.

"If you will."

"Well, I was. I was angry. I felt I had been treated in a way that was utterly uncalled for. If Mr. Sands wished to dispense with my service it was his privilege, of course, but there was no reason for him to do it in the way he did."

"And you have no idea why Sands discharged you?" insisted the lawyer.

Deston's lips parted in a smile. "I'm afraid that's something we will have to ask Mr. Craton to solve for us if he has the time to consider so unimportant an aspect of the case. I can't even make a guess."

Craton glanced thoughtfully at the lighted end of his cigar. Now he knew Mr. Sands's secretary was not being frank.

CHAPTER VII.

A THEORY.

THE arrival of an automobile took Deston from the room. In a second he was back.

"Sheriff Homes and Coroner Sutton," he announced.

Marsh turned to Craton, who nodded. The two officials followed Deston into the room and were introduced.

In a few words Marsh explained what had occurred and the five men passed into the library. The coroner lifted the steamer rug and knelt beside the body of James Sands.

"No wounds on the body—nothing but these marks on the throat?" he questioned.

"I have noticed nothing else," admitted Craton, observing that the coroner's question was directed to him.

The coroner bent lower and studied the bruised throat with minute care. Finally he arose to his feet.

"Do you believe those marks on the throat caused his death?" he demanded of Craton. His manner was the least bit assertive.

Craton shrugged. "Rather a question for a physician, is it not?" he asked.

"Well, I don't believe he was strangled and there isn't another mark on the body."

"Wasn't strangled!" frowned Marsh. "Then how in the world—what caused his death?"

The coroner glanced over his shoulder at the body.

"You all know what kind of a man he was," he suggested.

"If you mean what kind of a life he led, we do," admitted Marsh. "He traveled with a very fast set, was a heavy drinker, thoroughly dissipated."

"Spent a pile of money," put in the coroner in his assertive manner.

"Yes," admitted Marsh.

"Had an allowance from his father, I suppose; never did any work himself?"

"He had an allowance from his father, but he never lived within it—always after more money."

"And such a man, living such a life, undoubtedly had a weak heart," rushed on the coroner, a little breathless with what he considered the importance of the point he was going to make.

"You mean," cried Marsh, "that while he may not have been choked hard enough to have killed him the fact that some one tried to do so—judging from those marks—had brought on heart failure."

The coroner nodded, well satisfied with the point he had made.

"Then it's the same thing," snapped Marsh. "He was killed by whoever made those marks on his throat."

"Is that your judgment, Mr. Craton?" questioned Sheriff Homes quietly.

"It might have happened," admitted Craton, meeting the frank regard of the sheriff. "If some one attacked him and tried to choke him his heart could have given out under the excitement and strain of the struggle."

"That's my idea exactly," nodded the coroner eagerly. "His father and he had a quarrel. His father surely didn't stand for his continuous demands for money without some protest. Did he?" wheeling on Marsh.

"No," came the reluctant admission from the lawyer. "He didn't. Lately, however,

they have seen very little of each other. If James Sands needed money he came to me and I took the matter up with Mr. Sands."

"And did James Sands come to you for money recently?" urged Sutton.

"A week ago," admitted Marsh, his lips set hard.

"Did you get that money for him?" pressed the coroner.

"Mr. Sands refused to give me a check."

The coroner gave a satisfied nod. "And what did James Sands say when you told him of his father's refusal?"

Mr. Marsh made an impatient gesture. "He was disappointed."

"Now, Mr. Marsh," pressed the coroner, "we can understand your reluctance, but certainly you can appreciate the importance of the point I am making. What did young Sands have to say when you told him his father declined to give you any more money for him?"

Marsh turned across the room, hesitated, and came back.

"In substance he blamed me. He insisted that I had not tried as hard as I might, and he ended by stating, with considerable profanity, that he would get the money himself."

"Did he say how he would get the money?"

"He did not."

"But you understood him to mean that he would get it from his father?"

"Of course, naturally."

Coroner Sutton gave a sharp nod. "He appeared in need of money—badly in need of it?"

"I fear James Sands was always in need of money," admitted Marsh. "He was recklessly extravagant."

"There you are," Sutton exclaimed. "There was a quarrel as sure as fate. We'll find this was the first time they'd met since your talk with young Sands, Mr. Marsh. He came here, demanding money. Both grew angry, and—most likely—young Sands threatened his father. I'm not saying Sands meant to kill his son, but I contend James Sands collapsed in the struggle and that his father's hands were on his throat."

"Then who shot Willet Sands?" frowned the sheriff.

"Young Sands, of course. Finding himself fighting for his life, feeling his breath being choked out of him, he fired on his father, thinking it was either his life or his father's. It may even be that when he saw what he had done the shock killed him."

Marsh turned a frowning face upon Craton. "Do you believe it could have happened in this way?" he demanded.

Craton stirred quickly, like a man aroused from a deep sleep.

"What? Oh," meeting the lawyer's troubled eyes, "yes. It could have happened as the coroner says. We have a good reason for it all. Young Sands could have died from the strain of the struggle or through shocks and—surely it might be so—but where is James Sands's revolver if he fired the shot?"

"Isn't his pistol here?" frowned Sutton.

"There is a revolver on the mantel. Mr. Deston found it near the door to the side hall and laid it up there," answered Craton.

The sheriff crossed the room and picked up the pearl handled revolver.

"Rather a small affair," he scowled. "Did it belong to James Sands?"

"I think not," answered Craton, the merest trace of a smile on his lips. "His revolver is in his pocket, fully loaded. Excuse me; I hear a car, and I fancy it sounds like mine."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BULLET IN THE WALL.

CRATON hurried down the walk and uttered a faint whistle. He was answered instantly from the touring car which had drawn up on the lawn. A short, stocky man with decidedly bowed legs came toward him. The man walked with a slouch to his shoulders and a roll to his gait. He appeared, as was the fact, to have straddled a horse often and still to have retained the swinging roll of a sailor.

Jerry Mack had been with Banard Cra-

ton ever since Craton had, through his defense of Mack, stepped into the limelight as a detective.

The two men went around the house and into the old flower garden in the rear. Craton swiftly sketched the facts while Mack sat, stolidly silent, apparently uninterested, but in reality mindful of every little point his master was making.

"Who's with you?" asked Craton, when he had stated the case.

"Dally and Sawyer."

"Here's a list of the things I want done," he said, passing out a paper. "Let Sawyer and Dally take those. I've something else for you."

Jerry snapped his pocket flash on the page from Craton's notebook.

With a swift glance he read:

Some one called from Needham's grocery store in Stonebrook at nine thirty-five on telephone. They got the connection, but failed to get an answer. Who telephoned?

James Buckwell, Westland Apartments. Left here at eight forty-five—in his car. Any one with him? What time did he reach home?

Harry Akron. Servant at office. What do other servants say about him? His mother lives at 36 Lincoln Road, Yonkers. Is she ill? Did Akron go there this evening?

Samuel Vrooman, 19 Cortlandt Avenue. Where was he yesterday? To-day? Trace movements this evening in detail.

The names of all men and women friends of James Sands.

James Sands's movements this evening. He reached Brookmeadow about nine. Any one with him when he left town?

The time Mrs. Sands started to town in her car. Where did she go? Haven't traced her by telephoning up to now. What kind of a dress did she have on?

"If Dally and Sawyer find they can't cover that by to-morrow noon tell them to put other men out. I want quick work."

Craton watched the stocky figure of his absolutely reliable henchman roll away and got to his feet.

Walking into the upper part of the old flower garden, he paused as a signal came from back of him. He answered, and the next minute Jerry Mack was again at his side.

"Right," came the succinct report.

Craton gave a nod and began to speak.

"There were two, possibly three, women about here recently. Here"—passing over a slip of paper—"are the measurements of their boots, as near as I can get them. One went out the gate at the upper corner of this garden. A man followed her—Sands's secretary, I'm pretty sure, from a mark in the soft earth. He wears rubber heels—new ones put on his shoes a few days ago—and the trade mark is plain in the earth. He went past that gate up there a hundred yards or so and then came back. The woman went on. The rain yesterday makes it easy trailing.

"See if you can follow the woman up, Jerry, and get back to me as soon as you can. Better take a good look at the boot prints of the woman who went this way. Two hundred yards above the house you'll see where a car stood some time—oil on the grass—and a deep mark in the road, showing it left with a jump. Around that car are a number of prints of this woman's boots, and also a man's."

"With rubber heels?"

"Different man out there."

Jerry turned and was gone into the darkness without another word.

Craton went leisurely toward the house, but paused on the lawn to look over the collection of cars. A gray roadster stood apart under a big oak, and he walked over to it.

Flashing on his pocket light, he reached in and picked up a woman's hand bag. It contained a pair of gloves and a handkerchief. He buried his nose in the bag and drew a deep breath. There was a slight discoloration on the inside of the bag.

He slipped it into his pocket and lifted the flap on the inside of the car's door. A glance at the registration card satisfied him.

When he reëntered the library Marsh turned upon him eagerly.

"There are several things we want you to look into," he exclaimed a little impatiently. "We've talked the thing over from every angle—"

"And arrived close to the truth, I hope," smiled Craton. "Where is Deston?"

"I asked him to step out," explained the coroner. "He's open to suspicion, of course, though I think you'll find I'm right

about Sands and his son having a quarrel. We could talk easier with him out of the room."

"He told you about the telephone receivers being off the hooks, I suppose?" The coroner nodded. "I want to call your attention to the fact that the extension line from the booth to this desk has four feet of wire missing."

"When'd that happen?"

Craton shook his head.

"Looks as if some one wanted to cut off the telephone connections so Sands couldn't call for help when he was attacked," frowned the coroner.

"But Deston's phone—a separate line—and the telephone in the booth were left in working order," objected Craton.

The sheriff had gone in to look at the cut wires.

"Four feet gone," he called. "Now, what the devil good would that do any one just to cut this one phone out?"

"It can't have anything to do with the affair," fumed Marsh. "What we want to get at, Craton, is the possibility of Buckwell coming back here and doing for Sands."

"Provided he did threaten Mr. Sands, as Deston says," urged the coroner. "Might that not be a lie on Deston's part to make it look bad for Buckwell?"

"It surely could be construed that way," admitted Craton, "but I'm inclined to think Deston is telling the truth on that point."

"But Deston had good grounds for being angry with Sands having discharged him," urged the sheriff.

"He can get a position anywhere without trouble," Marsh interposed. "You'll find Deston is reliable. It—it looks more like the coroner's idea is right or Buckwell came back."

"Well, Deston couldn't get a job at the pay he was getting here," insisted Sutton. "I asked him. Six thousand a year, and he didn't seem to care to tell me."

"He didn't have to admit Sands had discharged him," Craton pointed out. "No one else but the two of them knew about it."

"Well," frowned the sheriff, "the thing doesn't look as simple as it did at first. If Sutton's theory isn't the right one, there are any number of people who might have done it."

"We might even say that Sands shot himself when he saw that his attack on his son had caused his death," the coroner suggested.

Craton drew a revolver from the top drawer of the big mahogany desk.

"Mr. Sands's pistol, so Deston tells me. Why didn't he use it if he killed himself?"

"The devil!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Then where did this pearl handled revolver come from?"

"Can't say where it came from," admitted Craton. "But I'll venture this: Willet Sands did not choke his son. In fact, no one choked James Sands. I won't say more than that now, except that there is a bullet in the wall there by the fireplace. It's in the lath. I pulled away the plaster."

The three men bent down. The sheriff was the first to straighten.

"Where did any one stand to fire that shot? The bullet is going up, not down."

Craton nodded agreement. "That's a question of course. Where did the person stand? Here's another thing, a pencil and a pen top I found in the telephone booth. Showed them to Deston as we were going through the house, but he can't say to whom they belong. And here," laying the silk hand bag on the desk, "is what I found in James Sands's car."

"What!" exploded the coroner. "You mean some woman was here with young Sands and— Say, by gracious, that pearl handled revolver is a woman's toy?"

"Then who shot Willet Sands?" cried Marsh. "This woman? The one who came with James Sands?"

"Only one shot has been fired from that revolver," reminded Craton, "and I am inclined to think the bullet is in the wall there."

"And Deston says he heard only one shot," exclaimed the sheriff.

"So he says," came Craton's slow admission.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Twenty-Stick Island

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Fortune Unawares," "Fool's Gold," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

JIMMY THORPE, storekeeper for the Vila Trading Company, sat on the veranda of his shack looking across the lagoon to the spouting breakers on the barrier reef and, beyond that, through the reef gate, to the infinite blue of the sea and the infinite blue of the sky. The bay curved like the horns of a *carabao* and his view was framed with vivid masses of green, mangroves, screw pine, coco palm, flaunting banana, breadfruit, candlenut and lesser growths that thrust and twined and clung, flourishing under the equatorial sun, fanned by the never failing trades.

The island of Twenty-Stick, so ran the story, had once been purchased from the chief who claimed to own it for twenty sticks of tobacco. It lay twelve degrees south of the line and, approximately, a hundred and fifty degrees east from Greenwich. It might, Jimmy sometimes thought, as well have been in space, so remote was it from human intercourse and activity.

In the old days when savages, naked save for paint and barbaric ornament, went hunting for heads and *bokolo*—which is the native word for human flesh—when traders went blackbirding to supply labor for the sugar plantations in Queensland and Hawaii, the site of Jimmy Thorpe's station had been known—with reason—as Trouble Bay. It still retained the title, but nowadays, in 1922, it was apt to be intolerantly placid.

There was no plantation at Trouble Bay. Jimmy's mission—at the princely salary of sixty dollars a month and board himself from the stores at wholesale prices—was

to bribe the natives of Twenty-Stick and neighboring islands to trade coconuts for tobacco, canned salmon, fathoms of bright colored cloth, safety razors, mirrors, cheap perfume, alarm clocks and paraffin lamps. Then in the drying season, to husk the nuts and reduce them to copra, stowing the product in a warehouse against the time when the Vila Trading Company's three-masted schooner would come along for it, the supercargo would go over Jimmy's stock and, for two days, he would have white company. The rest of the time he had his own, and he was beginning to be heartily sick of it.

The company's agent had assured him, as an incentive, that he would be able to save all his money. There had been moments when he would cheerfully have squandered a month's pay for a glimpse of Broadway, one good square meal and a show. Or even for an ice-cream soda, or a sundæ.

Not that Jimmy Thorpe, who was man-size and twenty-six, especially craved sodas when he was where he could get them at will, but water and the liquor from young coconuts pall after a while and there was nothing else to drink on Twenty-Stick except the native *kawa,* made from chewed and spat out ginger root strained through coconut fiber and fermented, looking like dish water and tasting vaguely of soap while possessed of the kick of a mule and an uncanny power of limb paralysis.

The Vila Trading Company did not allow gin among their stores. That handicapped business somewhat, but Jimmy had made out fairly well, and he had been long enough in the South Seas to see too many men lose brains and virility in adopting liquor as a panacea for loneliness.

That was what was the matter with him, first and last, loneliness. The glamour of the South Seas was still upon him, he could still revel in the beauty of his island, the sea and sky; he loved the plunge in the lagoon, the rush of the wind among the palms, the long drumroll of the surf, the kiss of the trade wind on his bronzed skin, the joy of fishing with friendly natives on the reef at low tide, when the palm torches flared and shouts proclaimed the spearing of fat fish or wriggling squid.

It was not homesickness. He had deliberately come to the South Seas after the war was over and his own bit in it ended, come with the pride and hope of youth, backed by some three thousand dollars, to wrest a fortune from sea or land. He had tried both elements, shell, *bêche de mer,* coffee, and, last of all, vanilla. Copra was beyond his means. It took seven years for trees to bear, with wages sapping capital.

Inexperience and ill luck had broken his bank roll, but not his spirit. Since one must live or become a derelict, he had accepted the job at Twenty-Stick, where he could save all his money and have another shot at vanilla when he had got enough together for a start. He had it all planned out, but the goal seemed a long way off and, save for the busy season, there was not enough doing on Twenty-Stick to keep a vigorous body and active mind interested.

He could almost recite backward the contents of every old magazine, pamphlet and paper that he had coaxed from the dour supercargo on the last trip. He had an incoming and outgoing mail once a year. Keeping a diary was endless repetition of small events. The climate was without an outlet for ambitious energies, better suited to the lie-in-the-sun-and-let-the-fruit-fall natives than to a live American. His nearest white neighbor was the missionary, thirty-five miles away, a worthy laborer in an unfertile field whose zeal Jimmy Thorpe found it difficult to share.

He was bored stiff, he confided to himself, as he refilled his pipe. Faata, the wife of Tubi, the pair who essayed to cook and keep house for him, had broken the only decent record on his phonograph, and he was peeved at the incident unnecessarily, for he seldom played the weak springed instrument. He found himself drifting into recollections of home ways and days and checked himself. That way lay sleepless nights and a very ferment of discontent. If only something would happen!

He had tried the lagoon for pearls, but if there were any on Twenty-Stick, they were not for Jimmy Thorpe. There was no way out but to save the monthly stipend and stick it out. He had five hundred dollars. Five hundred more and—

He yawned. His mouth was dry from too much smoking. If only—

II.

TUBI, his shining black face ludicrous beneath its mop of lime-bleached hair, like a dirty yellow duster, came racing along the beach, leaping and shouting inarticulately with a display of excitement and energy that was disgusting. Then Thorpe caught a word that brought him out of the canvas chair.

"*Ehipi,* hah! *Ehipi!* Plenty fine *ehipi* come along!"

"*Ehipi*" was native for ship. A "plenty fine *ehipi*" could not mean the paint-lacking, gray-canvas company schooner. That was not due for weeks.

Tubi was pointing to the right horn of the bay around which he had sighted his find. Faata, ridiculously dressed in a short but otherwise voluminous though sleeveless garment, rushed out, brandishing a pot that she had *not* been scouring and broke into a babble of swift talk with her dusky lord.

Thorpe darted into the shack and out again with his binoculars. The "plenty fine *ehipi*" was coming into sight, a steam vessel of dainty lines, unmistakably a private yacht, white paint, twinkling brass, gleaming portholes, clean buff stack, clean ventilators, awnings, deck cabins and—streaming valiantly, the Stars and Stripes.

Moisture came into Thorpe's eyes at the sight of the flag and fogged the focus. It was a long time since he had seen that flag and, exile as he was, it meant a lot to him. He had fought under it, and his heart went out to it and those who sailed under it. As for the *ehipi,* so bravely equipped, that stimulated a gush of mixed emotions that made him want at once to cheer, fire a salute and row off to meet the world.

There was a man heaving the lead. There was no smoke coming from the stack, only the dancing dazzle of superheated air above the top of the funnel. She was going to anchor. The anchor, lunged as it was, tripped and the chain snaked out of the hawse hole. The yacht swung to double bow anchors, hawse clear. She was going to stop—to visit Twenty-Stick.

Thorpe's hospitality came to the front with a rush. He saw a smart little launch descending from the falls, a white clad officer in the stern—distinguished plainly through the glass by cap and blouse, a sailor in the bows, others sliding down the falls man-of-war fashion.

They were coming ashore! Not the passengers, or the gangway would have been rigged, but he prepared to welcome the officer and his men. It was too bad he couldn't offer them a drink—though they would likely have that aboard. The presence of the American flag did not necessarily mean that the Volstead Act was carried into foreign waters—but he could give them young nuts, fresh fruit, fresh fish—all the bounty of Twenty-Stick.

He resolved to hire the natives of the island village to round up the supply if it cost him the equivalent of a month's salary in trade. In return—this had nothing to do with his generosity—he would get an invitation aboard, he would talk with his own people, hear the latest news—there was a wireless antenna between the masts—have a highball with the skipper, meet the owner, perhaps be asked to dine. There would be a snowy cloth, crystal and silver, savory food, deft and deferential service.

He did not know how he had missed all these things until now. And he would show them that he was not the ordinary, slouchy, bearded, careless type of storekeeper they might expect.

His shack was not much to boast of, but it was in order. Jimmy shaved every morning, bathed, changed his linen, kept fit. And, if he did not altogether realize it, he was good to look at, tall and well set-up, clear and gray of eye, firm of chin, and aquiline of nose, the true type of native American.

He resolved to change into white drill and meet the launch, now heading for the reef gate. Perhaps the yacht would come inside—there was good anchorage in the lagoon.

He took a last glimpse at her through the glass, trying to read the name that winked in gilded letters. A-l-b-a—Albatross—that was it. Movement under the awnings aft caught his eye. There was the

flutter of gowns, a touch of color. *Ladies aboard!*

Thorpe was no anchoret, and his involuntary hermitage aided the perfectly natural excitation at the thought of the opposite sex. He had not seen a white woman for two years. The idea that he would not meet them on terms of practical equality never entered his head. Sure of himself, his education, his manners and native gentility, Thorpe's own innate democracy precluded all thoughts of snobbishness from people who had money enough to possess a steam yacht and travel at leisure. Thorpe had that possibility within himself. Moreover, they would be glad of a run ashore, glad to see him once they realized he was not a roughneck. They were Americans—citizens of a democracy that proclaims all free and equal. They might not invite him for a week-end at their country houses, but they were at sea, travelers free of convention, and he was, in a way, their host.

It was a spruce Jimmy Thorpe that awaited the coming of the launch to his copra wharf clad in speckless, unrumpled duck, with white-braided blouse and white pumps that he kept pipe-clayed for an emergency that had never occurred before.

The officer—first mate by the rating of his stripes—looked at him with a certain degree of surprise, Thorpe noted, as he welcomed the launch.

"Come ashore," he said. "Haven't got much to offer you, but the best of the place is yours. Plenty of fresh fruit—and a turtle, anyway."

"You'll have to see the steward about furnishing supplies," said the man curtly. The launch was alongside the wharf, bumpered carefully from contact with the piles. Two sailors hung on with boathooks, and there was no show of landing. Everything was spic and span, from the smart lettering on the sailors' white blouses to the dazzling shine on the launch whistle.

Thorpe felt rebuffed. The trim-bearded officer was a bit of a crab, he decided.

"I wasn't thinking of selling anything," he answered. "What else can I do for you?"

"This is Twenty-Stick Island? You're not on the chart or in the register."

"Not important enough, I suppose," said Thorpe with a laugh. "But that's our name."

"You're trading?"

"No. I'm storekeeper for the Vila Trading Company. There's no plantation here."

Thorpe was not going to sail under false colors, though he saw that the cold-eyed first mate immediately rated him on a par with an understeward, would treat him accordingly and so report him.

"H-m! Know anything about the lagoon soundings?"

"There's plenty of water inside. Twelve to eighteen fathoms. Coming in?"

"If that's the case, your company don't own the bay?"

Jimmy felt his gorge rising against the curtness of the man. But he was not going to blame the whole company of the "plenty fine *ehipi*" that had just swum into his lonely horizon because of the superciliousness or surliness of the *ehipi's* first mate.

"No," he said. "They don't own Trouble Bay. So far as I represent 'em—and myself—you're welcome. Ships don't come here often. They break the monotony."

The officer gave the order to start the engine and shove off. But he had something to add to his unpleasantry before he left. It seemed to have been evoked by Jimmy Thorpe's last remark.

"They don't like visitors aboard. They ain't permitted. You might hand that along to your *kanaka* friends."

The last sentence was a covert insult to top off the personal hint to Jimmy himself to stay ashore. Thorpe flushed and a retort came leaping that he cut short of his lips, turning away instead as the launch got under way.

So they were a bunch of snobs, after all! His friendliness had been imputed to a desire to sell provisions. Visitors were not permitted, but they had had the gall to come to his landing and ask questions. They could go to blazes.

He felt a natural bitterness as he watched the launch return to the Albatross and presently saw the yacht weigh anchor and steam leisurely through the reef passage, conned, no doubt, by the first officer who had taken his bearings in the launch.

Her cables rattled out again, this time in fourteen fathoms. The beauty of the ship was reflected in the calm lagoon, but she had lost grace in the eyes of Jimmy Thorpe. Tubi came up to him and asked if he was going aboard.

"No. They no want any one go along that *ehipi*. You tell that along village, Tubi."

Tubi goggled his surprise.

"Not much good, that kind," he commented, and Jimmy silently agreed with him. What the devil had they come into Trouble Bay for? Some minor engine trouble, perhaps. A purse proud bunch of snobs. He felt somewhat like a friendly puppy whose glad greetings to a stranger had been ignored.

He did not need any glasses now to survey her. He would not have deigned to use them. He did not look her way. A breeze from the sea bore to his unwilling ears snatches of laughter, light, feminine laughter and the deeper echoes from men. A faint lilt of music from a phonograph that must be to his decrepit machine what a Stradivarius is to a beggar's one-string fiddle.

III.

SUNSET came and the flag was hauled down and taken in. Lights showed here and there. The sound of the ship's bell came across the water. The lights mellowed—were reflected in the lagoon. When Jimmy Thorpe came out from his own supper for a pipe the yacht lay like a fairy boat. They were having a course dinner served in the saloon, he imagined, with the women in gowns that revealed their fair, smooth flesh, set off with jewels; the men in conventional attire. To thunder with them! He hoped that morning would see her gone.

It was not envy. Maybe the slightest tinge of it, but his friendly overtures had been repulsed, his pride hurt. And they sailed under his own flag. To them Twenty-Stick was just a wild place not worth the visiting, beautiful as it was. None of them gave a thought to the storekeeper who lived there, solitary and naturally craving for clanship. If the owner and his guests did not want to mix with a trader's assistant that was their privilege, he supposed, but the whole order of the ship was one of unfriendliness. No trespassers. And he was as good as any of them.

No one came ashore. They disdained Twenty-Stick altogether, self-sufficient. No shore leave even for the sailors. Again Jimmy consigned them to perdition to relieve his wounded feelings, but the Albatross obscured his view, it projected itself upon his solitude. He thought of going inside and starting his own phonograph, of playing solitaire with his frayed deck of cards, but he resented being driven off his own veranda, and so he stayed where he was.

There was more music, the rippling notes of a piano, a woman's high, clear voice. Later, laughter from the deck underneath the illuminated awning. Jimmy fancied this latter mirth smacked of revelry, was born of wine. It sounded out of pitch. He imagined deck stewards serving fizzy drinks, handing about good cigars and cigarettes. He was too much of a man to feel an outcast, but the contrast between ship and shore was a sharp one, and Jimmy was sensitive.

He sat it out, smoking pipe after pipe in the darkness. They were growing hilarious aboard. There was a woman's high note of laughing protest, a man starting to sing uncertainly. Then the deck was deserted, save for the watch. The stars gathered in the sky, the sky darkened toward midnight. Jimmy Thorpe dozed off in his chair. He had his own campaign of sanitation and mosquitoes did not bother his veranda. There were some in the mangroves at the point and he hoped they would annoy the visitors, though it was not likely.

He awakened with a hazy idea that he had heard a cry from the ship, half angry, half distressful, the swiftly suppressed shriek of a woman. He listened, cramped from his nap, but it was not repeated and he filled himself a good night pipe, though his throat was rough from too much tobacco.

The night was intensely still. The usual land breeze hardly manifested itself, save as it brought down the spicy fragrance of the bush where heavy scented flowers grew

and the leafy vines were odorous. It was cool and the quiet sweetness of the night set its seal on his spirit. Save for riding lights the yacht was dark and its presence no longer bothered him. He yawned and stretched himself, ready for sleep.

His senses were keen, like those of all men who live in lonely places. There was a splash in the lagoon, not an unusual night sound, probably the leap of a fish. Instinctively he looked toward the water. There was a luminous and moving streak upon it, the flash of something white.

His eyes were focused for the dark by his vigil, and he could see a form that was swimming steadily for the shore, the regular lift of an arm from which rolled the luminous drops of sea fire that made up the wake of the swimmer. The whiteness precluded a native, and no native would be swimming in the lagoon at that hour. Also there was a possibility of sharks, for the tide was at flood.

It was some one coming ashore from the yacht in a strange and risky fashion. His brain became instantly alert. Somehow he connected the visit with the cry he had heard a little while before. Swiftly he moved inside and caught up an electric torch, hurrying down to the end of the wharf. A landing there was easy at high tide.

The swimmer was close in, forging forward with regular strokes. Jimmy slid the switch of his flash and the light rayed out. The beam revealed an oval face topped with hair that gleamed like pale gold, showing the parted lips of a small and red lipped mouth about a resolute chin. Two eyes reflected the glow of the torch. A voice called to him, low, compelling.

"Put out the light—*please!*"

Jimmy obeyed reluctantly, his thoughts running wild. A girl coming ashore! Why had she left the yacht? Obviously because she found it for some reason inhospitable. He crouched at the wharf end, calling back softly.

"All right. This way. Land on the wharf."

The luminous ripples marked progress. The starlight revealed her last strokes, an arm reaching out for the stringpiece of the wharf, a hand, small and smooth, but firm, that Jimmy clasped. The girl got to her knees. She was in a bathing suit, short skirted. As she stood up she came to Jimmy's shoulder.

"Will you come on up to the house?" he said, somewhat at a loss for words in the unconventional situation.

She seemed to be trying to make him out in the faint light. He was glad that he had stayed up, had put on his white drill. Her sex and her youth appealed to every instinct within him.

"All right," she said, her voice coming quickly after her swim, "if you won't show a light."

"Not till you get inside," he answered. "There are shutters."

It was plain that she did not want anything unusual marked from the yacht. She had eluded the vigilance of the deck watch, likely to be none too lively in locked waters. The islanders of those latitudes were of Polynesian origin, not dangerous.

"Path's straight ahead," said Jimmy. "I'll go first. See all right?"

"Yes," the girl answered, her voice rather faint.

IV.

JIMMY THORPE found himself tingling with the sense of adventure. The touch of her hand, the sound of her voice, her pluck in making the swim, the risks she might have left behind her on the yacht, quickened him.

She followed him up the stairs, across the veranda and into the shack, standing still while he closed his shutters, struck a match, and lit a lamp. He saw her regarding him with wide eyes, appraisingly, and knew the eyes were blue and frank, with a touch of anxiety that vanished as she gave a little sigh that sounded like relief from apprehension. Jimmy valued that as a satisfactory estimate of his appearance. She must have feared what kind of a man she might find.

He kept his eyes on her face, fully conscious of her lithe, curving figure in the wet bathing suit, with the water puddling on the floor; anxious to reassure her, though the sight set his pulses pounding.

"Will you wait here for a minute?" he asked, and, as she nodded, went into his sleeping room, closed shutters, lit a lamp, ferreted out a big towel, caught up his dressing gown, shabby but clean, and took them back to her.

"If you'll dry off and slip this on—in there," he said, "I'll hop down to my store and get you something to wear. Got some muslin goods in there. I won't show any light. Know just where to find them."

She took the things from him, still a bit doubtful, he fancied, as he hurried to the store and gathered some garments originally destined for native trade, simple enough, selecting what he thought would fit her from his orderly shelves.

Coming back, he knocked at the inner door. She showed herself wrapped in his gown. Her hair was short and curly, he noticed.

"Stockings, but no shoes," he said. "Sorry. I can have the natives make you a pair of sandals to-morrow. If you want to turn in—it's all right."

"I don't know how to thank you," she said. "For the clothes—for taking me on trust. I'm coming out again—to explain."

It was on the tip of Jimmy's tongue to be fatuous, to tell her that she didn't need to explain anything. He had put strong restraint on himself in not questioning her, and he patted himself on the back for it.

"Great Scott!" he said to himself. "She's only a kid. And that bunch of snobs. Drinking and pestering her. Well, she's safe here, if the whole crowd comes after her."

Already he had declared himself her champion. It was born of the night adventure, their youth, his chivalry, strengthened by his resentment against the yacht.

"It's you who are taking me on trust," he said aloud. "Don't you worry. It 'll be all right."

He found Faata's stove alight, a kettle hot, and he made two cups of powdered coffee, poured some canned milk into a pitcher, put out some crackers and a pot of jam. She might be hungry. Anyway, the coffee would do her good after the swim. Gad, she was plucky! Didn't even seem nervous.

"And she didn't know what she was coming ashore to," he added to himself, thinking of some storekeepers he knew, the general run of them gin swiggers, with native beachwives. Of course she might have heard from the mate what he looked like. But he did not fancy the man's description would have been flattering.

She came out in a short sleeved slip of lilac print, looking hardly more than eighteen, exclaiming at sight and smell of coffee.

"That was good of you," she said. "Thanks." She held out her hand to him.

"She trusts me," Jimmy said to himself. "She's a good sport. The right sort."

Her hands were well kept. Her accent was refined. There was nothing artificial about her, he decided, while he tried to place her with the crowd he imagined on the yacht. She didn't seem to fit in with them. But he held in his question till she had drunk the coffee.

"My name is Jimmy Thorpe," he said then. "I'm storekeeper here. Trade with the natives for copra."

"You live alone?"

"Yep. Got a housekeeper. Native woman. Sleeps out back with her husband, who's my man Friday. I'll have her in presently.

"Now"—he could keep in no longer—"what have they been doing to you on that yacht? I heard some one call out a while ago. Was that you?"

Her color slowly mounted, but she kept her eyes on his.

"Yes. I—they made it impossible for me to stay any longer. I had to come somewhere. It couldn't be worse—even on a savage island. I knew there was a white man ashore. They are—they are a rotten lot," she went on with a passionate flash in her eyes. "All the men and most of the women. One or two of them are just—silly. I can't go back."

"You don't have to."

"They'll know I've come ashore, of course. I dodged the watch after I had put on my swimming things. I went over the bowsprit."

"Didn't think about the sharks?"

"There are worse things than sharks," she said.

Jimmy Thorpe nodded. He guessed about what had happened. He was white hot with indignation, and he showed it. It wasn't hard to imagine what had occurred to drive a decent girl to a midnight swim through what—for all she knew—was shark infested water to a landing in the middle of the night on what she undoubtedly considered a savage island, with an unknown quantity in the shape of one white man who might or might not offer her protection.

" You're safe enough now," he said. " They haven't missed you so far, and they won't until morning—not too early then."

" Not until nine or ten o'clock."

" So you can roll in and have a night's sleep. I'll bring Faata in to bunk on the couch, and I'll roll up in the store. Lots of bedding there. Or I'll bring some of it up on the veranda."

She didn't argue the point, as most girls would, he told himself. She accepted his hospitality in the knowledge that he wanted her to have the best he had and that she could thank him most satisfactorily by acceptance.

" You said your name was Thorpe," she said as she finished her coffee.

" Jimmy Thorpe."

" My name is Margaret Dineen, Jimmy Thorpe. Peggy Dineen to correspond with Jimmy. I used to be a stenographer—in New York City. My people came from Danbury, Connecticut. I am a country girl—or was—and I did not like office work. I—I did not get along very well with my employer, and when I left he refused to give me any recommendation. That did not help matters any with the agencies or when I answered advertisements. I was getting down to the very last dollar, and I had about made up my mind to go back to Danbury."

" Home."

" No." She shook her head. " Not exactly. My folks were dead and the farm was sold, but I had relations there who would have given me board and lodging. It meant admitting that I was a failure, and I hated to do that."

Thorpe once again noted the firm, well shaped chin, and indorsed her last remark.

" I've been up against it myself," he said. " It's a bit ticklish when the last dollar grins at you. And you were only a kid."

She laughed at him.

" I'm twenty-two, Mr. Jimmy Thorpe."

Color had come into her cheeks, to stay, with the vigor supplied by the hot coffee, and she still looked absurdly young to Jimmy in the print gown he had furnished her.

" The last dollar was grinning at me sarcastically," she went on, " when I saw an advertisement in the paper for ' a companion to accompany lady—wife of owner ' that was just how it was worded—' on the voyage of a pleasure yacht to the South Seas and Orient via the Panama Canal. Good salary and treatment. Applicant must be young, good natured and well mannered.'

" I read that in Childs restaurant, and I broke that last dollar to pay for my breakfast and the bus fare to an apartment house on Riverside Drive. It was a gorgeous affair, and their apartment must have cost a tremendous rent. I didn't know how long that advertisement had been in the paper, and I was anxious until the girl at the telephone exchange told me the position was not filled.

" ' I should think you'd get it, deary,' she told me. ' There's been a terrible looking bunch after it, and Mrs. Melville's almost crazy. You look like you'd suit. They're sailing to-morrow morning. You'll get along with her fine if you humor her a bit and ain't too fussy.'

" ' What's she like?' I asked her. Somehow I wasn't so sure I wanted the place.

" ' Oh, just like all the rest of 'em nowadays, deary,' she told me, and then said I was to go upstairs. Mrs. Melville rushed me into taking the place. She was accustomed to having her own way, and she begged and pouted and practically told me to name my own salary.

" ' I get nervous,' she told me, ' and then I don't want to be alone and I shall want to get away from our guests because they are perpetually wanting to be amused and entertained and don't understand that a hostess needs a rest once in a while. So

I want some one congenial along. You're engaged. Never mind about your not having been a companion before. That doesn't need any training. Either you are or you are not. I can't sail unless I have some one to tell my troubles to without being afraid they'll be repeated to the rest of the crowd inside of an hour. If you'd seen the ones who have applied! Gum chewers and chickens looking for a sea trip! Send back to the Martha Washington, or wherever you are stopping, for your things and tell me where you came from, where you get your complexion and how you curl your hair.' "

V.

JIMMY sat admiring the girl's vivacity as she conjured up the scene of her engagement with clever intonation and gesture. Most girls, he fancied, would have collapsed by now in reaction, but she was telling her misfortunes with a sense of humor that he had not hitherto credited women with having under such circumstances. What a regular pal a girl like her would make!

Thorpe had never been in love. He had spooned a bit, had sometimes thought vaguely of getting married, had shied off from it again, thanked his stars he had not fallen, like some men had done, and philosophized, after the manner of young men who consider themselves modern but are of all the ages, that a man was best off single.

He had never before experienced the feeling that now possessed him, a sensation due only to the fact that he was in love at first sight with this girl who had come to him out of the night, and held the conviction that there never was and never could be any girl in the world like her and that he would be a lucky dog if he could get her to respond. Such a happening he had hitherto regarded as incredible, a fiction of writers of love stories. Now it appeared supremely natural.

She must have been desperate, but she was eminently self-reliant. He longed for an adequate chance to show his qualities of protection. He wondered whether the first mate had been the one who annoyed her. He had a private grudge against that person already.

The girl was going on.

" Things went well enough until we passed Panama. Mr. Melville made some great amount of money during the war. A profiteer. He wanted to spend it as easily as he had made it. And his guests were of the same sort, some of them just there to help the spending.

" Mrs. Melville was kind enough, but she is weak. They used to sit up half the night playing cards or flirting—and drinking. She was often jealous of her husband, and her nervousness came from that. It wasn't easy to handle her. Melville, the beast, started an affair with her maid, and after that I had to perform the duties of a maid rather than a companion.

" Things have been getting worse right along. They gave a big affair at Tahiti, and invited half of Papeete. It ended in a sort of drunken riot. I ought to have left then, but Mrs. Melville was really ill. It was that night that one of the men began to bother me."

Thorpe's jaw was thrust forward, his fists balled, his eyes cold.

" He did, did he?" he asked grimly. " One of the yacht's officers?"

" No. A man named Carter, a kind of partner of Melville. Perhaps that was why he wouldn't interfere. I had to appeal to him. His wife was not speaking to him—hasn't since we left Tahiti. She did speak to Carter, and he laughed at her. Melville told me it was a pleasure voyage and for me not to be a little prig. He said that Carter was a good fellow and that I was a fool not to encourage him."

" What is Carter like?" Jim's voice was husky.

" Like the rest of them. A cad." The girl's voice was cold and cynical. " I believe he used to be a college athlete once, and now the best he can do is to belong to a country club. There is hardly one of them who has been really sober since Papeete, and they have carried on their affairs openly.

" I went to the captain, but he is the kind who knows on which side his bread is buttered. He is a good navigator, I believe, and a fine disciplinarian with his own men, but his attitude to his employer's

affairs is that of the see-not, hear-not, speak-not variety. It's the same with all of them. Any woman on that boat is regarded as fair game and most of them seem to enjoy it.

" Carter tried to make love to me—as he calls it. He tried to break into my stateroom once, and some time yesterday he must have taken the screws out of the bolt on the door and replaced them with dummies. Probably he bribed the steward to do it. He was drunk, drunker than he had meant to be, I imagine. That was how I got away from him. Once I thought I couldn't, and I called out. Mrs. Melville heard and came out into the saloon.

" Carter was pretending to take her side against her husband for some rotten reason of his own. He saw who it was and slipped off through the alleyway, where my cabin opened. I knew it was no use talking to her. She wasn't herself. She had told me again that afternoon that she had no influence with her husband, and that I must fight my own battles. I believe Carter had suggested to her that I was deliberately trying to encourage him.

" It was hideous. The life on the ship was a horrible nightmare. I couldn't stay there. Carter laughed when he left. So—I knew I could swim ashore—and I came."

The girl had changed while she talked. Her face had aged, her voice become bitter, her eyes were as cold as Thorpe's, watching her, listening and supplying the context she left out.

" You didn't tell me what this Carter looked like," he said.

" If you ever see him you can tell him by his face. I marked it," she answered, her tone hard.

" I may see him. How long do they expect to stay?"

" About twenty-four hours, I think. There is something wrong with the condensers."

Her face softened. She leaned toward him.

" You have been wonderful to me," she said. " You are not going to try and pick a quarrel with Carter? I have got away. All I want is to keep clear of them. If you want to help me, help me to do just that. They won't let you aboard, anyway, unless you have been invited."

" That's all right," said Thorpe. " I can't fight the bunch of 'em, however much I'd like to. But they may come looking for you, and if Carter is along—"

" I expect I've wounded his self-pride too much in running away from his advances for him to bother. I don't know what they'll think. He won't tell what happened. Mrs. Melville will remember the cry she heard. She went back to her room after she had listened for a little while. Very likely she didn't connect it with me at all then, but she will when I am found missing. They may think I'm drowned. I am sure they will not wait for me very long. The easiest way will be the best. I don't know what I am going to do, but I can't go back."

She looked suddenly wan and tired, blue shadows under her eyes. Jim rose and mentally kicked himself.

" We'll talk about all that in the morning," he said. " You're played out, and, if I had the sense of a turtle, I'd have made you turn in long ago. I'll keep tabs on the yacht in the morning. First boat that comes off I'll wake you."

" That's a promise?"

" Sure."

" Then good night. I *am* tired."

She put out her hand again. For the first time he noticed bruises on her wrist. They had darkened since she had landed. Some of Carter's brutality! Well, he wasn't through with Carter.

" Look here, Miss Dineen," he said haltingly. " You've had a rotten experience. But don't think all men are beasts. Because—they are not."

She gave him a look that went clean through him.

" I am sure of one that isn't," she said. " Good night."

Thorpe roused up the astounded and somewhat indignant Faata and ensconced her on a couch in the little living room that was half office, telling her of her charge.

" White Mary along in there?" she asked. " Mary come from *ehipi?*"

" Yes. You look out along that Mary. *Ehipi* no good for her stop along."

Savage as she was, womanly intuition may have spurred Faata's intelligence, for she nodded and assumed her duties.

"You go along outside now," she said. "Mary she like catch sleep. I like catch sleep."

Jimmy obeyed, getting blankets, resting cheerfully on the veranda mat, preferring it to the chair.

"Peggy Dineen!" he said softly to the night in general. "A peach of a name! And a peach of a girl. Twenty-two? That blackguard Carter! Rest of 'em, for that matter. Ship ought to be pinched.

"The way she looked at me. Like looking at stars in the lagoon."

VI.

Jimmy woke a little after dawn. The faithful Faata was snoring inside. Tubi, reproachful for the disturbance of his domestic arrangements, was squatting beneath the veranda looking at his "plenty fine *ehipi*."

A little smoke rolled out of her stack. A few figures moved on deck, but it was plain that the passengers were a long way from rousing themselves.

Thorpe called down to Tubi.

"Tubi, you go catch young nut, get orangi, catch mullet."

"Tide no good along mullet. No can catch um."

"You catch um all same. By an' by you catchum two-three stick *tabaki*."

Tubi grinned at the prospect of reward and went his way. Thorpe knew a silver mullet would not be wanting for breakfast.

His regular shaving things were in his room, but he used one of his trade outfits, then took his plunge and swim.

Going back to the house he went aside to pick some passion fruit to add to the oranges, plucked a handful of the scarlet flowers for a table decoration, walking through the outer fringe of the bush back of the house. It was a wonderful tangle of graceful, lacey tree ferns, wild rubber, citron and wild orange, tall shaddocks with great globes of deceiving grapefruit all pith and bitterness, croton and dracena shrubs in gorgeous motley of crimson and purple and orange, tuberoses, hibiscus, blooms of yellow and pink on trees burdened with blossom, all tied together with the cordage of lianas that reached from the topmost boughs to the ground and ran along that. One of the vines was close to the path and covered with a delicate lilac flower.

Thorpe discarded his scarlet flowers for the daintier creeper, added a few tuberoses and astounded Faata by making a bouquet of them.

"White Mary she plenty sleep," she said. "I hear."

"You don't mean she snores?" said Thorpe indignantly. "You've been looking in at her."

Faata shook her head.

"No look. White Mary no snore. But I hear. She sleep plenty good."

Thorpe knew of the abnormal sense of smell and hearing of the natives and he was content that Faata had not disturbed his charge nor heard more than light regular breathing. Peggy Dineen would not snore. She couldn't.

He was fussy about that breakfast and the laying of the table, bringing up napery from the store. From time to time he looked at the yacht, which continued to show no signs of interior activity.

It was eight o'clock when the girl appeared. Thorpe escorted her to where a mountain brook cascaded over a rock in a silver stream that tumbled twenty feet into a ferny pool. He took along fresh towels and soap.

"Come back when you're ready," he said and left her.

"It's too pretty to use as a washroom," she said when she returned. "Is the island all as beautiful as that?"

"Most of it. Breakfast's ready. They are still asleep aboard. We can watch them from the table in the window. I usually eat on the veranda, but there's no sense risking anything. Of course they've no right to make you leave here, anyway."

She nodded at him over her orange. She was paler than she had been the night before and she was serious and thoughtful. But she said that she had slept well.

As they ate she encouraged him to talk about himself, and Thorpe was glad to do

so. It would take her mind off the yacht and center it on him. It was a good chance to let her know that he was not a storekeeper by choice, but through force of circumstance and as a means to an end. The talk inevitably got around to vanilla.

"What I'm aiming at," said Jimmy, "is to save up a thousand dollars and lease about ten acres in a valley about half a mile back of the house. It's warm and sheltered, and I've learned what not to do. The main trouble was about fertilizing. You've got to do it by hand, with a wooden match or toothpick, transferring the pollen, you know. Like this."

He illustrated with the tuberoses.

"I'd plant about ten thousand cuttings of Mexican vanilla and the rest is duck soup with a little cultivating and weeding. Takes three years for the first yield, but I'd make out with this job until then. Plenty of spare time for the vanilla. Then there'd be a clean up. Ten thousand pounds of dried bean, worth from two dollars and a half to five dollars a pound."

"Really?"

"Yep. The soil and climate's just right. There's a couple did as well as that close to where I tried my hand at it on Fiji. She helped with the fertilizing—it takes a light hand, did the scalding and sweating of the beans when they were sundried and he did the rest with a couple of *kanakas*. I got most of my dope from them—after I'd gone broke. They used to work in the early morning when it was cool and he kept store to make out, just as I would."

"You'd use your two natives?"

"If they're with me when I've saved up my second half of the thousand simoleons. If not, there are others. All I lack is the lady with the light hand."

He held his breath after he said that. She was looking down at her plate, but raised demure eyes to him.

"You are thinking of getting married?" A quizzical twinkle came into her glance, and Jimmy found himself reddening furiously.

"I hope to, some time," he answered. "Do you think a girl would care to live here?"

"Why not? It is a beautiful place."

Jimmy had hoped for some indication of personal interest, but he found none. Only the twinkle had gone and she was regarding him gravely.

"About yourself," he said. "I was thinking it over this morning. I suppose the best thing for you to do would be to—"

She checked him with a look out of the window.

"There's a boat coming ashore," she said. Jimmy got up.

"Better have Faata clear away. I'll meet 'em at the wharf. I don't expect to invite 'em up to the house. This is my own territory. You keep out of sight."

"I suppose they'll claim I'm in their charge," she said. "But I'm not going back."

"A fine crowd to take charge of anybody," said Jimmy as he went out. He hoped Carter was in the launch. He wanted a talk with that unworthy. Thorpe had purposely delayed talking over her own predicament with the girl. The matter was a delicate one. He felt that she had told him something of herself as an explanation for accepting his hospitality. His own sketchy biography he had furnished in similar spirit, to set her more at ease.

He could not see that they could make her leave the island, save by force, and he fancied they would hesitate in applying that. There would be money due her and he intended to see that she got it. It might not be an easy contract to fulfill. He burned to inflict physical punishment on the cad who had attacked her and he wanted to tell the owner, his wife, the captain and the sneering first mate just what he thought of them.

The girl could hardly remain at Trouble Bay and that was the only place on Twenty-Stick where she could put up. Faata would scarcely be recognized as a sufficient chaperon in the eyes of the world, though he knew that Peggy Dineen was grateful to him for having brought the native woman into the shack overnight.

Altogether it was a pretty complicated problem—trebled by the indisputable fact that he was in love with her. There was no doubt of that. It was not merely that she was the first attractive girl he had seen after a long solitude and the repression of

natural sex interest. The thought of losing her was unbearable since she had come into his life. From now on she would be a part of it and he wanted to make that part a major one.

He had figured out a possible procedure, but the best he could devise had difficulties. It was very plain that she did not mean to return to the yacht. She had a will of her own with which his own coincided. But Jimmy Thorpe had developed a habit of meeting the immediate issue squarely. Until that was disposed of, the rest must wait. He was as full of wrath as the cylinders of the Albatross were charged with steam at "full speed ahead."

As he went down his wharf he saw smoke issuing freely from the buff stack. It looked as if the trouble had been rectified and the fires were being replenished for an early departure.

VII.

THE launch came in swiftly and made landing. A man in white flannels jumped to the wharf and confronted Thorpe. He was the same height as Jimmy, heavier, with the suggestion of a paunch, several years older—possibly thirty. He wore no hat, and his hair showed signs of thinning. His eyes had the beginnings of sacks beneath them and his skin was puffy.

Many women indubitably would have considered him good looking, though his face had a disfigurement which was covered with a long strip of adhesive tape on the right cheek. Jimmy rejoiced at the sight of it. Peggy Dineen had told him he might recognize Carter by the mark she had set on his face. Here it was, hidden but evident.

Carter wore a scowl. His features were naturally arrogant, with the look of one accustomed to having his own way at the expense of others. And he had evidently been having a morning peg or two to top off the night's potations. He was not drunk, but neither was he sober.

He surveyed Jimmy with an intolerant air which would have been provocation enough if Thorpe had not been already primed. Jimmy's own face showed anything but a hearty welcome, glad though he was to see the man. Carter had once been an athlete, the girl had said. Jimmy had pulled off a few stunts himself and he had known close work in France. He sized up his man and did not worry much about the outcome of his righteous cause. The presence of the launch, in charge of a quartermaster, was a nuisance, but that handicap was almost immediately removed.

"I can't wait for you, Mr. Carter," said the quartermaster. "Mr. Melville is coming ashore before we sail, and he will want me on hand. I shall have to report to him. I am not supposed to take the launch without orders from the captain or the owner, sir."

It seemed to Thorpe that Carter was not a favorite of the petty officer.

"I told you I'd take the responsibility," Carter snapped at him. "Melville was asleep, and I can't help it if the skipper was up all night over the repairs. I'll explain to Melville when he comes ashore. You can go back."

The engine had not been stopped, and the quartermaster immediately took the wheel. The engineer threw in the clutch, the launch backed off, circled and shot back toward the ship. Carter started to walk past Thorpe, but Jimmy stepped squarely in front of him.

"This isn't a public landing," he said. "It's my wharf."

"Is it? Thought it belonged to the trading company. Where's your boss?"

"I'm in charge here." Jimmy was white hot, but he had his temper in leash. He was going to make Carter show his hand, if he could. "What do you want?" he asked.

Carter sneered at him. Then his face flushed, his eyes lighting with sudden fury.

"Damn your impudence!" he said. "I've come to take the young woman on board who came ashore last night. Maid of the owner's wife. She's A. W. O. L. if you know what that means."

"I was on M. P. duty once, if you know what that means," Thorpe answered. He was beginning to enjoy himself. He had the man he wanted all to himself. By and by he was going to give him a thrashing.

"If any young *lady* came ashore," he

said, "she was not the maid of any one. And she is not going back. You are the last person she desires to see."

He could see no object in denying her arrival. He had thought that out. The matter could not be concealed and he was not inclined to lie without due cause.

"Ah!" said Carter. "Taken a fancy to you, has she? You'd fall for her. You're here by yourself, I believe. And she stayed all night. She isn't quite as fussy as she pretends to be."

Jimmy had measured his distance, marked the spot on Carter's jaw where he hoped to connect. He might knock him off the wharf and he might not. Probably this ex-athlete knew how to box. So much the better. He ached to set his mark alongside of Peggy's on the cad's face.

He telegraphed his intentions, if not his blow. Carter took ground nimbly enough, his face twisted with malice. He had been standing with his hands in the side pockets of his coat. The right came out holding a squat automatic.

"I'm not fighting with understrappers," he said, his voice thick with rage. The devil of murder was in his eyes, the will and the desire to shoot. "I've got the right to plug you," he went on, "for what's happened up in that shack of yours. She don't want to see me, eh? Won't come aboard? We'll see about that. You face about and march on ahead, storekeeper, right up to the house. If we take her back and don't hold out on her references, she'll be lucky. If you've got any idea you've been protecting her, or intend to, after keeping her ashore with you, you've got a funny notion of keeping a girl's name clean. Now then, about face, you ex-M. P."

Jimmy's eyes blazed. He was powerless. He had not counted upon gunplay. He had a gun of his own, but it was in the house, in the drawer of the table he used as desk. That Carter would shoot and claim he had killed the girl's seducer, make up any devilish lie he wanted, was certain. Liquor and crude jealousy had made him reckless. They could blacken the girl's character if she returned to the yacht. Carter would see to that. And he had the drop on Thorpe. His finger was on the trigger. The lust to kill was in his eyes. Jimmy had seen that light before. If he went down the girl was defenseless.

He could not use his fists, but he could employ strategy, and his mind evolved a plan. It had its weak places, but it was the best he could muster.

"All right," he said sullenly. "You've got me covered."

He turned about as Carter gave a short laugh. It was ignominious to be seen marching up like a poltroon. Undoubtedly the girl was watching. If only he had told her to stay out of sight! The success of the plan depended largely on her not being in evidence. She might face Carter—or she might have confidence enough in Jimmy, despite present appearances, to let him handle the matter, though he was a sorry spectacle of a defender at the moment. But he had to get at the gun in his table drawer. That might even matters—and then—

"Cute little trick," said Carter, back of him. "You ought to marry her, of course, but I understand they arrange these affairs easily in the South Seas. Samoa style. But I think we'll take her along with us. She's tipped her hand off now. Can't pull any injured innocence after this."

Only the knowledge of the pistol muzzle now and then prodding the small of his back and the odds that any move would leave the girl to the designs of Carter kept Thorpe from taking a chance and tackling him. His rage tingled through his veins until his body ached with suppressed action. And he had his part to play.

At the foot of the veranda steps Carter halted him.

"Forgot to frisk you," he said. "Stand still."

Thorpe felt the muzzle of the automatic pressing into his body while Carter passed his other hand over him, seeking a weapon.

"All right," he said. "You needn't keep your hands up. On you go."

Thorpe raised his voice, speaking distinctly, trusting that the girl would hear and take her cue.

"Look here, Mr. Carter," he said, hating himself for the servility he assumed. "You've got the drop on me all right, but it isn't necessary. And you won't find Miss

Dineen here. She's gone. I took her over to the missionary's in a native canoe last night.

"I don't allow that you've any right to interview her, but I suppose Mr. or Mrs. Melville may have. The chap in the launch said they were coming ashore. I know just how far I can mix in this. I'll show them a blue print chart of Twenty-Stick. They'll have to have it to find the missionary's landing. It's hidden from the sea and it isn't an easy place to get into. I'll go with them if necessary."

He almost managed a whine at the end. He had gradually lowered his voice after the sentence stating that the girl had left in a canoe. If only she would comprehend. He believed he had taken the right line with Carter. His arrogance would be apt to presume that an "understrapper" would wilt before his superior position and the show of the gun.

"Likely yarn," answered Carter. "We'll see when we get into the house. Beginning to find your place, are you?"

"Yes, sir," Thorpe forced himself to answer in a low tone. He would take payment for all this later, he assured himself.

"Damned if I don't believe you're the innocent sort of sucker who'd try to play Sir Galahad," chuckled Carter, and Jimmy's heart leaped. "It's hard to think the girl would tumble for you. She's a cunning little fox. But I'll take charge of that chart. And you won't go along. This is my party and Melville 'll keep out of it, if he's wise. I've got a few things up my sleeve for Melville any time he tries to run me. An' he knows it. Smart enough to make money, but I'm smart enough to know *how* he made it. I could spill some official beans for him, any time."

VIII.

THEY were on the veranda now. Jimmy walked with his head down. The room was clear of any suggestion of the girl. He knew that. Carter, flushed with his own cleverness, was in a boasting mood, his vanity giving him assurance that the girl would not have flouted him and favored this trader's clerk.

They went inside, and Jimmy walked slowly over to the table. Carter looked around smartly with a grin on his face.

"Quite a dump," he said. "Musical, too. And books. My! Hello, who's this?"

Thorpe's heart sank. Somebody had entered from the inner door. But it was not the girl. It was Faata. And that was complication enough as he was forewarned from the light in Carter's eyes he surveyed Faata, looking at him askance.

"We'll test out your yarn," Carter said. "Does this cross-eyed hag talk English?"

Jimmy let himself slump into the chair. Not all of his dejection was feigned. Faata had the mind of a twelve-year old, smart enough, but not dependable. But her eyes flashed with quick offense; she began to blow out her cheeks.

There was a slight cast in Faata's eyes, really noticeable only when she was excited. There were times when Faata had persuaded herself it added piquancy to her dusky charms; nevertheless, it was a sore spot for outsiders to touch. "Hag" was beyond her vocabulary, but the tone convinced her that here was an added insult.

"What name you speak along of me that way?" she demanded.

"No offense. Names don't hurt. Here's a dollar. I'll give you five more if you answer my questions."

He laid the bills on the table, but Faata did not take them. Her full lips seemed buttoned in as she regarded Carter, pondering his epithets. Carter had lowered his gun, but he still had the best of it, and his suspicions were not lulled. Jimmy dared not look at Faata. He saw the door to the sleeping room was closed.

"Five dollars—I'll make it ten," said Carter, "if you'll tell me what happened to the girl that came here last night."

"White Mary?"

"That isn't her name, but she's a White Mary so far as you're concerned, I suppose. Where is she?"

"White Mary she come along last night," began Faata, while Jimmy listened apprehensively. He had made up his mind to throw the chair at Carter and dodge behind the table, pulling out the drawer to get the gun, if— "She plenty too much wet. Plenty cry. Too much trouble."

Faata was drawing on her imagination. Hope revived in Jimmy—if she didn't overdo it. Thorpe slid a cautious hand beneath the drawer to insure its sliding out easily. It sometimes stuck.

"She speak along that trouble with Missa Toropi. He get her dress along store. He an' my man Tubi they take her along native place, catch canoe, take her *milikani* (missionary). Missa Toropi he come back along time sun he come up."

Carter half shut his eyes, scrutinizing first the woman and then Thorpe.

"Let's see that map," he said. "Take your money, dog face."

Faata scowled at the fresh insult. She made no move to take the proffered bill.

"I think it's in this drawer," said Jimmy. "There was a blue print chart of Twenty-Stick belonging to the company, but it was thumbtacked to the wall of the store." Thorpe shoved back his chair slowly, fumbled in the drawer and took out a stack of papers. He could feel the bore of Carter's eyes, knew he was still doubtful. His fingers touched the handle of the Colt, and he drew it slowly to the front, looking up at Carter. A furrow was slowly contracting between the latter's eyes, his gun muzzle was coming up.

"You speak you pay me ten *tala*," said Faata. "What name you fool me? I speak true."

It broke the tension before Carter's growing suspicion changed to action. Thorpe had been certain he was going to insist upon looking through the drawer himself. He had meant to ask him what depth the yacht's launch drew, any question to divert his mind from the idea that Thorpe was fooling him. He should not have tossed out the first lot of papers or he should have pretended one of them was the chart.

Faata stood by the one easy chair in the shack. It was adorned with a trade cushion, its gay cover tasseled at the corner. Her fingers, brown and long and strong, played with the fringe.

Carter laughed at her.

"Pretty smart you are," he said. "Wait till I see that map." Then he suddenly barked at Thorpe. "Take your hands out of that drawer!"

Jimmy did, and the Colt was in his right. But Carter had swung the automatic to a level, pressing the trigger.

"Eyah!"

With the savage yell, wild and shrill, Faata flung the cushion by its tasseled corner. It whirled end over end and struck Carter's arm as he fired. The bullet went wild, tearing a ragged hole in the corrugated iron roof. In one bound Faata was upon Carter like an animated catapult. She landed clawing, trying to bite, winding her lithe arms and legs about him, transformed into a species of human leopardess.

Thorpe never knew whether he would have answered that wild shot with one better aimed. He was thankful he did not have to. Faata had writhed her way across Carter's body. Her brown legs, strong as steel, clamped about his middle, holding his left arm. Her left hand clutched his gun wrist, bearing down the arm. Her right was at his throat. Thorpe leaped across the room and wrested the gun away, laying it where he had set his own, on the table. He took hold of Faata's shoulders, countering the blow that Carter swung at her.

"All right, Faata," he said. "You let him go now. He belong along me. I catch gun."

Faata released her hold and sprang back, agile as a bounding ball.

"What name he call me cross eye? What name he speak me dog face?" she demanded, panting from her attack.

"Never mind that now. You take these two gun. Go back in room."

Then Thorpe saw that the door was wide open and Peggy Dineen was standing in it. Carter's face registered a swift succession of chagrin, anger, evil.

"Go in, Faata," said Jimmy, and his voice was imperative. "You too, Peggy Dineen. Please!"

Her blue eyes were fairly lit. Jimmy's interpretation of the look primed him with exultation. She knew what he meant to do. She understood. She approved of it.

"We're even up, now," he said to Carter. "You'll fight the understrapper or take a licking."

Carter's big jaw stuck out. He grinned confidently.

"That's what you want, you damned fool?" he said. "Galahad, I called you. Think you've won out, you and that little—"

Whatever the epithet, it died on Carter's swelling lips as Jimmy sprang in with a straight jolt fair on the mouth, trading it for a smash that caught him high up on the cheek and a wallop over the heart that had weight and strength behind it.

Carter closed, trying to throw him and Thorpe hammered him hard over the kidneys before he was forced to wrestle. Carter had skill and poundage. He forced Jimmy back against the table. It slid before them, bringing up against the flimsy partition wall. Carter tried for a crotch hold, his forearm against Thorpe's throat, forcing back his head, trying to close off his wind, force him over the table and pound the strength out of him. He had the advantage of the rush, he deliberately used foul tactics, and for the moment he had all the best of it.

The table had served many storekeepers, its leg, broken and hastily mended, gave way, and the two went crashing to the floor. The instant his shoulders touched the planks Jimmy put out a dynamic burst of strength and they went rolling, interlocked, crashing into the easy chair, a flailing, whirling mass of panting fury, bringing up against the far wall with Thorpe atop.

The plaster had been torn off Carter's face, and blood streamed from the score of Peggy Dineen. It smeared their white clothes. Jimmy's fists were red with it as he drove them into Carter's features. They were his mark as the other heaved under him, smashing at his ribs, lunging with his knees, twisting his head from side to side to avoid the blows.

Jimmy had been told by a pal of his, a fighting sergeant who held the championship of his division, that a man who is handsome, or thinks he is, is handicapped from the fear of losing his beauty. Jimmy cared little for his own face; he wanted to make a pulp of Carter's. He had the insults to the girl to wipe out first, and then his own, and every blow he thudded home was backed with righteous wrath.

Carter was out of condition, but he was strong with the huskiness of a magnificent body that had done its best to resist abuse. He got his arms up between Thorpe's and gripped his windpipe, a thumb on the jugular, shutting off the vein. Swift dizziness assailed Thorpe, energy seemed to flow out of him. He felt himself being heaved aside, the bloody face of Carter leering up at him like the visage of a savage beast through gathering mist. He swung one blow and felt the impact on bone. Instantly the pressure on his throat relaxed and he rolled weakly to one side as Carter's head thumped against the skirting board from the punch that connected flush with his jaw.

IX.

JIMMY got to his knees and so to his feet, swaying a little but full of fight though his head was throbbing with released blood pressure and his ears sang. Carter was not out. The blow had lacked power and exact direction. His eyes opened and he groaned.

"Get up," said Jimmy in two gasps. "Get up—and take your medicine."

Neither of them now saw the opened inner door with the girl standing in it, keeping back the excited Faata. Peggy Dineen had taken charge of both the guns. She stood with one in either hand, leaning forward, her Irish eyes alight, fixed on Jimmy Thorpe in undisguised admiration.

Carter looked at his opponent unbelievingly. He grunted and hunched himself up on his shoulders. There was nothing in his glance of gratitude for the sporting chance allowed him, nor did Thorpe desire or expect it. He wasn't through with Carter yet. He stood back to let the other get up, striving to get back his own breath that was still uncertain. As he filled his lungs he felt a sharp pain in his lower ribs. Either Carter had splintered one of them or the table had done it.

Carter drew his legs under him, hands on the floor, taking his time. He got up, wiped away the blood from his lips and out of his eyes, and cleared his mouth. Jimmy saw with an unholy joy that a gold-edged tooth was missing.

"Here's where you lose, Galahad," said Carter.

He squared off. He was going to box, and Jimmy did not know much about that game. He was going to batter through Carter's guard, taking punishment as he had to, looking out only for his own jaw. Carter's face carried a good share of punishment. If Jimmy could wear him out with his better wind, he meant to add a finishing touch or two to that gory decoration. Meantime he would play for Carter's wind. His own face was swollen and his cheeks smarted. He could not see as well as he wished out of one eye where a penthouse swelled on his eyebrow. But he caught a glimpse of Peggy before he crouched in front of Carter's fiddling lead, and it did him more good than the ministering of expert seconds.

The first round, if it could be called that, had been long and fierce. The next would settle the thing. One of them would go down and out. Carter would accord him no generous mercy, and Jimmy was not asking for it.

He was up against science now. Carter's rest had helped him recover his wind, he had found himself and he was prepared to make the vindictive best of his weight and cleverness.

After the first feint he came with a rush that Jimmy only partly side-stepped, receiving a hard smash below his heart that jarred him so that he barely set aside a vicious uppercut, while his passing lash barely landed. He tucked his chin well in and set himself to withstand the slogging drives. It was plain that Carter was trying to herd him into a corner, but Thorpe was willing to meet the encounters for the privilege of getting home to the stomach.

A feint followed by a piston uppercut that spent its force against his crossed arms but almost straightened him up by the sheer strength behind it. Carter's right sang by his ear as he dodged, at the same instant sinking left and right, and left again, deep into the superfluous fats of Carter's midriff. The muscles that had once made a buckler there had lost their resilience, like old rubber. Thorpe heard him grunt with pain and lost wind.

Carter clinched, leaning all his weight on Jimmy, striving to back him to the wall, and Jimmy freed an arm and walloped at Carter's kidneys until the latter tore clear and, with wide open mouth and a face that was pasty behind the blood that crimsoned it, stalled and sparred for time. His arms were getting heavy, or they seemed to be, but Jimmy was cautious, not to be led into a fatal opening by any false show of weakness. He knew he had hurt his man. Carter's diaphragm was quivering—there was no faking there.

He followed up, ducked a lead, stopped the following shoulder drive with an easy counter, and stepped in to plant a short arm jolt on the plexus mark. Suddenly Carter kicked him inside the left leg, just above the ankle. The pain was sharp as a stab, the attack absolutely unexpected. Involuntarily Jimmy bowed to the quick agony, defense forgotten, and met the smashing blow launched by Carter, timed to complete the rough-house trick.

It landed on Jimmy's mouth and rocked his head backward with blood spurting from nose and split lip, the room reeling about him as he staggered backward, knocking over the stand with the lamp that crashed with breaking chimney and the reek of kerosene as Thorpe careened against the angle of the wall. Dimly he saw Carter charging like a bull to finish him and, half blind, he summoned up the last reserves of energy that had served him well across seas when the issue was death. It was not brute courage, but the marshaling and exercising of his will.

He fought like a man gone berserk, but his brain was in command, rallying, shaking off dizziness as the recharged muscles flexed. He fought Carter back a foot, another, and another, and they stood toe to toe with Jimmy's head against Carter's chest.

Carter flailed and jabbed, pounding at the back of Jimmy's head and neck while Jimmy's forearms worked like twin pistons, battering at the other's quivering belly, sapping his strength so that Carter's blows lost force as his energy died down. Jimmy did not need to see, he bored in with punch after punch. He felt the weight of Carter sagging down on him, felt his lax arms drooping as at last Thorpe found the plexus with a right driven in and up, with all his

force that paralyzed the ganglia, short-circuited Carter's coördination.

Jimmy Thorpe slipped away from the failing, collapsing body. Out of his one good eye he saw Carter's blank gaze, dull and fishy, his jaw slack and the pasty flesh changing to gray. He flashed his right to the point of the jaw, and Carter dropped, face down, bent arms out, done for.

Thorpe was trembling with the effort of that last assault, the pith seemed out of his legs, and he stood weaving, drawing sobbing breaths, a sorry sight, with one sleeve torn away, his white drill spotted and streaked with blood, waiting for certainty that he had done his work.

Carter did not move. But Jimmy felt a chair placed back of him, a hand pressing him to its welcome seat. He was vaguely conscious of the near presence of Peggy Dineen and her voice, strangely far off, ordering Faata to bring water and towels. He tried to twist his battered face into a smile, peering up at her.

X.

THEN he stiffened. There were others in the room. A dapper, short man in whites, with a visored yachting cap bearing the emblem of an owner, stood with legs apart. Behind him were the first mate of the Albatross and three sailors.

"Some fight," said Melville. "Lord, but that was a whirlwind finish. Two of you chaps pick up what's left of Carter there. Have a drink, what's your name? No? Then give Carter a slug of it."

Jimmy pulled himself together. The thing wasn't settled yet. He heard Peggy back of him.

"This is Mr. Thorpe, Mr. Melville. He gave me shelter last night when I had to leave your yacht, after your friend grossly insulted me. Then Carter came ashore with a gun to force me to go back, which is, I may as well tell you, quite impossible. You have failed to accord me any protection, and I am staying here on the island."

"Yes, but look here, Peggy—Miss Dineen—things have been lax, I admit, but you must see you can't stay here. This chap—er—I mean Mr. Thorpe—has done splendidly, but hang it all—I take it you're not married, Mr. Thorpe. You can see how it is. I apologize, Miss Peggy. You shan't be annoyed again. Mrs. Melville is in the launch. I'll bring her up."

"It won't do any good, Mr. Melville. I have made up my mind. I am not going to return. I shall be glad if you will send off my things."

"But where are you going to stay?"

"At the missionary's home, Mr. Melville, until Miss Dineen makes up her plans." Jimmy was on his feet, still belligerent, his shakiness vanished. "I do not believe Mis Dineen cares to see Mrs. Melville. If you will take your friend back to the ship there will be no necessity for any of you remaining here any longer. I am quite capable of taking care of Miss Dineen's best interests."

Melville chuckled.

"Egad, I'll say you are!" he said. "Look at Beauty Carter, all-star halfback and winner of the Ladies Handicap. What a licking—what a beautiful licking!"

Carter revived, supported between two sailors, was a ghastly sight, his nose awry, his mouth mashed and his face more like a squashed beet than a human physiognomy. He tried for a feeble snarl and managed a grimace.

"Think it's funny, do you?" he managed. "I'll get even with you, Melville."

"Maybe," said Melville imperturbably. There was something likable about the owner of the Albatross, derelict as he had been in his duties. "I've often thought you'd try to double-cross me some time, and I'm prepared for it. You'll find it 'll go fifty-fifty. Take him out of here, you two."

He turned to Jimmy and the girl.

"Carter loses, and I think you win, Mr. Thorpe," he said. "More apologies to Miss Peggy would be superfluous, and she might consider them insulting. I am sure Mrs. Melville regrets all this, as I do. But Miss Peggy is quite right. She doesn't belong with us. We are a loose lot and quite without responsibilities, I am afraid. You may blame it on the war—and prohibition. We are post-bellum products.

"As for the missionary"—his eyes, hazel brown and not so evil as reckless,

twinkled—" you will of course conduct the young lady there. I would suggest that you induce her to return with you. To the brave belong the fair. I presume the reverend gentleman is qualified to perform all the ceremonies of his office. Your things shall be sent to you immediately, Miss Peggy. We are leaving inside of an hour. I have the honor to wish you both good morning and my sincerest wishes for your mutual happiness."

With another chuckle he went out, his men with him. The room was quiet. Jimmy was wildly revolving the hint that Melville had flung out. Peggy, her face rose red, started to bathe his face with careful and gentle efficiency. Jimmy fancied his hurts healing at her touch. Faata commenced to set the room to rights. She was the first to speak.

" Plenty trouble you give that man, Missa Toropi. White Mary she hear you speak along you take her *milikani.* She speak along me to talk all the same. He call me cross-eye, dog face! Eyah! Plenty I fix him. Too much plenty you make him finish. He think I take his *tala* (dollars). All same I put in stove. No good, that white pig!"

Ministered to, still tongue-tied, Jimmy stood up.

" I'll change my things," he said. " Down at the store. I'll be back. The launch has gone off."

He left with his thoughts whirling. How was she going to take it? He had fought for her. " None but the brave," Melville had said. Was it possible that she would marry him out of hand? Quite, if she felt as he did. If she didn't, things would be difficult. He would have to be very careful. She had her pride. She might think he wanted to marry her because she was up against it. If he could only make her see how he felt about it. What wonderful luck it would be for him.

He got into fresh clothes and patched himself up a bit from his medicine chest, though he shrank from a second look in the glass. His consolation was the fact that Carter was in worse shape. Jimmy had broken his teeth and smashed his nose. He had taught him a lesson that would last after Jimmy's own eye resumed normal color and condition. But—what a face for a wooer!

As he went back to the shack he saw the launch putting off again. The smoke was pouring from the yacht's funnel. She was ready for sea. In half an hour she would be gone, and Peggy and he would be alone on Twenty-Stick, save for the missionary, the third leg of a triangle that might be made an inclosure for a magical happiness—if only—

The room had been straightened up as best it could, pending repairs to the table. Peggy Dineen was at the window watching the incoming launch. She turned to meet him gravely.

" It's idle to try and thank you," she said. Then with a smile: " It was a wonderful fight. He was heavier than you. You were very brave. And—he might have shot you."

There was a little tremor in her voice that was music to Jimmy. She might care.

" I had to take a chance," he said. " Your things are coming in, I imagine."

" Yes. I suppose so. *Is* there a missionary?"

Jimmy colored. She hurried to offset his embarrassment.

" I didn't mean to doubt you—but— "

" Yes, there is a missionary. But—he is a bachelor—like myself."

" Oh!" She drew back from him, startled, considering the situation.

" I can't stay here," she said.

Jimmy's aching face fell.

XI.

THE launch came up to the wharf. Tubi, ordered by Thorpe, was waiting there. He was handed out a steamer trunk from the boat, and, swinging it on his broad back, he came up the wharf, the path, the steps, and deposited it on the veranda. Then he came in with a face agrin.

" This for White Mary," he said.

" This " was a letter addressed to the girl. She took it apathetically.

" The balance of my wages, I suppose," she said. The embarrassed silence repeated itself. Jimmy felt the precious moments

slipping and he took his courage in his hands. It had been much easier fighting Carter.

"You don't know much about me, Peggy," he said, "but I can tell you this much, if you'll let me, and believe me. I've never been in love with a girl before. And I haven't much to offer you, until I can get at that vanilla plantation, but it's been love at first sight. If you'd go with me to the missionary—and come back again?

He stopped short, vexed at his lack of fitting words. He did not see how the girl's eyes were shining.

"I think I know a good deal about you, Jimmy Thorpe," she said. "But I don't know if it is enough. It isn't as if—" In her turn she paused, twisting at the note.

"I'm a lunkhead," said Jimmy. "I can't tell you how I feel. I don't know how you do. I can't expect that you would fall in love with me, but—I wish you could."

He rose and went to the window. The launch was being hauled up. The yacht's cable was shortening. The girl opened the envelope and read a short note. There was a bill inclosed and she gave a little gasp.

"The yacht is leaving," said Jimmy in a dull tone.

Peggy Dineen hesitated.

"Jimmy," she said, "how much did you say you needed to start your plantation?"

"Another five hundred dollars."

"I've had a note from Mrs. Melville. A nice note. Some time I'll read it to you. But she seems to feel they owe me something. You see, I was engaged for the voyage. She has sent me five hundred dollars. It means little to her, outside of the thought. And that is meant well."

"Yes," said Jimmy. "That's fine. It was coming to you. To pay your way back."

"Yes, Jimmy. If you want me to go."

Jimmy whirled.

"Peggy, do you mean it?"

"Don't you want to take me up to look at your vanilla valley—*our* valley, Jimmy?"

"Do I? Peggy!"

Faata stuck her head in at the door and vanished to bear the glad news to Tubi. They did not hear her. Peggy Dineen was stroking the battered cheek of Jimmy Thorpe.

"It wouldn't be for your looks as they are now, Jimmy, that I'd fall in love with you," she said. "But they have got something to do with it."

That was cryptic to Jimmy, but all that Peggy said was right with him.

As they stood on the hill above the little valley where they were to build up their fortunes together, partners in all, they saw the trailing smoke from the Albatross steaming away from Twenty-Stick.

"There is the missionary's place," said Jimmy. "You can just see it from here. How soon shall we start? I've got wedding rings in stock. They are only brass and gilt, but one will do for now."

She pressed a little closer to him.

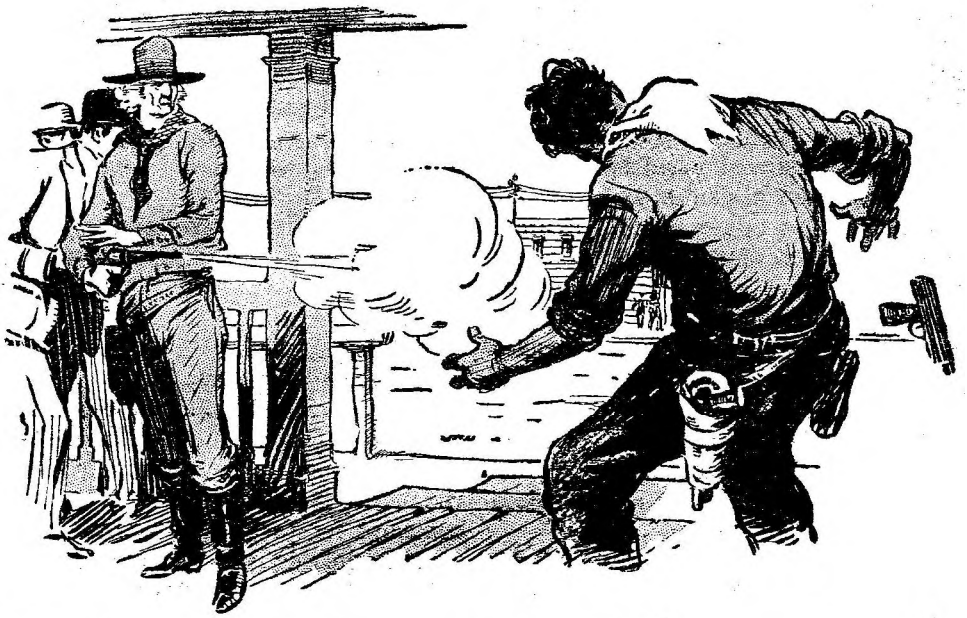
"I'm a fine looking bridegroom for a beautiful bride," he said.

"Sure, Jimmy," she said with the first touch of brogue he had noticed in her speech, "you're the finest ever. And we'll go whenever you are ready."

"That's now," he said.

So the meal that Faata had prepared for noon served them as a wedding supper. Such is the way of lovers.

THE END



The Way of the Buffalo

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Last Hope Ranch," "Riddle Gawne," "Brass Commandments," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

JIM CAMERON, son of a millionaire mine owner, buys a strip of land near a ranch town that is beginning to feel restless in its civic sleep. He intends to wake it to the advantages of the telephone, electric light, *et cetera,* but discovers that his neighbor, "Sunset" Ballantine, a gallant old gunfighter, is bitterly opposed to any change from the routine of cow-ponies, oil lamps, *et cetera.* Ballantine has publicly announced that gunplay will follow any attempt to displace his beloved quietude and contentment by improving the adjoining property. Cameron, in inspecting his purchase, prevents the assassination of the unsuspecting Ballantine by a vengeful old rancher who hoped that a silver bullet would down the invincible warrior. Ballantine's niece, Virginia, a tall, slender, golden haired girl, witnesses Cameron's intervention, but as she already had her rifle pointed at the would-be assassin she is not effusive in her thanks. Later Cameron sees Ballantine enforce his will on judge and witnesses and free a man unjustly charged with horse stealing. So this is to be Cameron's task: To face the ire of a cattle baron who refuses to go the way of the buffalo before the merciless march of Progress.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD WOLF'S CUNNING.

HIS thoughts serious, Cameron walked along the east side of the square and paused before the doors of "The First National Bank of Ransome," so distinguished by the sign above its front. Looking back toward the courthouse, he could see Ballantine, still standing where he had stood when he had emerged from the building. It was as if the man patiently waited, hoping that those he had challenged would return.

But it was evident to Cameron that there would be no trouble. Buggies, spring

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wagons, buckboards were wheeling away amid dust that swirled in clouds. Horses bearing riders were cavorting around the square, headed for the open country that lay calm and serene around Ransome; citizens of the town who had been drawn to the courthouse had vanished.

The square had been magically cleared. With the exception of Ballantine, who was now moving toward a pinto horse hitched to a rail in front of the courthouse, the square was as empty and green and quiet as it had been when Cameron had seen it the first time, that morning.

Ballantine appeared as out of place as if he were walking down Broadway, in New York. He was like an ancient masterpiece in a modern frame.

Picturesque he was, to be sure, and the romance of other days seemed to be in the atmosphere around him, and yet he impressed Cameron as being pathetically futile because he represented a dying day whose sun would rise no more. Rugged as he was, arrogant and inflexible, the splendid fellow would have to bow to the inevitable.

Cameron entered the bank.

He approached a window, arranged for the transfer of some funds, and was walking out, when Fancher emerged from a doorway and recognized him. Fancher extended a hand and smiled broadly.

"My name is Fancher," he said. "I didn't get this opportunity last night. The way you handled Gideon Strong rather took my breath away. After sleeping upon the incident I am convinced that what you did to Strong was for the good of his soul. But Strong is a man I wouldn't care to antagonize. The law isn't as strong here as it might be."

"I've noticed that."

"You mean you visited the courthouse this morning," said Fancher. "I've already heard about it. What do you think of Ballantine?"

"He is a remarkable man."

"Um-m," said Fancher. He glanced keenly at Cameron. "Think you'll get along with him?"

"I hope to."

"Well, by George, I wish you luck! But Ballantine is a hard man to handle. I happen to know that he was right about that man Nelson lying about Ben Baxter, for Judge Gray had the inside dope on that deal. He would have discharged Baxter. That's all right. But it's the idea of any man usurping the power of the court that disturbs me."

"It sets a bad precedent," admitted Cameron. "But what would you have done if you had been in Judge Gray's place?"

Fancher flushed. "I suppose I'd have done just as Judge Gray did."

Cameron wouldn't, but he didn't say so. While he rather admired Ballantine for his courage in openly and arbitrarily directing the release of the accused man, he felt some contempt for Judge Gray's weakness.

After talking with Fancher for a few minutes, Cameron walked down the street toward his hotel.

He was convinced that the people of Ransome were afraid of Ballantine; that they were awed by his guns, by his reputation. As a matter of fact, Ransome had just given a demonstration of its fear, and one enterprising citizen — Fancher—had just admitted that, like Judge Gray, he would have lacked the moral and the physical courage to defend the laws. Cameron was more than half convinced that Ballantine was aware of Ransome's fear of him and was taking advantage of it while perhaps secretly laughing at Ransome.

Cameron again visited the station, to find that his trunk had not yet arrived. When he reached the veranda in front of the hotel he observed a pinto horse hitched to the rack at the edge of the board sidewalk that skirted the veranda.

Also, he saw Ballantine himself sitting on the railing at the western end of the veranda. Ballantine was talking with half a dozen men who stood in front of him. The men were strangers to Cameron, with the exception of the proprietor of the hotel, who saw him as he stepped upon the veranda, and nodded to him.

Cameron crossed the veranda, went inside, purchased some cigars, filled his case, lit one, and strode to the door.

Ballantine interested him. Reluctantly Cameron admitted that he impressed him.

Watching the man closely, although not openly staring at him, Cameron could find nothing in his manner to support his previous conviction that Ballantine was amused over his exploit.

Ballantine's rugged face was set in serious lines. He was as impressive now as he had been when he had stood in the court room dictating to Judge Gray. There wasn't a hint of exultation in the fine, keen eyes that seemed to Cameron to be staring into unfathomed distances with a serenity which could mean nothing but a consciousness of the man's ability to take care of himself in any crisis. Externally, Ballantine was as rugged and grim as the encompassing country; if there was any humor in him, it was not visible.

While Cameron stood in the doorway Gideon Strong stepped upon the veranda. Strong must have been walking down the sidewalk while Cameron had been watching Ballantine, for he had mounted the veranda from that direction. He was halfway across the veranda before he saw Cameron and was evidently intent upon joining the group that surrounded Ballantine.

But when he saw Cameron he halted, turned, and bowed derisively.

"Good morning," he said blandly. "You're stirring early. Been over to the courthouse?"

Cameron did not acknowledge the greeting. He stared past Strong, seemingly over his shoulder; then apparently straight into Strong's eyes without seeing him.

Strong laughed.

"You have," he said.

Strong seemed hugely amused. His fat face was red, his eyes were agleam with malice. That he could smile after what had happened the night before indicated an aggressiveness that made him worthy of consideration.

Yet Cameron loathed him. The man was grossly vulgar, sensuous, coarse. He was not more than thirty-five, but there was none of the clearness of youth in his eyes; they had an old, sophisticated expression, as if they had seen all that was to be seen, as though they had stripped the masks from all the illusions of youth to search for the worldliness underneath.

Strong was a creature of appetite, of violent passion. There was no repression in him. The things he thought were lying naked in his eyes, and the thoughts were not good.

For an instant longer he stood, watching Cameron with gleaming, quickening eyes; then he laughed lowly, deep in his throat, turned and elbowed his way to Ballantine.

Cameron did not follow his movements. But he stiffened slightly when he glanced casually toward the western end of the veranda to see Strong and Ballantine approaching. Strong had caught hold of Ballantine's right arm and was urging him toward the doorway in which Cameron stood.

In another instant Strong and Ballantine were confronting Cameron. Ballantine was gazing steadily and curiously into Cameron's eyes; Strong's face was working with repressed mirth.

"Sunset," said Strong, "I told you I'd show you something that would interest you! Take a look at the man who bought that last stretch of land next to yours! Deal was closed last night. Yes, sir! I cashed his check this morning. You ain't scaring him any! Not any! He bought the land, knowing what you've said about not wanting it settled or worked! Sunset, meet James J. Cameron, your new neighbor!"

Strong did not meet Cameron's eyes as he finished, because Cameron was not looking at him. Cameron was watching Ballantine. Ballantine had stiffened. His lips had straightened; strange little flecks of fire danced in his eyes.

Strong turned chuckling, to watch the effect of his action upon the men who had turned to follow his movements.

Ballantine turned perfectly motionless. His eyes, unblinking, steady, were probing Cameron's, as if to read his thoughts. Strong had ceased to chuckle; he made no sound. Silence, portentous of the imminence of the strange and the unusual, had descended upon the veranda.

The stillness was broken by Ballantine's voice, deep, slow, deliberate:

"You're James J. Cameron?"

"That is my name, sir."

"Ever hear of 'Smoke' Cameron?"

"'Smoke' Cameron was my grandfather."

Ballantine did not move, although the light in his eyes grew so intense that it made him seem to lean forward as if the better to search the face of the young man who curiously and steadily looked back at him.

"Is your father 'Bill' Cameron?" asked Ballantine.

"Yes."

Ballantine's face was now betraying some signs of emotion. It had reddened slightly; he was staring straight at Cameron with a gaze so curiously foreshortened that to Cameron it seemed the eyes were not seeing him at all, but were visualizing something beyond him. And as Cameron watched he saw Ballantine's gaze grow retrospective, as though memories were crowding out all realization of the present.

And then came incomprehension, perplexity. Ballantine's lashes flickered several times as if to dispel a persistent vision.

"You've bought the land next to mine?" he asked, seemingly to confirm a fact that his mind had not yet fully grasped. "You've bought that land, and you're Smoke Cameron's grandson?"

"Yes," answered Cameron.

The color left Ballantine's face. He stood rigid, silent. He voiced no greeting to the grandson of a man he evidently had known, but the shadow of an ironic smile twitched at his lips. For an instant longer he stood, staring into Cameron's eyes. Then he wheeled and faced Strong, his voice cold with passion.

"Strong!" he called. "Step out there! You've been tryin' to make a fool of me!"

"I beg your pardon, Ballantine," said Cameron gently as he stepped between the two. "I have first claim. Mr. Strong has made the same mistake twice. His ideas of humor are too vague to be appreciated."

Camern smiled at Ballantine and walked toward Strong. The latter, his face suddenly gone gray, essayed a defiant sneer. He held his ground as Cameron approached.

Cameron's smile had vanished. The eyes that met Strong's were the cold, alert, passionless eyes of the man who fights because he likes to fight.

"Right now, Strong!" he said.

Strong's legs went to a sprawl; his right hand moved rapidly toward a hip pocket. He threw up his left hand with an instinctively defensive movement as Cameron stepped in.

But there was a lightning motion, as if of terrific force suddenly unleashed and flashing out of nowhere, a smashing, splitting crash as Cameron's right fist struck Strong's jaw; and Strong went down as though he had been struck on the head with a hammer.

He fell upon his right side, rolled over from the force of the blow and lay limp and motionless, face down. Cameron walked to him, stooped, drew an ugly looking automatic pistol from the man's right hip pocket, and threw it into the street. Then he stood erect and looked at Ballantine.

Several other men were watching Cameron, and there were pale smiles of approval upon some of the faces that were turned toward him. But still other men were watching Ballantine.

Ballantine had turned; he was facing the sidewalk that led down the street toward the courthouse. Coming toward the veranda, and not more than fifty or sixty feet distant, was Bill Nelson, the man who had perjured himself when testifying against Baxter.

Nelson had been drinking. At a little distance down the street, in front of one of the saloons, was a crowd of men, watching his progress toward the hotel.

Instantly, Cameron knew why Nelson was coming. The man had gained false courage through his potations and was recklessly and tardily seeking revenge for his humiliation in public. That he had told the crowd of his intention was plainly evident by the fact that the men were watching him.

Cameron again looked at Ballantine. The old fellow was erect, motionless. His big felt hat was pulled well down over his forehead billowing the white hair above his ears and at the back of his head. Cameron understood that he, also, knew the meaning of Nelson's approach, for his eyes were alight with a cold contempt, although watchful and alert.

Cameron forgot Strong. It seemed the other men on the veranda had forgotten him, too, for none looked at him. All were interested in Ballantine.

Cameron backed away from Ballantine until he felt the veranda rail against his back. There he stood, watching, realizing that here probably would be enacted drama that he would never witness again —the scene of an old-time cowpuncher and gunman watching the approach of an enemy; the men on the veranda slowly moving away from him, getting out of range, while the old cowpuncher, perhaps the least disturbed by the impending clash, stood calmly, even contemptuously awaiting the first hostile movement.

Nelson continued to come forward. Cameron observed that he was not very drunk. He did not stagger; he appeared deliberate, sure of himself. That was the whisky, bolstering his courage. His face was flushed; his eyes were glittering. As he came close to the edge of the veranda his gaze met Ballantine's, and he sneered. He meant to kill.

Then suddenly he was standing on the eastern edge of the veranda. He halted, steadily watching Ballantine.

"I've got yu'—yu' old wolf!" he said.

Nelson was breathing fast, his voice was vibrant with passion.

"Yu' made a fool of me in the courthouse this mornin'," he went on. "I'm aimin' to blow yu' apart. Yu've been runin' this country for years, braggin' about your gun-slingin'. If yu' wasn't so old I'd make a colender out of yu'. As it is I'm goin' to bung yu' up a few an' let yu' go. Throw your gun!"

Nelson crouched, tense, expectant, watchful.

"Bill Nelson," gently said Ballantine; "your skin's full of licker or you wouldn't be tryin' to make a fool of yourself. Go back to your crowd an' behave yourself."

Ballantine stood. squarely facing his enemy. He was erect, in startling contrast to Nelson's crouching attitude. His hands were hanging at his sides; Nelson's were curved, claw-like, above the butts of the guns that swung at each hip. He had not worn the weapons in court, but they appeared to belong on him, he wore them as if he were accustomed to them.

He sneered at Balantine's gently rebuking words.

"Crawfishin'—at your age!" he said. "Yu' can talk big enough when a man ain't got a gun on him, but when a man comes heeled yu' sing a different tune; Flash your guns or I'll bore yu'!"

"Bill Nelson, you'd better go home," warned Ballantine.

"Flash 'em!" yelled Nelson.

His right hand moved with the words.

Cameron saw that hand grasp the butt of the gun at his right hip. He heard a crash from Ballantine's side; saw a smoke streak with a lance flame penetrating it, shoot from Ballantine's right hip. Ballantine had "fanned" his gun!

Cameron saw Nelson's right arm jerk backward as if some one had seized it from behind. Nelson's gun thudded to the floor of the veranda; the arm swung back and dangled limply.

Nelson's left hand flashed downward toward the gun at his left hip. Again Ballantine's weapon crashed. This time Nelson's gun stayed in its holster. But the left arm dangled as the right had done, and Nelson screamed in agony.

He staggered back against the railing of the veranda, striking in a corner where the two rails formed a "V" for his support. There he bent his head forward while he screamed and cursed horribly.

"You had to have it, Nelson," said Ballantine. He sheathed his gun, glanced around. No one said anything to him. He looked at Cameron and Cameron observed the ghost of an ironic smile on his lips.

Then, not seeming to notice Nelson as he passed the man, he walked across the veranda, down the steps to the sidewalk, strode to the hitching rack, unhitched the pinto, threw the reins over the pommel of the saddle, swung into the saddle with the grace and agility of a man of thirty, and rode down the street toward the open space that stretched in front of the white ranch house.

Some men led Nelson, whimpering now, but still cursing, down the street. Cameron still leaned against the veranda railing.

Ballantine had known "Smoke" Cameron. Cameron's father had told Cameron that "Smoke" and Ballantine had been friends. Still, Ballantine had not offered to shake hands with him, had given him no greeting of any kind. What had been the significance of that ironic smile? War, of course.

Cameron heard a voice, a mere whisper. He did not look up, for he knew it came from one of the men on the veranda.

"Two fire-eaters," said the voice. "There's going to be trouble in Ransome!"

CHAPTER V.

THE EYE-SORE.

CAMERON stood, watching Strong. He had hit the man rather hard, for a terrific hatred had expressed itself in the blow. He hadn't lost his temper; he had merely deliberately punished the man for presuming to attempt to make him appear ludicrous in Ballantine's presence; for attempting to arouse antagonism between himself and Ballantine.

Cameron didn't want to antagonize the old man. He meant to go ahead with his projects, that was true, but he wanted to push them through, if possible, without arousing any bitterness.

Strong would have been surprised if he had known how completely Cameron comprehended the magnitude of the work he had been sent to do. Strong would have been further surprised if he had known that Cameron had completed greater enterprises than were contemplated in Ransome.

The invisible influences behind Cameron had been at work for many months in Ransome; Cameron was the visible power which would push the well-planned projects to completion. Forces such as Gideon Strong and Ballantine might irritate and delay; they could not defeat Cameron's aims.

Cameron watched Ballantine ride away; he watched Strong sit up and stare dizzily about; he stood near the doorway of the hotel as Strong got to his feet, swayed and leaned against the veranda railing and looked at him

Strong was pale, but there was no more fight left in him. Cameron saw by the way the man's gaze wavered that he did not intend to seek immediate revenge for the blow. There might come a time when Strong would attempt reprisal of some sort, but not now. For the present he had had enough.

Followed by the glances of a half dozen men who were still on the veranda, Strong moved along the railing, holding to it until he reached the steps. He stumbled down the steps and walked unsteadily along the sidewalk, eastward. He made no attempt to pick up the pistol Cameron had thrown into the dust of the street.

Cameron, feeling the interest of the men who had witnessed the scene between himself and Ballantine, and fully aware of the glances that followed him, stepped down from the veranda, crossed the street and walked through the square. He paused at the base of the bronze statue erected to the memory of the town's founder.

Cameron wasn't concerned about Strong. Strong was a cheap, blatant real estate shark. A blow would teach him his place. But Ballantine was different. Ballantine had refused to shake hands, although he had offered Cameron no insults. His attitude had been a revelation of character; he had confirmed the warlike inclinations which had been exhibited previously in the courthouse.

Cameron waited in the square until the crowd on the veranda of the hotel had dispersed. Then he walked down to the station and sent a telegram to his father, at Denver, bearing the terse message:

"Deal closed."

Early the following morning Cameron hired a horse at the livery stable, rode down the slope west of town, passed the picket fence in front of Ballantine's house and vanished into the hills south of town.

He returned with the dusk, put the horse away, went to his room, washed, found that his trunk had arrived and changed his clothes. He hadn't tasted food since breakfast and he was famished when he entered the dining room. But he had explored every foot of the land he had purchased.

He spent some time the next morning

wandering, in apparent aimlessness, about Ransome, and just before noon he entered the bank and asked for Fancher. The latter appeared, smiling.

"So you finally talked to Strong in the only language he understands, eh?" said Fancher. "Strong has been needing that sort of thing!"

"I'm rather sorry it had to happen, Mr. Fancher," said Cameron. "It wouldn't have happened if Strong hadn't made it necessary." He looked straight at the banker. "I want to buy the building adjoining this, on the east. The two-story brick."

"Well, ahem!" hesitatingly exclaimed Fancher. He looked sharply at Cameron and smiled faintly.

"You mean the Judd Building? I'm sorry; you're a little too late, I am afraid. A man named Jordan took a thirty day option on that property about two weeks ago. I don't mind saying that he got a low figure on it, too."

"Yes; I know the figure. Ten thousand. We've bought his option. We'll put the deal through right away, if you please."

Fancher's eyes lighted with comprehension. He smiled broadly. "I see," he said. "Certainly. We'll take care of it right away. You work fast, don't you? If the question is not impertinent, would you mind telling me what you intend to use the building for? There are, you know, certain restrictions which might possibly interfere."

"There is nothing to be gained by secrecy, Mr. Fancher—especially as publicity will help the project along. The Judd Building will become the plant of the Ransome Telephone Company."

"By George!" exclaimed Fancher. He was amazed, delighted. "An extension from Dry Bottom?" he inquired.

"Exactly."

"When is this going to happen?"

"Dry Bottom is twenty miles distant," said Cameron. "The linemen have been working this way for the past month. According to my schedule they ought to be here by the eighteenth. This is the fourteenth. They will be here, for when I came over on the train I noticed they were only about two miles out."

"Well, by thunder! I've heard about them sticking in new poles! But I was under the impression that the railroad company was doing the work!" His eyes were glowing with admiration as he now looked at Cameron.

"Yes," he added; "you certainly do work fast! And it's all settled, eh? The grant—the franchise—and everything?"

Cameron nodded. "Service by the first of the month," he quietly announced. "When Jordan was here to take the option he did some measuring and estimating. Jordan is one of our engineers. He'll be here within a week to install the switchboard and the other stuff."

"'We,' I presume," said Fancher, "is the Cameron Company, of Denver."

Cameron nodded.

"You'll sell stock here, I suppose—to the —er—natives?"

"A limited amount, necessarily."

"H-m! Well, don't slight us."

After Cameron left the bank he walked toward the hotel. He had almost reached the veranda when he saw the station agent waving a hand at him. He went down the slope to the station and the agent pointed to a box car which stood on a siding.

"A horse in there," he said; "consigned to you. Huh!" he added when he saw Cameron's eyes light up. "You knowed it was comin', eh?"

Half an hour later Cameron led the horse out of the car. The animal was playfully nudging him.

"H-m!" remarked the station agent. "The horse seems to understand him, but I'll be damned if I do. If I had his coin I'd be doin' a hop, skip an' a jump over the high spots! No buryin' myself in a hell-hole like this! He looks thoroughbred, sort of!"

A saddle and bridle and a groom came with the horse. The groom took the evening train back the way he had come, and appeared relieved that he had not been asked to stay. But the saddle and bridle Cameron slipped on the horse. He rode the animal to the livery stable and turned him into a box stall.

The horse was a big black, superbly muscled, with fire and spirit in his flaring nostrils and restless eyes. A patch of white on

his forehead so closely resembled a star that the livery stable owner nodded his head approvingly when he heard Cameron mention the name: "White Star."

The livery stable owner observed that the horse liked Cameron; and his own manner toward Cameron grew more friendly. He also observed that the saddle had been much used; that it was a cow saddle with long skirts, one of which contained a rifle holster.

"He ain't so damned much of a tenderfoot, after all!" was his mental observation. "I'm bettin' he could ride some of these sagebrush rummies off their legs! The more you look at him the better you like him."

Cameron's light, tropical serge clothing had gone into his trunk, as also had the white, soft shirt, the tie and the collar which had been so greatly envied by Kerslake, of the Merchant's Board. Khaki trousers now adorned Cameron's legs, and puttees of dull leather—also much worn—reached from his glistening tan shoes to a point just below the knees.

A brown shirt, with patch pockets much in evidence, appeared to have been made to measure; as did a coat of brown corduroy—also with patch pockets—which was just long enough to conceal a narrow belt and a blocky, sinister looking leather holster containing a heavy, blue steel automatic pistol. He wore the hat he had bought in Ransome.

The morning after the arrival of White Star, Cameron was up early to ride the black horse southward. He wished to take another look at the land he had bought—and his inactivity since arriving in Ransome irked him.

There was something in Ransome's lethargic atmosphere that irritated him.

He saw where the town might be improved; where there were opportunities to establish important utilities which would result in much good to the town's people.

It did not astonish him that the well-to-do people of Ransome hadn't taken advantage of their opportunities; this was not the first town in which the business element lacked initiative. It was not the first town that he had jerked out of somnolence. He'd "make" Ransome as he had made other towns. But for a few days he'd have to be idle.

Half a mile from the edge of town he passed close to a two story frame building of ramshackle appearance. The building stood at the edge of a narrow road which appeared to wind aimlessly over the undulating land. There was a hitching rack in front of the structure, and a long, low veranda upon which there were several chairs and benches. A crude sign, swung from the eaves of the veranda, bore the legend:

KELLY'S CATTLEMEN'S BAR.

There was no denying that the building was old; it had a look of having been there for many years. It seemed to Cameron's eyes to be more aged than the "Trail House," in Ransome. Its founder may have dreamed that a town would one day grow up around it.

But Ransome had grown away from it. The green-brown section of upland stretching between the old building and the nearest of the town's structures, completely isolated the "Cattlemen's Bar;" gave it a forlorn appearance, swathed it in an atmosphere of desolation.

Cameron sat for a time on White Star, interestedly looking at the building. A small space between the front of the structure and the road was level and clear, but upon both sides and in the rear were piles of refuse, empty bottles, tin cans, beer kegs in pyramids; empty whisky barrels, ashes, broken boxes scattered untidily about.

In Cameron's fancy the building made an ugly blot on the face of nature. It seemed a derelict which had been blown to its present position by an idle wind. It did not seem to be a part of Ransome, and it certainly did not belong on the bosom of the majestic land on which it sat.

Moreover, the dilapidated affair was on his land. He made sure of that while he sat on White Star. By consulting the blue print he had brought with him, which contained a description of the land, he was able to determine that the building appeared to stand almost in the center of the strip which extended from the railroad track in Ransome to the point southward, where the boundaries broadened.

Sitting on White Star, Cameron decided the building would have to be removed or destroyed. He didn't want it to remain where it was. He felt it offended his sense of the esthetic. He had plans for the grouping of the structures he meant to erect on the land, and he didn't want his plans spoiled by the " Cattlemen's Bar."

He might have ridden on, to consider the matter at leisure, but at that instant a man appeared in the doorway of the saloon, seemed to squint at him, laughed harshly and spoke to some one inside. Three other men appeared behind the first, crowding the open doorway. One wore a dirty white apron; the others, apparently, were cowpunchers or homesteaders.

All were grinning. Cameron was close enough to them to see their faces. He felt they were discussing him. Acting upon a sudden impulse he wheeled White Star and rode to the edge of the veranda.

The voices of the men died away as he swung off White Star, trailed the reins over the animal's head and stepped upon the veranda. As Cameron halted after taking several steps toward the men he was conscious of an atmosphere of hostility that suddenly seemed to envelop him.

None of the men spoke. They stood, watching him, their faces expressionless. One of the men was a cowboy, for he was arrayed in chaps, boots, and the other regalia of his trade. Cameron had seen no horse in the vicinity, but there was a small stable at the rear of the building. He thought the cowboy's horse might be in there.

Two of the remaining men wore overalls and woolen shirts. After a galnce at their boots, Cameron decided they were homesteaders. They might be workingmen from Ransome. Cameron wasn't interested in them, but he did not fail to observe that they watched him with intent curiosity.

The man who wore the white apron pushed his way out of the doorway. As the man turned sidewise to pass between the two who were partly blocking his progress, Cameron caught a glimpse of the butt of a heavy revolver in a holster at the man's hip.

The man was tall and massive. The white apron bulged at the front, betraying an undeniable stomach; but his chest was deep, his shoulders wide and heavy, and his great arms were long and powerful. He was shaved smoothly, so that Cameron could detect the lines of character in his face.

His chin had a belligerent thrust; he had small ears which seemed to flatten against his head; his mouth was big, the lips thin and bloodless; the upper lip was protruding and prehensile. Blue eyes, small and agate hard, were probing Cameron's gaze.

The man emerged from the doorway, folded his arms over his chest and spoke shortly:

" You lookin' for somebody, stranger?"

" I'm looking for the owner of this saloon."

" I'm him," said the big man.

" Mr. Kelly?"

" Correct. What can I do for you?"

" My name is Cameron, Mr. Kelly. I'm the new owner of this property." There was the mere hint of a wayward smile on his lips as he added:

" I was passing, saw your place and thought I'd stop and get acquainted with my tenant."

" We've heard of you," said Kelly. " You're the guy which blowed in here the other day an' slugged Gideon Strong."

" I also stopped for the purpose of talking business with you, Mr. Kelly," added Cameron, ignoring the other's reference to Strong, but feeling the hostility of his manner. " I've come to give you notice to vacate."

Kelly's face flushed. He unfolded his arms and stuck his hands into the pockets of his trousers, lifting the edge of the apron to do so, thereby exposing to Cameron's view the butt of the heavy revolver at his hip.

Cameron saw the other men look quickly at Kelly. They appeared to detect humor in the situation, for they smiled. One of the men in overalls chuckled lowly, insolently.

" You're givin' me notice, eh?" said Kelly. " How much notice?"

" Three days."

Cameron paid no attention to the glances

of the other men; he was looking straight at Kelly, and something in his eyes caused Kelly's to waver.

Kelly cleared his throat.

"Three days, eh" he said. "Well, Mr. Cameron, I've got to hand it to you. You're a fast worker. You've been here three or four days. You've bought the land; you've knocked out Strong; you've bought the Judd buildin'; you're goin' to give Ransome telephones. Ransome ain't used to travelin' so fast. Why not say three years instead of three days?"

"Three days," repeated Cameron quietly.

Kelly's hands came out of his pockets and went to his hips, where they rested, his elbows projecting. His face had paled; there was not a vestige of color in it, and his eyes were glittering with rage.

"Damned if you don't mean it!" he flung out, his voice hoarse with passion.

"Certainly. The building is in the way. It has got to be disposed of. Three days will give you plenty of time to get your stuff out, to find a place in Ransome. I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Kelly. But three days is the limit."

Cameron turned, walked to the edge of the veranda.

Kelly's voice halted him.

Cameron turned. Kelly had drawn the gun from the holster at his hip. The weapon was held rigid at his side, its muzzle was gaping at Cameron. Kelly's body was tense; the muscles of his throat were working; his eyes were blazing pools of passion.

"Damn your hide!" he shrieked. "You can't come into this country an' pull off any of that kind of stuff! You'll die so damned fast you'll think somebody is shovin' you! Understand that?

"This bar has been here for fifty years! Better men than you have tried to bust it up, an' it ain't busted yet. It ain't goin' to be busted! I'm warnin' you!

"There ain't so much law in this country but what a man's got some rights in the place where he lives, an' if you come back here again with any of that three-day talk I'll blow you into hell! Don't you forget that!"

"I'm sorry, Kelly; as I told you before. But this is my land. I've got certain plans and I'm going to put them through. Your place is in the way. It's got to be removed. You've got to get out. You've got three days.

"You've talked so much that you've put an idea into my head. Put up your gun, Kelly. You can't shoot me for telling you about my plans regarding this place. And I'm not a bit afraid of you."

The wayward light had come again into Cameron's eyes—a light of such intensity that it caused Kelly to marvel, and slowly to restore his gun to the holster at his hip.

"Now listen carefully, Kelly," Cameron was saying when Kelly, amazed that his right hand was no longer fingering the butt of the gun, blinked rapidly at him: "It is nine o'clock now, of the fifteenth. At nine o'clock on the morning of the eighteenth I'm going to blow this building up! If you don't want your stuff to go up with it you'd better get it out. I think you can understand that!"

Cameron stepped down from the veranda, mounted his horse and rode away.

For an instant Kelly stood watching him, his eyes narrowed to slits. His right hand slowly descended toward the butt of the weapon at his hip. He was in the grip of an insane rage, and would have done murder.

"Quit it, you darned fool!"

The voice of the cowboy startled Kelly; brought him out of the frenzy that had seized him. He looked at the cowboy; at the other men, and slowly backed to the wall, where he stood, staring at Cameron's vanishing figure.

"I've been around a little in my time," offered the cowboy by way of explaining his action in speaking so urgently to Kelly. "I know when a man's bluffin' an' when he's tryin' to run a whizzer. That guy goin' there means business. When he says a thing he don't mean somethin' else.

"If I was in your boots, Kelly, I'd be somewheres else on the mornin' of the eighteenth. As sure as shootin' this here joint is goin' to be blowed up!

"An' there's another thing, Kelly. I was watchin' that guy when you thought of throwin' your gun. You'd never have throwed it successful.

"That guy had one of them new-fangled automatics stuck under his coat. There bein' no flap over the darned thing proves that he figures to use it. An' I figure that a guy with an eye like his is chain-lightin'.

"Gentlemen, I ain't goin' to be inside this here joint around nine o'clock on the morn' in' of the eighteenth! An' don't you forget it!"

CHAPTER VI.

A DAYLIGHT ROMEO.

CAMERON awoke with his thoughts dwelling upon Ballantine. He was aware that the old fellow had impressed him, but he hadn't taken very seriously the rumors of the man's threats, nor had he been perturbed over Ballantine's obvious hostility toward him that day on the veranda of the hotel, when Strong had introduced them.

Ballantine, in spite of the romantic atmosphere that surrounded him, despite his picturesqueness, was a rather nebulous figure. What Ballantine did or felt was not important. The West was full of his kind—pioneers steeped in the glamour of the past, who became obstructionists out of pure obstinacy, or because they lacked the enterprise to keep abreast of the times.

And yet Cameron felt a pulse of sympathy for Ballantine. After all, because a man was old, there was no reason why he should be ignored or ruthlessly shoved aside. The very fact that a man was old entitled him to consideration from the younger generation.

Age did not lessen a man's capacity to experience the tortuous stabs of tragedy, and there certainly must be tragedy in the contemplation of the passing of a régime in which a man has held a prominent position. Ballantine had been a king in his day, now he was confronted with the knowledge that a new king—Progress—was to shunt him aside as though he were of negligible importance. Cameron decided he must have a talk with Ballantine, to explain his position.

But as this morning he rode down the slope toward the white ranch house he was aware that he was giving more thought to Virginia than to her uncle. He found he was entertaining a hope that he would not be forced to antagonize Ballantine, for any sort of a difference between himself and the old man would mean that he wouldn't be able to see much of Virginia. For she was loyal to her uncle—he had observed that!—and naturally she would not very much admire any one who became his enemy.

He brought his horse to a halt at the white picket fence, dismounted and looped the reins over a picket. He didn't expect to stop long—just long enough to reach an understanding with Ballantine, and then he intended to ride on, to have another look at the gorge where he intended to build a dam.

The wide veranda that ran along the front of the white ranch house had, he thought, an atmosphere of disuse. Somehow he got the impression that the front door was seldom opened. Therefore, he passed the veranda and went to the rear porch, where he stood for an instant looking at the screen door.

No sound came from the house. He stepped upon the porch and knocked on the frame of the screen door. Some one was at home because the kitchen door was wide open; he could look into the kitchen. But there came no response to his knock, and presently he stepped off the porch and glanced inquiringly about.

An oppressive loneliness seemed to envelop the place. He had a strange feeling that in this house, where once had been laughter and talk in young voices, there reigned now only emptiness.

The entire place had a look of past fullness, of past vitality and life, and of present senility. It was a nest where the young had lived, from which they had flown. A house of memories!

Yet everything was in perfect order. In fact, there was too much primness about everything. A primness suggesting age and inertia.

A roller towel on the wall above a spotless wooden bench upon which sat a basin that glistened with cleanliness was so white that it gleamed like snow in the sun. The porch floor had been scrubbed until the wood was bleached. The curtains of the

kitchen windows were immaculate; the glass shone.

Cameron turned and looked at the other buildings, mentally classifying them. A big stable, a wagon shed, a storage shed, two long bunk houses, a mess house, a blacksmith shop and two other structures were scattered over a level within three or four hundred feet of the ranch house.

Spanning the river which he had followed out of Ransome on the day of his arrival was a big corral—empty. Farther down the river was another corral, smaller, also empty. No litter of any kind was visible.

North of the ranch house was a garden. While Cameron stood looking at the garden he caught a glimpse of a blue cotton dress beyond a corner of a small building in the garden.

Strangely the atmosphere of loneliness no longer afflicted Cameron. Senility no longer mocked him. Youth—youth wearing a blue cotton dress—had magically transformed the place. And now Cameron knew he had not come to talk with Ballantine.

Cameron walked toward the garden. He avoided the small building behind which he had seen the dress, so that he would not seem to steal upon its owner.

Virginia was bending slightly forward, mounding soil around the roots of a rose bush. A sunbonnet as blue as the dress she wore was upon her head, its broad tucked wings concealing her face from Cameron. Her hands—gloved—were wielding a hoe, and she was so intent upon her task that she did not know he had halted within a dozen feet of her and was watching her.

She turned when he gave her a low "Good morning."

She started, gripped the hoe tightly, blushed.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "It is Mr. Cameron!"

She dropped the hoe and stood erect. She removed one glove and tucked in some stray wisps of hair. Her blush deepened.

Cameron had not failed to observe the significance of her action in dropping the hoe. He read a welcome in that sign. If she hadn't been pleased to see him she would have continued to hold the handle of the implement, to show him that she intended to resume her work as soon as she could get rid of him.

Also, her action in tucking away the stray wisps of hair held some significance. It told him, wordlessly, that she wanted to look her best. Her blush told him still more; so much that a strange elation seized him.

"I didn't mean to startle you," he apologized. "I knocked at the kitchen door, but as nobody came I took the liberty of looking around. Then I saw you. When I saw the hoe in your hands I had a fear that it might be a rifle."

"Oh, that!" she said. She looked straight at him, and although her eyes were dancing there was a challenge in them.

"You had no business standing there laughing at me afteh you'd been pretending," she declared.

"But I hadn't been pretending!" Cameron defended.

"Well, we won't argue. I expaict I just had a fool notion. And I didn't hurt you."

The laughter died out of her eyes; she regarded him with a cool, disconcerting calmness which seemed, instantly, to set a barrier against any further intimacy or friendliness.

"You've come to see my uncle, I expaict?"

"Yes."

"He isn't heah. He went away this mawning, early. But I expaict he'll be coming along most any time now."

Cameron detecetd a change in her manner toward him. There on the ledge the other day she had appeared frank, straightspoken, sure of herself. Now there was constraint in her attitude; a cold reserve, a suggestion of awed deference.

There also was an apologetic shyness in the way she removed her gloves as he stood looking at her. Embarrassment was in her manner of taking off the sunbonnet and letting it dangle by the strings from the hand in which she held the gloves.

"I think I shall wait for your uncle, if you don't mind," said Cameron. "But don't let me interrupt your work."

"I'm through right now," she said. "This isn't work, anyway. Uncle Jeff

usually does the garden work. But this rose bush has been obstinate. Some way, it just seems to lack ambition."

"Reminds one of some people."

"That's a hint," she charged instantly. "You are referring to Uncle Jeff. Folks in town have been telling you about him."

"Well," he admitted, "I think I have heard some talk. I didn't place much credence in it."

"You thought it impawtant enough to repeat it," she said, looking at him with level eyes.

"But what Uncle Jeff thinks is his affair," she added. "Folks get queer notions. There are some around heah who think uncle is a harmless crank and that he talks just to let off steam. But I want to warn you that he isn't a crank.

"I really don't think he hates people in Ransome because they've come so close to the T Down. Uncle Jeff has got a big heart. Nobody can know him and not love him.

"It's just that he's got so used to living the old way that he feels the people of Ransome are going to interfere with him. If he'd move this house back several miles, or build a new one back where the people couldn't bother him, he'd never worry; he'd not hate people.

"But from the way he acts I expaict he don't know that. And I'm afraid he'll get so resentful that he'll kill some one. There is men in town who would be only too glad to have an excuse to get him out of the way so that they could do what they pleased with his land."

She led the way to the porch and offered him a chair. But he dropped to the edge of the porch.

"I'll be comfortable here," he said. "You go right ahead with your work."

"My work is done," she said, "until dinner." The color in her cheeks grew deeper. "There isn't much work," she added; "there's only Uncle Jeff and myself. There's a cook with the outfit."

She had been standing near the kitchen door. Now she crossed the porch, went down the steps and seated herself on the edge of the porch near the wall. She was undeniably embarrassed and uneasy. The sun was high, but there was a welcome shade on the porch, and she still held the sunbonnet by its strings and seemed to gravely inspect it.

Twice as Cameron sat there gazing off into the shimmering glare of white sunlight he felt she was watching him, and he somehow got the impression that she wanted to introduce a subject but was uncertain as to how to begin. He was not surprised when she finally said:

"Mr. Cameron, I've told Uncle Jeff about Dave Jenkins trying to shoot him."

"I understood that was to be a secret between us?"

"So it was. But afteh what happened in town the other day I felt uncle ought to know."

"You mean after what happened on the veranda of the City Hotel?"

"Yes. That was just like Gideon Strong. He'd do a thing like that. But that doesn't matter. Strong doesn't count. But afteh uncle told me that you had bought the land down along the creek I felt uncle ought to know that you had saved his life."

"Why?"

"Mr. Cameron," she said gravely, "Uncle Jeff has sworn to kill any man who tries to improve the land you have bought. He don't want it all cluttered up with factories and mills and machinery and railroads, to make a lot of noise and dirt and smoke. That's what you intend to do, isn't it?"

"Something like that," admitted Cameron. "So your uncle has vision? He foresees what is going to happen some day."

"It won't happen in his time," declared the girl, soberly. "He'll die, keeping those things away. He's been hoping he wouldn't have to fight. He's been worried. And then you had to come heah.

"You're Smoke Cameron's grandson. The night uncle came home afteh shooting Bill Nelson he was out heah on the porch muttering to himself. I heard him repeating over and over that you was Smoke Cameron's grandson, that you had Smoke's blood in you, and that you'd very likely be as determined a fighter as Smoke.

"I thought he'd go into town and shoot you before I could prevent him, and so I had

to tell him about you saving his life. I expaict that's why you're still alive."

"You think he would have killed me?"

"Yes; I think he would. He isn't a bit afraid of any one shooting him. Nobody can hurt him with a bullet. He's been in dozens of fights and no bullet has ever touched him. He can't be shot."

"I think you told me that the other day," said Cameron. "And I presume most any bullet would hit me if it were fired straight enough. But I have started this thing and I can't run away. That is what you have been suggesting, isn't it?"

"Yes," she admitted frankly. "I want you to go away."

He shook his head. "No," he said. "I'm sorry I can't accommodate you. The thing has gone too far. And, besides, even if I did give it up it wouldn't be long before other interests would step in. It's bound to come.

"All over the West the situation is the same. Towns are springing up; business is advancing its lines. A new era is at hand. The old West is dead. Old methods and customs must give way to the new."

There was a look in his eyes which reminded her of the day he had stood facing her after she had shot the hat she had affected to despise. And suddenly she knew that he was no more afraid of Ballantine than he had been when she had shot at his hat.

On the day he had faced her on the ledge she had rather liked him. The knowledge, assailing her suddenly, had thrown her into a sort of panic, had provoked the wild impulse of defiance which had led her to shoot at his hat. She had wanted to show him—and herself—that she did not care for him.

Now, covertly watching him, she was sure she didn't like him. She didn't like the calm serenity of his manner, the iron edge of command which she detected under his quietness. There was something about him which convinced her that he was accustomed to having people obey him, and that once having set out to do a thing he would persist against all obstacles.

It gave her a feeling of dismay as she likened him to her uncle. They were much alike. There would be trouble, and of course she'd have to stand with her relative. And now she knew why she didn't like Cameron. It was because of the fight that was to come.

"Perhaps the old methods and customs will go, Mr. Cameron," she said. "But why hurry them away? Perhaps there are still people who like them."

"Hurry them?" he returned, looking at her. "I had no idea of that. Changes come along naturally. I just happened to be here when the time came."

"I'm not so sure that the time has come!" she declared. "The time does not come until everybody is ready. There are people here who are not ready."

"There always are such people. Usually, after changes come, those same people are glad of it."

"That is what you think."

"Well, yes."

"And I presume you also think that you are the advance agent of progress—progress spelled with capitals?" she said with a flavor of sarcasm.

"No," he answered calmly. "I'm a man with a job of work to do. I merely intend to stick to my job."

Obstinate! That was her thought. Certainly he was obstinate! It stuck out all over him.

"Mr. Cameron," she said steadily, "I do not like you. I think Uncle Jeff is going to hate you!"

"Curiously, I had the same thought," he rejoined. "About you uncle. But I don't mind telling you that I'd been hoping you and I could get along. You see, I like you quite a little. In fact, though I expect you will not believe me, you are the first girl I ever admired."

"I'm sorry I can't believe you," she declared, sitting rigid and regarding him with scornful eyes.

"I don't expect you to," he said calmly. "And yet it is the truth. I think that what I most admire about you is your perfect frankness. Also, your eyes. And your hair. It is very beautiful."

"Mr. Cameron, you will please not discuss my hair!" she said frigidly.

"Of course not, if you object," he answered. "As a matter of fact, in my opin-

ion, there is little choice between your hair and your eyes. Now your eyes are—"

"You will please not speak of my eyes, either, Mr. Cameron!"

"Jim, if you please," he said. "'Mr. Cameron' sounds too stiff and formal—don't you think?"

"Still it will always be Mr. Cameron. We are going to be enemies—always, I hope!"

"Well, just as you say. Still, I think I should rather have my enemy call me 'Jim' than 'Mr. Cameron.' And 'always' is a long, long time."

She looked very straight at him and her eyes were searching and cold and scornful.

"You are accustomed to having your own way, aren't you, Mr. Cameron?"

"We all like to have things turn out the way we plan them, Virginia.

"Miss Ballantine, if you please!" she rebuked.

"Pardon me," he said gently. "I just wanted to hear how it sounded. I shall be calling you that again, I think."

"If you do, I shall go into the house, Mr. Cameron!"

"I surrender," he said. He was silent, although he watched her, observing the warm color in her cheeks. She was not as angry as she thought, he decided.

"I think you are a very forward person," she declared at length, "and presumptuous."

"Still, I don't think I should shoot a hole in anybody's hat without giving some warning," he smiled.

"I did that because you were pretending," she asserted. "I'm sorry I did it. But you had no business looking at me like that?"

"Like what?"

"As you—did."

"You mean I shouldn't have admired you? Why, I just simply couldn't help it, Virginia."

"Miss Ballantine!" she corrected.

"Yes; Miss Ballantine. Why, I couldn't help it any more than I can help it now. I wasn't pretending. You are very beautiful, Virginia."

She got up and stood looking at him disdainfully.

"I suppose you can't help it," she said. "I—I think you are one of those men who believe they have only to reach out to take anything they want. Perhaps you are not to blame. You are wealthy, and I presume you have never been denied anything. As a result you come heah and imagine you can take what you want without asking for it. I warn you that you will discover you are mistaken!"

He shook his head.

"I've made mistakes," he said; "grievous ones. But they have been made because I took snap judgment. I have had plenty of time to consider what I want, now, Virginia. Almost a week. Four days, to be exact. I find myself wanting what I want just as much as on the first day I saw you.

"Don't think I want an answer now, Virginia," he added as she blushed crimson and looked at him with a scornful smile. "I'm very patient. I just wanted you to know."

She laughed mockingly as she opened the screen door.

Cameron saw her gaze sweep past him; saw her eyes widen as she caught her breath and stood rigid. He turned slowly, to see Ballantine standing near the edge of the porch, hands on his hips, looking at him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHALLENGE.

BALLANTINE'S eyes were something like they had been on the day he had stood near the courthouse door, looking at Judge Gray. No one could fathom the blue depths of them to determine what passions they concealed. Nor could Cameron at this instant be certain there was any passion in them at all.

They had the pellucid and baffling vacuity of the eyes of an eagle, and they gave the same disconcerting impression of intense fixity, of all-seeing power. Cameron was convinced that there was no passion in them at all—only intense alertness and confidence.

Ballantine wore no hat. Involuntarily, Cameron glanced toward the stable, to see

Ballantine's pie-bald horse standing near the structure, saddled and bridled, as Ballantine had obviously left him when he had dismounted. Ballantine's hat was hanging upon the high pommel of the saddle.

The old man's hair, wavy and abundant, shone like a white flame in the sun. It was damp on his forehead, where his hat had pressed it, and a big curl of it swept over his forehead. The rest bulged outward in waves.

"What are you wantin' Jinny to know, Cameron?" he asked, gently.

"That I love her," Cameron replied.

Ballantine's muscles leaped as if an electric shock had passed through them. But instantly they relaxed, although a tinge of color appeared momentarily in his cheeks, then died out, leaving them pale, as before.

"You don't waste any time, Cameron," he observed, his voice carrying a note of slight mockery. "You've been in this section about three days."

"Four."

Ballantine's lips curved into the ghost of a derisive smile.

"Well, have your way. Four days. I expect this love talk comes of you meetin' Jinny over there in the gully, when Dave Jenkins tried to shoot me.

"I'm thankin' you for that, Cameron. But you needn't have been concerned. Dave Jenkins or no one else will ever kill me with a bullet!

"Just the same, I thank you. But this love business is another matter. Jinny ain't goin' to love any man who comes here tryin' to meddle with our lives."

"With all respect to you, Mr. Ballantine, I think that when love comes to Miss Ballantine, she will be the one to decide."

"Mebbe she will," Ballantine acknowledged. "I don't know that I'd have any call to interfere. She's her own boss." He looked at Virginia, and saw the scorn in her eyes.

"Seems like you've already been answered, Cameron," he added. "An' a thing that's been settled ain't worth discussin,' Did you come here just to tell Jinny you love her, or was there somethin' else?"

"Yes; there is something else, Mr. Ballantine. I've bought the land adjoining yours. I've heard some rumors regarding your attitude toward improvements. I never pay any attention to rumors when I can get my information first-hand and I've come to have an understanding with you."

"There ain't a lot to understand," Ballantine announced. "If you go to clutterin' up that land with factories an' mills an' such like you'll wish you'd never bought!"

"That is exactly what I intend to do, Mr. Ballantine. The land will be improved. We intend to go ahead. But we don't want any trouble."

"You bought trouble when you bought the land, Cameron. You bought it with your eyes open. You knowed there'd be trouble. Gideon Strong said you knowed." Ballantine's neck muscles worked. "If Jinny hadn't told me about you interferin' when Dave Jenkins tried to shoot me you wouldn't be worryin' none about trouble right now!"

"Mr. Ballantine," said Cameron, quietly; "if you mean that as a threat you are wasting your time. Perhaps there was a day when men could be intimidated by threats. But not in this day.

"There's a better way to settle all differences. I don't want to seem impertinent, but I think I must speak the things I feel. Improvements of the sort we contemplate will increase the value of your land. Any inconvenience you suffer will be more than made up if you should ever decide to sell.

"You can move your house back half a mile or so, or build a new one. That is being done all over the country. I could name, off-hand, a score of towns in the West in which the old citizens have been confronted by similar situations. Usually they are eager to get out because they realize how inevitable the thing is. They simply sell their old places, buy other land on the outskirts of town, and rebuild free from crowding.

"I don't foget that your house is a homestead, and that it has a sentimental value that can't be computed upon a cash basis. But nearly everybody has to be transformed in the crucible of progress, has to watch old scenes and faces vanish, has

to be torn from old associations and transplanted in a new environment. That is the immutable law of growth."

"I didn't ask Ransome to come here," steadily declared Ballantine. "I was here before 'Gene Ransome ever thought of buildin' the first shack up there. I ain't goin' to get out, an' Ransome ain't goin' to come any closer to me!"

"If you'd care to move your house or build a new one, I'd be glad to lend you one of our engineers, Mr. Ballantine," suggested Cameron. "Also, if you think you are entitled to damages on account of our activities so close to your property we'd be glad to take that matter up with you. We don't want trouble."

"Cameron, my house will never be moved! I won't build a new one! I've got to keep tellin' you that, it seems. No one is goin' to build a lot of shacks along my line an' blow smoke an' bad odors into my face. That ought to settle it!"

Cameron's lips closed. He looked at the unyielding face of the man who stood before him; he glanced at Virginia and observed that she was regarding him with a shadowy smile in which there was much defiance.

What Cameron didn't know was that Virginia was thinking once more that the light in Cameron's eyes was strangely like that which shone in Ballantine's. In the fight which would now surely come Cameron would be as determined and unyielding as her uncle. She had to show him that her sympathies were with her uncle; she was too proud to let him see the dismay which had gripped her.

"Well," said Cameron gravely; "that seems definite. I want you to remember that I tried to patch things up."

"You mean you'll go ahead?" asked Ballantine.

"Without a doubt," answered Cameron. "We'll go ahead and show you where you are wrong. Our schedule is made up. Next week our telephone company will begin to operate. At the same time our engineers will arrive.

"Inside of ten days I'll have an office opposite your house. Within sixty days we'll have a narrow gauge railroad running, with a settlement down south a little where we will build bunk and mess houses for the men we employ.

"Inside of sixty days, also, we will begin to erect a power house to supply electric light to Ransome. At about the same time we'll begin to construct a dam in that gorge of granite. Later, we'll make arrangements to get the copper out of those hills."

"Copper!" exclaimed Ballantine. He was startled. "Who told you there was copper back there?"

"Smoke Cameron did the prospecting where he was in this section," returned Cameron.

Ballantine's eyes were clouded. He was now standing rigid, his jaws were set, there was a queer flare to his nostrils.

"Smoke Cameron found copper back there?" he demanded.

"Plenty of it."

"An' that's what brought you here?" went on Ballantine. "Smoke findin' copper here was what set you rarin' at this section like a pack of wolves!"

"That's what directed our attention to Ransome," admitted Cameron.

Ballantine's eyes appeared to glow with a terrible regret. A flash came into them, expressing a sort of reminiscent vindictiveness.

"I reckon it's my own fault!" he said, as if speaking to himself. "Once Smoke Cameron an' me was pretty close to a run-in. God knows why I didn't kill him! An' now he's brought this pack of hell-hounds down here!"

Ballantine's gaze foreshortened; he was again looking at Cameron, and his eyes were gleaming with little flecks of passion.

"Where you goin' to build your railroad?" he questioned.

"Right along the edge of my property line," said Cameron. "It will reach from the main line to the end of the level."

"When you goin' to build it?" asked Ballantine in a cold voice.

"It will be completed within sixty days," returned Cameron.

He had told Ballantine that before. He was aware of the terrible change that had come over the man. As Ballantine now stood he looked the same as he had that

morning in the courthouse. The cold, deadly passions he had felt then were rioting through him now. And yet when he spoke his voice was under control, although there was a strained, vibrant note in it.

"You're goin' to build it right along your line, close to mine?" he inquired. "Right beside my land?"

"That's the intention."

"You're runnin' things accordin' to a schedule, eh?" he continued. "Everything to be done just like it's arranged."

Cameron nodded. He was fascinated, but not intimidated by what he saw in Ballantine's eyes, and he felt a strange, internal stiffening, a stirring of antagonism mingled oddly with regret that Ballantine was determined to choose war.

And yet Cameron had felt all along that war between them was inevitable. He had seen it in Ballantine's eyes there on the veranda of the City Hotel when Strong had introduced them.

"Sixty days!" said Ballantine, his voice a cold drawl. "You'll have your railroad runnin' inside of sixty days. Well, don't hurry it none, Cameron. For the longer it takes you to build it the longer you'll have to live. I'm givin' you fair warnin' that the day you run an engine down a track in front of my house, I'll stand on the track and drill you full of holes!"

He stood for an instant, motionless, watching Cameron, and Cameron returned his gaze while wondering, a trifle contemptuously, if Ballantine thought the threat had frightened him. He smiled, without mirth; the smile of a fighting man receiving a challenge; and a pulse of rage for the old man's obstinacy surged through him.

"All right, Ballantine," he said shortly; "you've done your threatening. You'll have to make good. I'll run the engine on its first trip!"

He bowed, first to Ballantine, and then to Virginia. Virginia gave him one quick glance, then stared downward.

When Cameron reached the gate, closed it and mounted his horse, Ballantine and Virginia were still standing where he had left them. The girl was still gazing downward, but Ballantine was standing erect, defiant, his patriarchal head gleaming spotlessly white in the sun.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

THE MEDITERRANEAN

WITH languorous waves you tolerate a shore,
Where jagged rocks extend red arms to stress
Their right to hold you slave. In sheer excess
Of pride and arrogance those hills ignore
The fact that soft luxurious clouds adore
You too, and even droop in covetousness
To stroke your form. A wily sorceress,
With dreams of reckless love, you must abhor
The touch of those cold hands, but still you lie,
Quiescent in voluptuous ease, until
The wild winds blow from distant shores to thrill
Your ardent soul. Then let the others try
To keep you slave. You only toss your spray
Across their eyes, while passion has its way.

Harriette G. Bingham.

The Old Rocks

By ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

"KEEP yer eyes off them hussies."

With this admonition old Captain MacEagh hustled his son Ian down to the water front.

"This is the most heathen port down North, and as if that weren't bad enough here I find ye in the wickedest streets—a devil's half acre that 'd make Sodom and Gomorrah blush."

Such accusations brought no shame to gay MacNairs. What matter how old age, with passion spent, might rant against her? Was she not for Youth the lurid light of a northern ocean?

MacNairs boasted thirty-one wharves, and thirty-one rum shops to boot, a rum shop at the head of each wharf. Fights were so frequent that if you stopped to watch them all you would never get your day's work done.

Because of this bellicose atmosphere MacNairs was known as the battleground in the East, where the feuds of the fighting fleets were settled.

For the roaring town there was only one attraction beyond her fights, the pride of her upper streets, of her Tracadie women, famous wherever sailormen are known.

Red Alec Campbell never missed anything in that direction, but to-night something weighing on his mind caused him to pass the charmers by.

Pretty Raymond walking with an added lure in the gaze she bent on him failed to attract his roving eye. Whereupon she stamped her little foot and stood pouting on the windy corner. As she paused thus, Red Alec suddenly faced about, gazing down upon the forest of masts tapering against a sunset sky. He saw the beauty of the ships, and though not apparent, he beheld no less the nearer beauty of the girl.

But he seemed to have eyes only for the sea, and vexed at being thus slighted the lass moved away. As she vanished Red Alec was not above inquiring:

"Who's the little bit o' fluff just passing round the corner?"

"That's Raymond, queen of the Tracadie girls."

"Where does she hang out?"

"She's a singer up at the Starboard Light place on the top of the hill with all the flags painted on the front and the green lantern over the door. You'll see—"

"I know the place," broke in the other, starting off with quick impatience.

A few hours later when the upper streets were awakening to nighttime melody Red Alec strode casually into the music room of the Starboard Light, occupied by a group of mariners, including Ronald Donn, of the Judique Fleet, who gave his brother Highlander a Gaelic greeting. Raymond, at the piano, favored the stranger with a stealthy smile, then turning to her music, began to sing a popular Highland ballad:

"Knees deep she waded in the pool—
The Banshee robed in green—
She sang yon song the whole night long,
And washed his linen clean;
The linen that would wrap the dead
She beetled on a stone,
She stood with dripping hands blood red
Low singing all alone—
His linen robes are pure and white,
For Fergus More must die to-night."

Red Alec did not wait for the second verse. He left as suddenly as he had entered, while suggestive winks and glances passed among his fellow mariners.

The singer sang on to the end, then looked around inquiringly for the stranger.

"Where's he gone?"

"Into the ballroom. That song was too much for him."

"Why, who is he, anyway?"

"Who is he? It's funny you don't know him. That's Red Alec Campbell, the hell driver from Judique. No wonder he couldn't listen to your song. He's the man who's doomed to die."

The first note of a fiddler's jig issuing its summons, emptied the music room of all save Ronald Donn. Raymond sank down beside him. But her mind was all on the other Highlander of tragic fate.

"Tell me, do you know this lad they call Red Alec?"

"Sure, I ought to ken the lovely devil. He's one of our ain of Judique."

"Is he with your fishing fleet?"

"Sometimes, but not for long. Fishing is too tame for the like o' him. Mostly he's running booze frae the Treaty Ports, or dodging his majesty's cruisers."

"Well, what makes him say he's going to die?"

"Why, so he is. He's due to take the Banshee out this Saturday night for a run to St. Pierre."

"Is that the bad luck schooner Mr. MacLehose just built?"

"That's her, same one as was sprawled out, and took twenty-one men, heaven rest 'em to their graves on the western ground. She's a proper jinx, gone bad and gone bad for good. Ye can't trust her now no more than a wicked woman who's had taste o' blood.

"Mr. MacLehose ought to 'a' kenned better than to gie her sic a name. But nothing ever phases him, and when the Dundee towed her in bottom up, he just had her righted and run her onto the ways, an' made her over good as new, and, like the daredevil that he is, he had the name Banshee printed in gold again upon her counter.

"They towed her up to Judique harbor to fetch another crew. But that crew never came.

"The first night she was lying off the Inner Island, Old Jean of the Mist, who has the second sight, was awakened by voices sounding around the Banshee. Then she heard the dogs barking in Stella Maris churchyard, and every time a dog barked a man was drowned.

"Next day when the seer had told what she had seen ye could na get no man nor lad in Judique parish to ship aboard the Banshee—not for all the gold that MacLehose could offer. So the chief had her towed back to MacNairs, and she's been lying here ever since—until this verra December morn Red Alec, who's always in league wi' the devil, makes some dicker wi' MacLehose, an' has his own boat, the Corsair, hauled up, and put his drunken foreign crew aboard the Banshee. And now they are outward-bound wi' that evil witch.

"But it 'll be Red Alec's last voyage, not because of ony gossip, but because Jean o' the Mist has seen it—it 'll be another case of a new boat and the old rocks."

A troubled look stole over Raymond's

pretty face, but she was quick to hide her feelings.

"All right, Ronald Donn, you may take me in for a dance."

Sweeping across the floor she had eyes for only one. Yes, there he was, seated apart at a little table gazing upon the dancers, with that same distracted air, so interesting and yet so tantalizing to the curious sex. With his chair tilted back, his thumbs in the armpits of his vest, his countenance serene, Red Alec looked anything but a man marked for death. Now and again he gave a quick, imperious toss to his head as a slight outer sign of some inner volcano.

The more Raymond regarded this lovely devil, the more her interest was aroused. Every time she swept past in the dance her eyes were searching his.

In spite of herself she was carried away by that imperious tossing head. Before the evening was far spent a most expressive pair of eyes were sending flashes to Red Alec, declaring boldly, "I am yours."

These infatuated flashes were scrutinized by one Ace Bolce, King of the Hairleggers, a gang of adventurous jailbirds, who joined the fishing fleets in order to escape more strenuous labor breaking rock ashore. These ocean gangsters possessed an unsavory reputation.

The King of the Hairleggers, incensed by these intercepted flashes, dispatched one of his minions to tell Red Alec to quit.

"Our skip says ye gotta keep yer lamps off his gel. If ye don't we'll give yer yours."

The Campbell spoke no word, but a long, sinewy hand reached under the table and grasped the fleshy part of the gangster's leg. Red Alec, as a feat of strength, had often pinched his thumb clean through a deck of cards, and now with equal ease he pinched away a piece of the gangster's quivering flesh. The victim fled precipitately with a howl.

A moment later Ace Bolce himself sat at the table opposite Red Alec, glancing across at his new rival. As the gorilla took his place Raymond felt a flutter, but one contemptuous toss of the Campbell's head was reassuring.

"Ye don't know me, do ye?"

"Na, I dinna ken ye, nor ony o' yer lice."

"Down this way, ye Judique pigs have got all the pride of all the world. But there ain't no pride left when ye've turned to a corp washed stiff and cold on a black lee shore. I know ye. Fer all yer airs ye're goin' to git yours, mister."

"Of course I will. I was born to be drowned in the sea, like all the rest of my folks down North, and when I go it 'll be fighting, not squealing like ye and your brave rats."

"That's all right. Just wait till youse guys comes into East River some time wit' a load o' fish. We'll be waiting fer ye, an' there'll be a nice mess o' Judique stiffs, laid out on the marble slabs when we're finished wit' yez."

"Ye dinna need to wait till we get to East River. Right here in MacNairs we can accommodate ye. Whenever Judique is on the floor, all ye need ta do is to say 'Peek-a-boo,' and yer coffin 'll be hanging on the collar beams."

The gorilla burst into an ugly laugh.

"Laugh in a dance hall if yer please. But ye'll no laugh on the Sunnyside wharves when the Hielan fleet is in. No more will ye laugh when ye buck into a giant's gale just around o' Glasgow Head. Fer longshore fightin' or fer deep sea racin', Judique is ready fer all the Hairleggers this side o' hell. An' what are ye abuttin' into my table for, anyway?"

"I've come over here to tell ye to keep yer lamps off my gel."

"Aye, that's your lay, is it? Well, these here wimmen that won't be held do give us the time o' it, now don't they? And who's yer lady, onyway?"

At the Highlander's banter the gorilla grew incoherent. He began to finger a long sailor's sheaf knife on his hip.

"It's knives, hey?" said Red Alec, rising suddenly and kicking the stools away from his feet. "Well, come on then, me brave one, and we'll send ye home in ribbons."

Ace Bolce was a good judge of how far to go in quarreling with Judique. He readily dropped his hand from his hip. The other just as readily sank back into his

seat, pulling his chair closer, at which the gorilla was careful to keep the calves of his legs out of range.

"That's your lass yonder, is it?" said Red Alec with a nod toward Raymond, the first sign of recognition he had given her, which the girl was quick to notice.

"Yes, that's my gel."

"Well, if she's yours, why don't you hold her?"

"I hold her, don't ye worry."

"Dinna see ony sign o' yer holding her now. If I couldna nail a skirt to me no better than that, I'd quit."

Ace Bolce spat with affected disconcern.

"All right; ye can rave away for to-night. I'll let ye go it. I know ye, fer all yer blow and bluff. Ye ain't no better now than if ye was already stinking on some windy shore. Ye are Red Alec Campbell, the fool who's going to sail the Banshee straight to hell. When you're a bloody drowned corp, I'll still be kicking my heels in the sunshine and dancing with Tracadie wimmen.

"When I was in Sing Sing, they used to give the guys in the death cell extra rations, and since ye're on your way to drowning I'll give ye yer extras too just fer to-night."

Later Ace Bolce was sorry for his generous offer. It was the midnight dance, the dance where sweethearts coupled. This dance he had come to regard as his with Little Raymond by divine right.

With eager eyes he dodged in and out among the crowd in search of his anticipated queen. But she was his no longer. Coming down to the far end of the sanded floor, he was just in time to see Red Alec leading the lady of his choice out onto the balcony.

The gorilla stalked behind the door gray with rage, grasping with burning fingers for his sheaf knife.

"Why the hell didn't I stick 'im at the table?" he muttered.

Outside in the cool night wind a little Tracadie girl shuddered beside the man who was doomed to die.

"Why do you tremble, little one?"

"Listen!"

Red Alec bent and listened. From afar there came the thunder of the Northern Sea. Murder behind, waves of death before! But what was that to him? Up went the haughty head with its old contemptuous fling.

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid of what, little one?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I've heard the men say things to-night that made me jumpy, and when I hear that roar it makes me frightened. Aren't you afraid?"

"I'm afeared o' neither God, man, nor St. Michael."

"Oh, but you shouldn't talk that way, because it makes me tremble just to hear you say such awful things."

"What!" Red Alec was startled. It was surprising to him to be chided for blasphemy by a "little bit of fluff."

"I never expected any one to mind my talking straight at the Starboard Light. This balcony ain't a confessional, is it?" asked Red Alec.

Little Raymond was stepping along at his side, her arm clasping his. She did not speak, but the Campbell was struck by something plaintive in the eyes that searched his own. The complete helplessness and trustfulness of the little girl beside him suddenly disarmed the man.

As they paused and listened again to the distant roar of the sea, Red Alec felt strangely awakened within him the sense of guardian and protector, all because of the trustfulness imparted by a girlish arm that clasped his own.

"A man couldna be a man, if he laughed at the trust of such a little one," he thought to himself, as they resumed the walking.

"What makes you so glum all of a sudden? Why don't you talk?"

"You knocked all talking gally west."

"Well, I don't know why I should have asked you not to speak the way you did. None of us are saints up here. With the most of us it doesn't matter what you say or what you do. But after all that Ronald Donn told me to-night about you being the man who was doomed to die, to come out here in the dark alone with you and hear that awful roaring of the sea made me terrified. That's why I couldn't bear to hear you speak those terrible words. If you

speak that way, it feels as if something dreadful is sure to happen to you."

"What if it does?"

"Well, I don't want to see you go away and not come back."

"I always said, little one, I didna care when I went away, but first thing you know you'll be making me afraid with a' this kind o' talk. Aye, this is a bad line for the skipper who's just about to take the Banshee out to sea. If I let myself go, I could almost be again like I was when I was a scared and trembling lad."

"Well, let's play that we're a little boy and a little girl again, just for to-night."

"Na, child! If I got playing at that I'd meet some old time witches that would be sure to come and haunt me when I'm fighting tooth and nail at sea against some giant's might."

"But don't you believe in our good Saint Michael, the guardian and patron saint of the sea?" There was an anxious sob in Little Raymond's voice as she uttered this query.

"Of course I do, down underneath. We all, as we get older talk and bluster. I'm one o' the black sheep o' Judique. But I'll tell ye truly, little one, for all me blustering I canna begin to unlearn what I first heard as a bairn at me mother's side in the high white wales of Stella Maris. Yea, I believe in good Saint Michael, but dinna ye tell the secret which I've told ye."

"Oh, I'll keep your secret. But I'm so glad you've told me. Because you have told me I've got something here to give you, that will bring you back to me, in spite of the old rocks."

The girl withdrew her arm and unfastening the neck of her gown, drew forth from her warm breast a beautiful cross, with two cross bars.

"This is the cross of Clan Ranald, that once belonged to the Fair Bishops. It was blessed by them, and it will bring you safely through the water."

With sudden trembling, and a visible emotion that hardly credited him, Red Alec unbuttoned his homespun shirt, and bending over the girl placed the cross upon his chest and clasped the necklace by which it was suspended. When she had finished she raised her lips and kissed him; not the kiss of passion, but the kiss of childhood's trust and faith.

For a few minutes longer they continued to walk together in silence. At last Red Alec seemed to shake himself out of a stupor.

"I must be going, little one."

"What, so soon?"

"Yes."

"I can't ask you to dance with me to-night."

"No, not after what we have just spoken. But when I've brought back your charm, over the Bad Rocks, then will you dance with me?"

"Yes, and when will that be?"

"The midnight dance at the New Year's Ball."

Things went wrong on that voyage from the very start. On Friday evening Red Alec boarded his ill luck ship. As he came over the side it was a cold drizzly December twilight, with promise of wind and storm.

Many a curious watcher on the shore stood gazing on the Banshee, and conjecturing her fate. A winter's offering for the hungry sea.

On the morrow the crowds were there gossiping in high excitement, shaking dubious heads, searching with questioning eyes the place where the fated vessel had been moored. But she was there no longer! She had gone—gone long before the gray and howling dawn. In the mystery of her departure the prophets read another certain proof of doom.

On Friday evening in the channel, between the Inner Island and the mainland a large fleet of fishermen and coasters had assembled in anticipation of storm.

The Banshee had run in from MacNairs late in the afternoon. As all the best anchoring grounds were occupied she was obliged to take a berth not far from the long sand bar which extended nearly two-thirds of the distance across the southern end, leaving a comparatively narrow outlet between there, and the sand-pits of the mainland.

When she came to anchor toward dusk

it was raw and breezy, with a sharp choppy sea running. About nine o'clock the wind backed to north northeast, and began to pipe in good earnest, with occasional flurries of snow.

Red Alec, walking his poop, sniffed the rising storm with apprehension. Finally as the blow increased he roared: "Turn out all hands and let go the second anchor."

All hands were called again at midnight to pay out more cable. When the watch turned out it was intensely dark. The air was filled with snow and sleet, and the gale had increased almost to a hurricane, while the tide had risen to an unprecedented height.

"My God, what a night!" exclaimed the skipper. "If a mon slipped his moorings here he'd be in the belly o' hell afore he kenned where he was."

Hardly had this exclamation escaped, before the gang paying out the cable, descried a coaster driving directly down upon them, broadside to the wind. Shouting the alarm the crew made every effort to sheer off from the impending menace, but were only partly successful. The coaster struck the Banshee on the port bow. Her starboard anchor hung at the cat head, caught the other over her port cable.

"Holy Mother save us!" yelled Little Roary. "Both ships are onto our anchors. Will she hold? No! No! There she goes!"

Down wind they went toward the bow of the Royal Stuart, broadside on, while the coaster pounded away at the helpless Banshee, as she rose and fell with the heavy seas.

"We'll be ground up between the two of em, or all of us'll be driven in a pile on the bar."

The bar was not more than three hundred fathoms to leeward. There the seas were breaking masthead high.

Fortunately the Royal Stuart's anchors held, giving the middle vessel time to extricate herself.

Red Alec, jumping on board the Royal Stuart, requested Ronald Donn to pay out more cable so that he would drop aft. This done Red Alec swung head to the wind, and paid out on his cables, dropping down between the other two and astern of them, where he held on, thinking it would be safe.

But in this he was disappointed, for in a moment there came a startling cry.

"Our starboard cable's been cut by that swine Donn."

The first thing was to rig the stock of the spare anchor. This job was just completed when the mate shrieked out in dismay:

"We're all adrift, they've cut our other cable."

Was the Banshee doomed to die right there in sight of the lights of home? Even the stoutest hearts trembled. But not a moment could be lost, for the foaming, roaring breakers were directly to leeward.

Luckily the helpless vessel fell off with her head to the eastward. Instantly Red Alec, determining to run out of the crowded harbor, through the darkness of the night, intensified by the blinding snow, rendering the attempt to pass between the Southern Bar extremely hazardous. It was a choice between that hazard and certain ruin on the lee shore.

Running aft to the wheel Red Alec shouted:

"Bear a hand on the fores'l. Lively now and git it on her!"

The foresail was soon up about as high as if single-reefed. The skipper righted the wheel, the sail filled, and they started off, racing through the inky blackness of the crowded port.

"Hard up! Keep her up!" shouted the lookout. Up went the wheel, the vessel swinging quickly off until a light was dimly seen on the weather bow, and the cry of "Steady so!" assured the skipper that they were heading right.

The next instant they went tearing by the stern of one of the fishing fleet, just clearing her main boom.

"Some close sha—" yelled a deck hand.

The words were suddenly cut short by a voice of warning.

"Luff, luff!" The Banshee went sweeping by the last of the line, almost scraping the end of the other's bowsprit with her rigging.

This was the outside vessel. Having kept a mental calculation of the distance run, Red Alec judged soon after passing the last that he was far enough to keep off, and run out of the channel.

Five minutes from the time that his cables were cut they were safe in the open sea.

At the wheel, with eyes blazing, Red Alec expressed himself to the Banshee as a mad rider to a restless mare.

"Ye may have tasted blood afore, ye pretty witch, but ye've got a hand upon yer wheel at last that 'll spoil yer tricks and break yer wildness. Ye gave us a devil's own start to-night. But by the leapin' lightning before we're through, we'll break ye, and bring ye back to port like some old hag that's clean forgot her wicked day."

The way that Red Alec handled the Banshee through the Strait of Canso would have brought consternation to any other crew. But his own never felt safer than when this lovely devil of a skipper started to fight the sea in earnest.

With utmost bravado he piled on the canvas, and every time he jibbed, it was with a sudden viciousness that nigh cracked the sticks out of his vessel.

"Leave it to Red Alec to tone down this witch," laughed the mate.

Little Roary, the cook, was the only one who could not respond to the intoxicating moment. At the end of the one of the skipper's wild and crazy outbursts, he broke in: "I'll say, Red Alec, ye're the greatest ship-handler that ever came frae Judique. There's none could ever show ye the look of his heels at sea. There's none could brave a storm more bold than ye. But for aye that you're only one weak man, and this time I dinna ken what 'll come o' our uncanny voyage. It's an uncanny day, an uncanny ship, and now, God save us, we're awa' with an uncanny start. Wae's me, I'm afeared as Jean of the Mist has said, that it 'll be a new boat and the old rocks."

This lament of Little Roary brought to the crew new dread. But Red Alec would suffer no such words.

"Be damned to ye, Little Roary, fer your auld wimmen notions! In all our smuggling days we never made a luckier start."

As Chedabucto Bay opened out before them the skipper bellowed: "Git the stays'l on her."

Soon the Banshee was carving her way in living fire through the black night. Every man aboard that smuggling ship worshipped speed as a goddess. This then was the appeal that could not be withstood.

All the rest of that outward voyage seemed to prove Red Alec's word of a lucky start. In remarkably short time the Banshee, which disappeared so mysteriously from the Harbor of Judique, was sighted riding on the edge of a gale off the loom of Gallantry Head. Shortly after she berthed safely in the Harbor of St. Pierre.

In the French Treaty Port the smuggling schooner loaded by night at the wharf of the leading wholesale liquor dealer. The cargo included casks of Demerara rum, hogsheads of port wine, cases of champagne, casks of Jamaica rum, boxes of Havana cigars, pounds of smoking tobacco in caddies, and French cut tobacco.

For these luxuries Red Alec paid in gold four thousand four hundred and forty-four dollars. On this order the Canadian import duty would be seven thousand five hundred and fifty dollars, making the cargo worth eleven thousand dollars landed at the smuggling station on the outer island of Judique.

The bulk of this profit if realized would be due to Charles MacLehose, owner of the ship. Red Alec was a Highlander turned to smuggling for the love of adventure, MacLehose, a Lowland Scot, for the love of gold.

While they were still loading, one of MacLehose's scouts arrived with the warning that a Secret Service agent had spotted the Banshee and guessed her mission. This meant a warning by cable to the cruiser at Sydney.

On account of this Red Alec put to sea that very night. Although the storm signals were flying he pushed his nose out beyond the guardian capes and boldly faced the bitter ocean.

Head winds, boarding seas, driving blizzards, and biting cold were their portion as they beat across the gulf. Time and again the skipper was forced to drive his crew to sheer exhaustion, fighting with ice mal-

lets against the tons and tons of ice that sheeted over all, until they threatened to founder.

"One consolation in this devil's weather," said the skipper, "is that it will keep the cruiser hugging safety behind the harbor bar.

After two weeks of buffeting the skipper was anxiously looking to pick up Wolf Point Light. He knew by dead reckoning that they must be somewhere off that section of Cape Breton coast. All that afternoon they looked in vain for land. After nightfall it began to snow and soon the air was full of soft, feathery flakes which effectively shut out from view every object at greater distance than a hundred fathoms.

All hands were called to pound the ice off cable and running gear, since it was of highest importance to have everything ready for anchoring or taking in sail at a minute's notice.

As the night wore on the wind rose to a proper southeast gale, with an accompanying blizzard. One of the most dangerous positions for a mariner is to be caught on a lee shore in winter, with an easterly gale of blinding snow.

"No time to be poking round the land," muttered the skipper. For safety's sake he shifted his course to the northward, and let the Banshee run before the storm.

Scudding before the wind under trysail and jib they were swept up beyond St. Paul's Island. By the following morning the gale had blown itself out, and Red Alec was overjoyed to make his landfall. There about five miles to the south lay Cape North. Beating up into the lee of the land it fell dead calm, and they were forced to anchor.

Cape North, which loomed before them, was the extreme warder of a continent, the end of a mountain range rising sheer a thousand feet above the surge.

The defiant skipper always felt a certain kinship for that sentinel cape, standing undaunted against the polar night, and the league long howlings of the storms of a polar ocean.

But Little Roary dreaded this spot, as a bound beyond the utmost suzerainty of God. Gazing at the granite bastion that towered above, the little piper was filled with dire misgiving.

"Ochan, and it's a wae night, that brought us to anchor off this fell coast. I seem to see yon cape raised like a giant's fist that's fain to strike."

"Aye, never ye fear, she kens her ain, we o' the Hielan hills are her kith and kin. Did ye ever hear o' a man o' our ilk, that was harmed along these shores? Na, na, she kens her ain."

"Well for me, I would na trust ony ship in sic a place. Sure, these are the seas that God forgot. It's a dead man's ocean, and a dead man's shore. Dinna ye mistake it, skipper, frae the night we was blowed out o' Judique Harbor we was doomed for an uncanny voyage."

Red Alec laughed contemptuously and went below, where all hands were mugging up with Demerara rum. He would have joined them in a glorious carouse, but the pressure of a charm upon his breast restrained him.

Now and again the skipper took a turn on deck. Gazing at the towering, shadowy cape, he found there a fascination as of a bird in a serpent's eye. The last breath from the southeast had died out, and they lay becalmed, except for an occasional cat's-paw, which came from any point of the compass.

By noon there were indications of another storm. This gave uneasiness. Although it continued calm during the early part of the afternoon, the barometer fell rapidly, foretelling an approaching gale. Out of respect for these indications Red Alec let go his second anchor.

A peculiarity of the North Bay in the months of December and January is its sudden reversion of weather. The wind will blow southeast, fall calm, and then in a short time there will come a gale out of the northwest. It is characteristic of this northwest gale, that it leaps forth unexpectedly like a roaring lion.

While the darkness of the night was still falling the sleeping ocean began to show its hate. Long, black, snarling seas appeared, foam flecked with ominous threatening, as the advance guard of a hurricane.

"We're in for it," muttered Red Alec

grimly. "But it's too late now, we can only trust our anchors and wait."

Before long a full blown northwest hurricane came howling out of the winter's night.

Only Red Alec and the mate and Little Roary were sober. But there was nothing they could do.

"Will the cable hold?"

"Yes, it will hold," declared the mate. "That cable was made by Dennis More. When he forged it in the smithy at MacNairs he said 'some day these links will hold a father and his bairn,' that's why he forged it well. That's why right now I believe it will not break."

The cable forged in faith held on. But as the hurricane increased something happened that shook the drunkest of them—the anchor began to drag!

"Christ's cross be o'er us, our time has come!" yelled Little Roary.

Through the blackness of the howling night the Banshee answered to the call of the storm.

"What's before?"

"Where are we drifting?"

"Dinna ken, but we're bound fer the auld rocks."

That lovely devil, Red Alec, had been continually rubbing clothes with death. Formerly in such desperate straits he soaked himself with strong liquor and by the supernatural powers derived therefrom came through alive and kicking.

But this time the dare-devil stood strangely silent, muttering to himself and clutching something at his breast.

A spirit of hopelessness settled down upon the crew. The very sobriety of the captain chilled their hearts. Where was the blustering, hell roaring Red Alec, who laughed at danger and knew no fear? Yes, his time had come. The hand of fate at last had struck terror even to that strong heart.

Like a bride of the sea prepared for her dance with death, the Banshee dragged her anchor, and floated on.

Somewhere through the roaring night there came faintly the sound of a bell. The sound of that muffled bell reminded Red Alec that it was the day before New Year's Eve. To-morrow would bring the New Year's ball—and the midnight dance. Never for a moment did he doubt that he would be there to keep his tryst with Little Raymond. How would it happen? What would he do? Such questions never crossed his mind. He knew at last the Banshee was doomed. He knew at last he was a helpless one in the hands of good St. Michael

Red Alec, the mate, and Little Roary were standing on the poop together when there in the tempestuous night the Banshee found the old rocks that were waiting for her.

Without slightest warning her stern suddenly ran across a ledge of shelving granite. The dragging anchors held her momentarily pounding in spume and spray. Quicker than thought the three standing together aft climbed over the taffrail and leaped down upon the ledge.

Others of the drunken crew started after, but the moment of grace had gone.

The schooner was lifted on a soaring comber swinging broadside to the granite wall, smashing and pounding her ribs to splinters. As the sea backed and fell, the Banshee, with a broken spine, wallowed helplessly, like a murdered corpse upon the wave. Then as though some unseen hand were reaching upward, the bow leaped forth, and with a sudden dive she vanished.

On that thundering ledge Red Alec guessed and guessed rightly that they were prisoners at the base of grim Cape North. Beneath a howling, hungry ocean. Towering a thousand feet above, a mountain wall of granite. Ocean and bastion rock alike with the spirit of the north, were remorseless and relentless.

The three survivors crawled in upon the ledge to escape from the crashing seas. But Red Alec did not tarry. While the other two were crouching and shuddering with fear, he watched his chance between the seas, rushed across the narrow ledge, and started to grapple his way up the shelving side.

There was no time for his companions to question. They also set themselves to follow.

The next crashing wave found all three high enough to be reached only by the lighter spray. But even that light spray

upon their backs in such a precarious eerie fell with the touch of grisly terror.

Below them the howling gray wolves of the deep. Above a black, insuperable cliff. Any man might well write off his life in such predicament. Right there and then the two faint hearted followers would have abandoned the struggle.

"No one could live below, no one could climb above. We might as well 'a' gone down with the ship," wailed Little Roary.

But the next instant the redoubtable Red Alec had crawled across another ledge, and leaning over, gave his mates a hand.

From there a sheep trail ran up with sharp incline. In single file, crawling on hands and knees, they worked along the precipitate ascent until another sheer bluff rose before.

"Might as well have been drowned already," croaked the complainer. "We can't go down and we can't go up. Not even God could save us on sic a dreesome rock."

For the first time the skipper asserted his command.

"Shut up wi' yer puling, Little Roary. Ye go to mass on Sabbaths, don't ye?

"All right. You thank the God ye worship in the mass that He has brought yer feet up from that hell that's baying beneath. Pray to Him to help ye. Then if ye've got any sand in yer gizzard, help yourself."

"I did na think that the likes o' ye would be taking Father Donald's job," was the piper's answer. But no more complaining words escaped him.

A perpendicular wall towered above them to dizzy heights. Surely they could go no farther. But, no, already Red Alec had begun to climb by the help of every niche and crevice. It seemed only a place for wheeling sea birds. But Red Alec and Little Roary alike were Highlanders in the truest sense of the word. From boyhood both had been scaling cliffs and mountains. Now, like spiders on a web, each hung to the sheer face of the cliff with the sea a hundred feet beneath.

The third survivor, the mate, had come nigh the end of his scaling capacity. He was only a sailor. A sailor will go aloft anywhere, so long as he has a rope or yard to grip to. Take away that support and he is lost.

The unfortunate mate possessed none of the Highlanders' skill at mountaineering. But he was game to the end. Like some old viking he regarded his fate impassively. When the others had drawn themselves far above, he bit off a quid of tobacco, and manfully committed himself to the sheer ascent.

After striving upward for twenty feet the mate made his fatal error. It is a principle of scaling always to keep two hands and one foot, or one foot and two hands, clinging to the surface. By this means the climber always maintains three points of suspension. Red Alec and Little Roary knew this by instinct. Ignoring it, the mate attempted to haul himself upward, sailor fashion.

He had gripped an apparently solid projection, which began to give and come away; then with a crack it broke off completely and the clinging mate went plunging outward, while his death cry horrified his companions on the dizzy wall above.

The realization of the tragedy just below brought a sickish dread to the remaining twain. With his toes digging into a fissure of broken rock, Red Alec paused, his blood pounding against his ear drums. A sudden tremor smote his limbs with palsy. Now was the time for prayer. His blue lips moved, but no words came. Trembling, the fingers of his free hand closed upon the Clan Ranald Cross.

"Perhaps she will be remembering the old rocks, and saying the good words for me."

That thought brought reassurance, and he started again.

Gasping and panting, Little Roary came struggling at his heels. No words were passed. Every last breath was husbanded for the struggle.

It seemed like walking sheer up the side of a house. At first glance there appeared no slightest aid to progress. But with unerring touch Red Alec felt out each scar, and fissure, cleft and crevasse, testing cautiously and climbing always, with the steady sureness of a mountain goat.

Here an overhanging cliff opposed him. With the speed of a snail, he worked his

way around the under side, and gradually over. Then a moment's wait to give a hand to Little Roary, and he was up and off again.

The tardy coming of the wintry dawn turned the black face of Cape North into foreboding gray. Red Alec, with pumping lungs and pounding heart, stumbled over yet another of those never ending ledges. Now and again he licked the powdered snow, striving to appease the parching thirst which affects those who climb arduously in cold high altitudes.

His dulled senses had lost all sense of reckoning. It seemed as though he had been through endless night toiling over that insuperable bastion.

For the hundredth time he put out his hand to give a boost to his weaker shipmate. Little Roary, who had expended his utmost breath, staggered and collapsed. Only Red Alec's presence prevented him from plunging after the mate into a sailor's grave.

Red Alec hauled the unconscious man into a cleft of safety, then stood above him panting and spent.

" I'd like to lie there beside ye forever," he muttered wearily, pausing for a breather.

But the coming on of dawn brought to mind a steadfast purpose. This was the morning of New Year's Eve.

There remained no further time to pause or rest. Beyond the top of grim Cape North was a longer journey.

The last fifty feet Red Alec negotiated in a burst of speed. At last, with heart and lungs aching from the unheard of strain, he scrambled across the crest, and sprawled out helplessly.

Jem MacLean, the lightkeeper, returning from the light to his home, encountered what he thought was a dead man in the driving snow. As he bent over him Red Alec lifted himself up by his elbows.

" Where did ye come from, Red Alec?"

" Up frae below. I was piled on the cape last night in the Banshee."

" What's that? Ye don't tell ye come up over the side o' Cape North!" exclaimed Jem MacLean, aghast. " Sure, no living being could ever come up there!"

" Yea, that's where I come from."

" Na wonder ye're nigh dead."

" Aye, I'm all right, Jem. All I'm needing is a hand to yer fireside and a swig of good hot rum."

A little later, after he had directed the rescue of Little Roary, Red Alec called on Jem MacLean for yet another tot of rum.

" Make her good and able, Jem, fer me journey isna ended yet. I've a tryst to keep this verra night."

The New Year's Ball was on in gay MacNairs. All were abandoned to joyous delight. All except Little Raymond, who listened between the shriek of bagpipes and the cry of fiddles. Even Ace Bolce was struck by her distracted air. But Ace was supremely happy. He had her, and that was enough.

That very afternoon the revenue agent gave out how the Banshee had cleared from St. Pierre and had not been sighted since. It was conceded that the smuggling schooner had foundered in the hurricane. This was the news which set the King of the Hairleggers in such high heart.

Came the time for the midnight dance. Youth and ardor rushed and jostled. Ace Bolce had been promised this dance with Little Raymond if " some one else " did not come. Ace knew that " some one else " would never come. With the confidence of possession, he ranged himself beside the Tracadie Queen.

" My dance, ain't it?"

" Oh, yes; but please do wait."

" Wait! Ain't I bin waitin' all this night?"

" But I'm sure I hear a footstep."

Both paused and listened. From without there came only the loud high piping of the wind.

" Ye thinks ye heard a footstep. Well, there ain't no footstep, so come on, kid, this dance is mine."

In spite of herself, and almost in tears, Little Raymond was dragged onto the sanded floor and swallowed up in a whirling reel.

The belated skipper of the Banshee arrived at the flood tide of the midnight dance. Through the card room he strode, and straight onto the roaring floor.

"I ken that she'll be waiting here for me," he muttered.

For a moment Red Alec was blinded by the giddy lights and the flash of wild, tempestuous petticoats. Then through the whirl his eye caught the giant form of the Gorilla, the Tracadie Queen folded in his arms.

Red Alec stood like a man who had suddenly aged, mumbling feebly to himself.

"I thought she'd wait. I thought she'd wait. But no, they're all the same; there's none o' them that ye can trust."

With his dream so swiftly shattered he wondered what it was that he had fought for through the raging seas and over the precipitous rocks.

The shock of all that he had passed through overcame him, and he staggered to a seat.

What was left? Whither now could he go?

As if in answer to that query, faintly from far away there came the chimes of Stella Maris. Instinctively his hand reached out again to clasp the Clan Ranald Cross. He knew where he would go.

Rising slowly, he started for the door. Just then a shrill scream, a voice that searched him, that enthralled him. He turned to see a lovely figure burst away from her dancing partner and dart toward him.

Yes, something more remained.

A MUSIC TRUST

SAID the horsey to the pussy: "Take the raveled end of me,
Chafe it briskly o'er the contents of the central part of you,
And the hearers are transported to the pinnacle of glee,
Though perhaps they don't remember where this lovely music grew."

Mewed the pussy to the horsey: "You are eminently right.
There is magic in my innards when they're tickled by your hair.
You have doubtless heard my yowlings on the rearward fence at night
While old shoes and other missiles go skyhooting through the air.

"That's a sample of the music that my viscera produces
Ere they amputate the tresses of your tail or of your mane.
None would ever think my solos came from Pryor's band or Sousa's,
Till they've dried my works and horsehair is massaged across the grain!"

"We're the greatest two musicians in the universe, I've reckoned,"
Neighed old Dobbin to Grimalkin. "Ask F. Kreisler and his like!
And the boastful world of music wouldn't last a blooming second
If the leaders of the union were to order us to strike!"

Strickland Gillilan.

A Hatful of Trouble

By FRANK BLIGHTON

Author of "The Pagan," "The Invisible Burglar," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUT AGAIN!

THE mystery of how the jumble of miscellaneous but entirely innocous articles came to be in his bag instead of his own possessions, so likely to be construed as incriminating, dazed Arthur. Then, slowly, his perplexity faded away.

To himself the prisoner said: "Bless that little Irish daughter of a quick-witted race. I see how she managed it. She was gone quite a while, when I first got in. She was suspicious of Foster. So she went up to my room, and put in all that junk, thinking he might be up to some mischief.

"But how did she unlock it, when I had the key in my pocket all of the time? Hold hard, my scientific soul—here's another equation."

He looked over at his captors.

"Gentlemen,, may I be permitted to smoke?" he asked.

The captain nodded. The quiet, well-bred request, coupled with the dignified bearing which had so puzzled him, counted much in the prisoner's favor.

"Have a chair, Mr. Tower," said the captain, "until I talk with these officers. I guess," he smiled, but not in the offensive way Lyons leered, "you won't fade out on us, will you, while we're in the other room?"

"No, sir," said Arthur Tower, choking back his jubilation. "I am subject to your jurisdiction, until I am arraigned in court. I don't yet know just what I was arrested for, in the first place. I think it's all a misunderstanding."

The prisoner, of course, had no idea whatever that he was in the ante-room of the miracle department which had matched its scientific resources against his elusiveness—and won out so handily.

Cassidy came out of the other room carrying some typewritten sheets. He was followed by Lyons, who sullenly replaced the bag's contents, returned the key to Arthur, with his money, and a request to count it.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 28.

It was a good omen. Arthur went deliberately through the bills.

"Correct," said he.

Lyons grunted and went back into the other room as if no such person as Arthur Tower had ever occupied even one transient moment of his mind or duty to the commonwealth. The favorable portent was thus much enlarged.

Then Cassidy said: "I'd like to check up this police record of the investigation, thus far, if you don't mind, Mr. Tower, so I'll ask you a few questions."

"Am I charged with any crime?"

"No."

"Thank you. I couldn't imagine just what could be behind my first arrest; but that wonder is merged into the greater curiosity of how much you know about me since. If you'll first read that—"

"It's lucky for you," cut in Cassidy, rather tartly, "that we know a whole lot about you, including the fact that you are just what you told us on the train you were: that you did come down from Boston yesterday morning; and that you did come in on a local train from Bonicrest, just in time to hook up with Patrolman McGuire's first glimpse of you. I merely want to see if the department is in error in any of the minor details."

Arthur gave his name, place of birth, occupation, name of employer before coming to New York, education, date of graduation and a few other inconsequential things.

"That's all," said Cassidy, when he had finished.

"You mean I am free to leave?"

"We could lock you up on a charge of evading arrest, and escaping from custody, as Mr. Lyons told you on the train; but Patrolman McGuire does not feel that he cares to press the original charge, now that it looks as if you had nothing criminal up your sleeve when you first skipped out on him."

"I wish you would say to him, for me, that I am sorry he misjudged my actions."

"Police business," cryptically returned Cassidy, "don't always turn out like it looks. It looked like you'd got away, didn't it?"

"Yes, sir, it did." Arthur reddened. "But McGuire—"

"McGuire stated that you aroused his suspicions, at first, by standing in the middle of the street for a long time, staring into the crown of your hat. He didn't know but you might have been a demented person."

Just here Lyons again emerged from the inner room with a changed expression.

"I guess," said he, with a more engaging mien than hitherto, "that we better take the edge off that bust-in we made on you, Mr. Tower. The ladies seemed rather hard hit. If you say so, I'll call up. Do you know the number?"

Arthur smiled. Lyons knew it as well as himself, beyond doubt, but sheer politeness forbade the incurring of more ill feeling while prudence forbade, no less.

"Thank you. May I talk with her, after you have finished?"

"Surest thing you know!"

Mrs. Moran, replying, was very indignant at Lyons when he delicately intimated the "arrest is all a mistake," and next very cordial with Arthur. She invited him to return at once, and was for summarily discharging Foster, but Arthur told her he held no umbrage, and the man was only doing what he thought to be right.

He bade the detectives good day and at the first convenient booth tried, again, to get Shelby 8900. This time there was no answer at all. It was the only fly in the amber on his way back to Bonicrest.

No more amazed resident of the fashionable country section existed than the surly station agent, as the recent "criminal" darted for the taxi he had despised the morning of his first arrival.

When the contrite Foster opened the door, Mrs. Moran was there, as well.

"You poor boy! Felice tells me you've taken to a sort of cinema existence. At least, you flash in and out of Bonicrest like one of the high priced stars, but your adventures seem to be real enough! We're waiting dinner for you!"

Arthur laughed, shook hands, and followed Foster up to his room, even permitting that worthy to unlock the bag, in which fresh linen masked much of the contents.

Foster, however, on opening it was oblivious to aught else, but his amends.

"The officers told me that you were a very desperate character, sir, and not knowing of you previously, in the face of those shields they displayed, I was inclined to credit the statement, and hence may have exhibited more zeal than one of my position should. But, sir, so many, many things —even people, sir—are not just what they seem to be these days, that one does not always know what one should do."

"Quite so, Foster," said Arthur. "It is of no consequence, happily. You may go."

"Thank you, sir."

Felice greeted him at the foot of the stairs. "Every time we meet, we eat, or almost."

Like a fairy she tripped in at his side. Mrs. Moran was waiting their arrival.

No shadow of his recent humiliation intruded.

Mrs. Moran had more than a few queries regarding Mr. and Mrs. Winslow, and in the first pause comprehension of a bit of squab, served with a most zippy sauce, induced Arthur to observe:

"My compliments to your chef. This excels the proverbial home cooking. It really does!"

Felice and Mrs. Moran both laughed.

"The chef would hardly thank you for that," said Felice. "She's old Mammy Poindexter, and she cooked for papa long before he met mamma."

"And she thinks Mr. Moran is the greatest man in the world—in which we agree," supplemented the matron.

"And what does Mr. Moran think of her?" asked Arthur. "That would complete an equilateral triangle, if he holds similar sentiments."

"Well," said Felice, "none of your poky angles will fit Mammy Poindexter or papa's opinion, either. The only time he ever said much about her was when he told her the ace of spades turned pale whenever she came near it."

They all laughed.

"I'm rather looking forward to meeting your father," said Arthur. "I suppose you may have spoken of me to him."

"You're getting near a dangerous curve!" smiled Felice.

"You shouldn't tease a guest," said her mother, smiling the reproach. "You see, Arthur, Mr. Moran isn't much impressed by the mere idea of a scholar. He started carrying water on a railway grade for a pittance and his board, when only fourteen. Mammy Poindexter's husband was a foreman of a number of negro laborers, and she cooked for every one. That's why she thinks he's such a great man. Mr. Moran had a very uphill fight."

Arthur nodded. The explanation was emphasized by the refined elegance of the surroundings.

"But to look at him you'd never guess it," said Felice. "His hair is as black as yours. He refuses to worry; after he leaves the office he's generally through for the day—although, at times, owing to pressure, he likes to handle odds and ends down here, during the summer especially. Those times he generally comes down by boat and brings his secretary, Mr. Boyce, with him. After the dictation is over, father just throws it all off again until he goes back to the office. He says it's the only way to keep young."

At the meal's end they went for a stroll through the gardens.

There was much to admire, not the least of which was a dwarf maple, imported from Japan, with Burgundy colored leaves. Then Mrs. Moran pleaded fatigue and a slight headache.

"I'm not used to nursing," said she, "but the lady was so ill and such a dear and old friend that I could not remain idle. You children can look after each other until bedtime. Good night."

Felice suggested the music room as twilight fell.

She played very well indeed. And music, as is well known, hath charms.

It was growing rather late when Arthur finally ensconced himself in the same cretonne covered chair. He patted the thing almost affectionately, and thrilling to his sensitive finger tips came the touch of the three steel cased phials that he had left in its ample recesses just before his third arrest.

That was one thing the man who had stolen his unicorn didn't know about him—nor did the police. If the police had known—if they had started in to analyze the contents—Arthur was sure they would have known much more about him than they did now—and equally sure he would not be in the chair, facing a dimpling young lady in a dim light. She suddenly remarked in her indescribably piquant way:

"Well, Sir Scientist, what have you to say for yourself since I last talked at length with you?"

"A lot more than I can tell you," said Arthur. "So I won't begin at the beginning. I'll begin with my bag. It was awfully kind of you—to put it very mildly and unscientifically—for it was clever as well as kind for you to switch the things in it, just before those men popped in on me. I don't know how to thank you."

Felice leaned nearer.

"If you'll get the things now," said Arthur, trying to bridge over the grisly photograph and its sinister connection with the secrecy of his employment, "I'll give you back the other things—the boxing gloves, you know, and the broken fan. Then, to-morrow, I'll develop your picture."

More than a mild wonder touched her celestial lips.

"Excuse my slang, my dear boy, but what in the world are you raving about? I didn't see your bag—except when you came in. And I'm sure I saw that Lyons man taking it with him when you were dragged out. I don't know a thing about it!"

CHAPTER XIX.

PERPLEXITY RAMPANT!

"YOU can say what you like," averred Detective Lyons, when the inner door closed upon himself, Cassidy and the captain in charge of the miracle department, leaving Arthur Tower smoking in the anteroom just before his release, "somebody besides that guy out there is in on this. Somebody's horned in on our game. Now, how could they—when even he didn't know we was after him so hard, and had been after him all night, and was ahead of him, when he got down to that gal of his?"

He waved the broken ivory fan, as if he were Marc Antony, with exhibit A of the assassination of Julius Cæsar, addressing an invisible Roman populace. Cassidy gloomily picked up "Who's Who in Europe." Europe was nearly three thousand miles away—or thereabouts.

The captain grinned.

"You got your man without getting much evidence. It's no crime to have boxing gloves. Now, Bill," he chaffed the fretful Lyons, "if you'd only thought to have planted a pair of 'knucks' on him, like in the old days, it would be a clear case of open-and-shut. You overlooked a bet. Tom, here, didn't ask me for any evidence last night. 'Only wanted me to locate the fellow that owned a handkerchief. And you both told me that the tip was hot, didn't you?"

"Let me look at them reports," gloomed Lyons. "Ain't there something that you can hang a charge onto in all that stuff? He must 'a' been a busy guy. Whaddy know about that, Tom?"

He pointed to the typewritten sheets.

"That's the trouble, boys," smiled the captain. "He's always been a busy boy. If he wasn't knocking all the theorems out of old man Euclid, he was running a mile in almost a record time; or showing up Hal Chase at the spot-one bag on the Schofield nine; or putting little niggers into some new soap in the Crescent laboratory that no emancipation proclamation can reach, they're so small. Willing little niggers, too, according to what his boss says."

Lyons reddened. "What are we going to do? We can't go into court with any cock-and-bull story like we had to tell you, captain. They'd break us and send the three of us out among the goats. And we look like goats, don't we?"

"There's only one thing to do," said the captain. "Turn him loose. Then we'll throw the net over and around him. He'll probably go back to the girl. It surely looks as if he was up to something."

"How do you figure that?" asked Cassidy, brightening up.

The captain mentioned the wad.

"You said he wrote 'The world is mine,' and signed 'Monte Cristo' in that hat he's still wearing, I believe."

"We thought he did," said Lyons, considerably crestfallen.

Cassidy nodded. "We might get the hat and see if he did," he amended.

"No," said the captain. "That would be tantamount to admitting a slip up. We'll give him his head. Now, he left Schofield after working steadily for two years, after graduation, and the highest salary he received was twenty dollars a week. The money he has on him I don't believe he had when he came to New York. If he got it here, and by some crooked work, there's no trace of it in the banks—that is, there's no report of any robbery of that magnitude and with big bills like that.

"So, we'll just parallel him. I'll take the numbers. We'll send to all the banks and brokers. In the meantime I'll send Atwater to Schofield on the first train. He can take the new high power portable wireless phone with him in his grip, and rap right back to me with all the speed in the world if he tumbles to anything. Jacobs can go with Atwater and hobble the phones in Schofield. If he phones back there, we'll outspeed him if he's up to any crooked work.

"In that way, boys, he'll go over the brink the same as any lop-eared lobby-gow that ever frisked a poke—that is, *if he's a crook.*"

"*If* he is— For the love of Mike, captain, why the *if?*"

The injured accents of Detective Lyons at the mere suggestion of possible innocence made the captain smile.

"Why, Bill, a young man that knows as much as this boy, knows that he ought to earn a whole lot more by going straight than he ever could by all the crooked work in the world. He wouldn't get away with it long."

"It ain't scientific," protested Lyons vehemently. "If he wasn't crooked, why did he blow from McGuire first off and then from us last night—the three of us—and Big Mac himself between him and the door? Why did he, if he's got so much surplus brains, duck away from a charge of disorderly conduct? A guy with that much brains must have a crooked streak in him somewhere, or he wouldn't duck. With that much brains he oughta know we couldn't hold him before any magistrate in the city—not with that kind of a working record behind him!"

"Bill," said Cassidy, "You give me a pain sometimes. He said that much when he agreed to come with us to-day, didn't he? And ain't he out in the front office right now?"

Lyons admitted that Arthur had.

"Then, following out your own argument," said Cassidy, "he knew enough to know we didn't have a thing on him, and that was why he come. Remember when he said, 'Very well, gentlemen, I will not press further'?"

"Tom," said Lyons loftily, "you must remember we had *him* buffaloed when he made that crack, just as bad or much worse than he had us buffaloed when one minute we see him writing in the top of his hat and the next we don't see his wad, his hat or him.

"Now, you're forgetting the wad, too. How would a kid like him, that's worked, according to everybody's say so in Schofield—a punk little burg—for two years on less than twenty-five a week, save enough jack to flash a wad like that within five hours after he strikes New York?"

"That's one of the things we'll know," said Cassidy patiently, "mebbe, if we do what the captain advises. Give him his head."

"I'd like to turn in my shield, right now, and steal his head," growled Lyons, who was fond of the last word. "If I had a head like his, and could do what he seemed to do last night, I'd go right down into Wall Street, cop off a million or so in old bills and smaller ones than them, float out and over into some back room in a low-down gin mill in Brooklyn, and growl at everybody that didn't give me a buck tip for a nickel of two per cent suds!"

"You made one good observation, Bill," said the captain. "This bag hasn't even a night shirt in it. A man don't sleep in boxing gloves either. There's something

curious about that. I was watching him very closely when you unlocked the bag. I'm not sure, but I think he was both surprised and relieved. Anyway, while he didn't look very guilty before, he did seem relieved after you began fishing out harmonicas and things."

Lyons emitted another roar.

"How did he switch bags on us? I had that one between my feet, all the way up." He turned to Cassidy, who shook his head.

"He couldn't have known we were coming," said the less choleric but equally puzzled detective. "I was watching that blunt chinned puss of his when the butler slipped your nips on him. And the butler got the hat and bag and brought them back to us. I watched him. He ain't in with this fellow. He was with us strong, all the way."

"Give him his head, boys," soothed the captain. "Even if you don't nail him in crime—if you've prevented a crime, that's something. But until you get real evidence, just keep looking for it. Don't get too close to him. He'll probably square it with the ladies. Help him, offer to help him square it. Then drop in that way to-night. He won't blow before to-night, anyway."

So, while perplexity ran rampant in the miracle room in police headquarters, it also haunted Arthur when his hastily arrived at the belief that Felice had shrewdly done him this great favor, was shattered by Felice herself.

He could only stare at her in the dim rosy glow of the spacious hall, as if he could not believe her statement. The mystification that spread over his "blunt chinned puss," would have gratified that individual greatly, had he been there to see.

"Whatever gave you that idea, Arthur?" queried Felice with a perplexity akin to his own.

CHAPTER XX.

CUPID AND THE COMPLEX.

"WHY," said Arthur, "when I first came in—" He paused. He thought he heard a cautious step outside the window. Running over to it, he looked out. There was no one in the thin veil of growing darkness.

He saw only the sheen of the neatly clipped sward, beyond the beds of flowers, and still farther back and well to the rear of the mansion, the lattice where he had silhouetted Felice with his camera, and, beyond the wall inclosing the estate, the sentinel-like figure of the big tree.

He dropped down in the window seat by her side.

"When you first came in—then what?" asked Felice.

"I had an idea when they opened the bag," he began, "that you might have suspected some mischief, because of the way you referred to Foster—prior to my arrest. The idea came to me when they took my keys and opened my bag, that you might have changed the things—just to fool Foster."

Somehow this explanation seemed frightfully lame, even to the speaker.

Felice fell silent. Then:

"It's very queer. I don't understand why you should have had that kind of an idea, Arthur."

"The camera," he groped. "It had your picture in it, you know."

"Oh, I see, now." Her relieved laugh broke the tense bond that suddenly rose up.

"You were half right, Arthur. I saw a man—a strange man—just after you came in, slipping past one corner of the greenhouse. Of course, I was all alone. Mother was away, so was papa, and even Mr. Boyce—who is almost like one of the family—he's father's secretary.

"I didn't know just what to do. I ran upstairs"—her incredibly pansy blue eyes now emitted little flashes like a tube of radium from a purple lined metallic case—"and hunted high and low for papa's pistol. That was the second time I left you. I brought it back and put it under these cushions. And you weren't here.

"The next thing I knew, I heard voices from the library, and when I went in there Foster was smirking like a chessy cat. Believe me, if you hadn't pleaded with mother so, when you telephoned back about it being all a mistake, mother would have sent him away, out of hand."

Arthur had a queer feeling.

"Let me think a minute, Felice dear," he begged. "I'm rather confused. And, may I smoke, please—over in the big chair?"

She patted his cheek.

"Collect your thoughts, smoke all you want to, and then go back to the very beginning—and tell me everything," she said.

He laughed. The laugh vented a little of his irritation.

"It would take me all night," said he, "and it's getting late. I'll go back to the time I phoned to you. I'm reasonably sure I had my own outfit at the time."

"But," said Felice with fresh bewilderment, "why, then, did you start in to thank me for changing it—when I didn't do it? I gathered from what you said about the things they found in the bag—well, what *was* in it, anyhow?"

Arthur told her.

"How did they ever get there?"

"I have no idea. I'm going to find out if I can."

She came over and sat down on the arm of his chair. Arthur squirmed. That chair held the secret of the three steel-sheathed test tubes.

Her spontaneity, however, touched him. It would seem that Felice cared for him considerably. He tossed the cigar out of the window, lest he profane her angelic presence by a vile weed that solaced his hitherto semimonastic life in the laboratory.

She caressed his hair. Her feeling was as motherly as any girl's love is, if it is deep-seated. The maternal will not be denied.

"We'll both find out," said she reassuringly. "Only, Arthur, I had an idea, somehow, from your manner, that you were pleased that the police didn't know what you had in your bag. Now was I right or wrong in that?"

"Eminently and entirely, algebraically and geometrically, correct," said Arthur Tower, wishing he could have seized his absent unicorn as handily as he did this phase of his multiplying dilemma. "I'll get to that part of it later. It wasn't so much what was *in* my bag, as the construction they would be certain to put upon it. The police," said Arthur Tower, more manfully than heretofore, "are not strictly scientific."

"They were doing something awfully queer to-day," said Felice, "in coming down here to arrest you."

"They were mistaken. They admitted they were mistaken. They probably have no idea, whatever, how badly they were mistaken. And yet they are certainly as clean-cut and as fast working men as any police department in the world has, for they proved it, when they arrested me. Felice, dear, believe in me always, won't you—as I have always believed in you?"

She looked down at him tenderly and yet enigmatically. Her eyes shone.

"I wanted to rush out and grab the pistol and stop them—when they dragged you off to-day," said she, in a voice that matched the touch of her hand. "I don't know what I might have done if mother hadn't come up."

Arthur made no reply for several seconds.

"That's mighty fine and kind of you," said he, at last. The words were commonplace, but the tone was not.

"I'm going out to walk around and get things straightened up in my mind, Felice. Then I'm coming back in, and tell you what I think happened to that bag. The habit I've formed of crawling in on myself to cudgel out a problem—and, believe me, this is a rather involved problem—is too strong for me to think clearly—especially near you."

"That's not a half bad idea," she agreed "And I'll go and see how mother's headache is getting along. Poor dear, she's all tired out. And if you're not too late getting in, we'll have some of Mammy Poindexter's cold custard."

CHAPTER XXI.

EQUATION EXTRAORDINARY.

ARTHUR TOWER put on his unicornless headgear and slipped out the side door. If possible, he must reduce this mystery to terms of mathematical formula without delay.

The ultimate equation might be a formidable one and the terms involved. But, that was the way he gained his livelihood.

He had told Mr. Black that science could analyze a tear, without regarding the motives that brought it into being, but he knew now that a mystery that somehow steadily grew in profound and complex situations and that might apply to Felice no less than himself, was not to be coldly resolved into its sheer mathematical, sexless symbols.

The air was fragrant with the scent of flowers; the muted notes of sleeping birds now and then interpolated dream-murmurs, alternating with more frequent squeaks from a cicada, fiddling somewhere in the Japanese dwarf maple, as if defying, in turn, the intermittent but clearly audible "twa-n-n-ng" of some robust frog in a nearby marsh.

The whistle of a locomotive down at the railroad station recalled him to the insistent present.

Some one had cut the unicorn from the top of his hat. That had been done just outside the wall.

Now, it was no less true, that some one else had abstracted the contents of his bag. Arthur did not bother about motive—that dealt with an emotion. The bald fact sufficed. The thing had been certainly done between the time he hurried out of the laboratory and the time he reëntered the Moran mansion—unless Foster had done it.

Foster hadn't known he was coming, except from the police. Foster was a fixed quantity—a stable integer.

The others were unstable. Their acts proved it—especially the original theft of the unicorn.

It was impossible to say, from the bald facts, whether the theft of the unicorn was done by the same man or group of men as the theft of the contents of the bag. It seemed to be a different act, remote from the first, and so he determined to call it the act of a "*y*-man." If it afterward turned out that the same man or group of men had done both things, then both *x* and *y*, whether standing for individuals or groups, would be identical.

"Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other."

In that event, the equation would read: "$x = y$."

And, the same terms, plus his missing bag and unicorn, would have a common significance. At present, they had no such significance. So, Arthur Tower merely mentally wrote down:

Let x = a minus unicorn.

Let y = a minus-contents-of-bag.

He began with the first equation.

The *x*-man could hardly have been informed that Arthur Tower would turn up the unexpected way he had at Bonicrest between seven and eight o'clock Thursday morning.

Arthur hadn't known it, himself, until he had discovered that magic little black "f" on the time-table. That seemed to resolve all doubts.

"Unless, indeed," he mused, "the unprepossessing man that Mrs. Evans phoned me about at the laboratory on Tuesday morning last was in some sort of communication with the man that took the unicorn. But that seems fallacious."

Patiently Arthur reviewed the facts.

"He must have known my identity; he could have known of it only from my prospective employer; or, at least, through some avenue, legitimate or otherwise, connected with my application to Mr. Black for employment. I didn't know Mr. Black and he didn't know me—and he had lots of applications."

"*Twa-n-n-g!*" boomed the frog.

CHAPTER XXII.

EQUATIONS ACTUAL.

"FRIEND frog," smiled Arthur whimsically, as he whispered to himself, "your applause may be both premature and entirely erroneous, but it is no less vigorous. It *fits*—part way!" he told himself, jubilantly.

"Now, he saw me and I saw him when I was in the taxi and McGuire and the other two men were getting in to take me to the station and I was hiding the keys.

"I'll go back, and see how it fits, from

the time I left Schofield. He visited the professor; he probably saw me at the laboratory.

"Now, he may have been on the train with me. I didn't see him. But, leaving Boston at midnight, going to bed, getting up early—all that only proves he may have been in another Pullman.

"Now, I got off on impulse to see Felice. Where does that leave the little *y*-man? It leaves him on the train—if he was on the train, going to New York. If he was still following me—why didn't he show up near Mr. Black's office? I don't remember seeing him.

"But he didn't need to come there. If he *was* following me, when he found I was not on the limited in New York, he had only to follow the transfer of my bag to the Hotel Romaine. Why, to be sure! He must have done that. For there was the tag on my bag and I had the other half of it. And the bag was in the hotel when I finally got in. So was my trunk. It's there still."

The equation, absurd in inception, tenuous as a frail thread, now grew perceptibly stronger.

"I didn't go to the Hotel, until *after* Mr. Black hired me. Then I went there, *took my bag which has since been rifled,* and went straight to the laboratory! Aha! Also Eureka! Thumbs down—I'm Nero, you scalawag of an angular-faced *y*-man!

"Mr. Black wanted secrecy. He didn't send anyone to investigate me. He didn't send, because he had heaps of applications. I was picked—it doesn't matter why—motives are not in this equation, as yet. Just naked facts. I was sent for. I was scrutinized, before I *knew* I was sent for. I was followed—not to the office—to the Hotel Romaine.

"I was followed again, *after* I was leaving the laboratory. I was followed by this same angular-faced, tall, unprepossessing scoundrel. He didn't follow me to the police station—as he would have done had he been legitimately employed.

"He went straight back to the laboratory, to steal by bag, thinking to break in, before I was released! But I was too fast for him. And then he followed me—followed me up to the hotel on the palisades where I slept! I had my own bag this morning. I see where he could have gotten it—the only time he could have gotten it.

"He got my bag, opened it, took out what I had and put in what Lyons found. He got it when I was telephoning to Shelby 8900—and the chauffeur had left the car. The limousine was alone when I got back just ahead of the chauffeur. I had the rifled bag until Foster got it, he had the same rifled bag until the police got it.

"Oh, you crafty, deep-dyed, super-sneaking scalawag—I just wish I knew if you were the same as the *x*-man that stole my unicorn. I know you, you big, lantern-jawed, long-legged, rhomboid-faced, malignant—"

"Whos'e all dis yere!"

"*Twa-n-n-ng!*" boomed the robust frog.

Out of the darkness loomed a great dusky shape!

"Mistah Towah, Miss Felice, she done want to know if you-all is goin' to sit out here all night, a cussing the fiddling crickets and de frogs!"

It was very appropriate that the "chef" should arrive just as Arthur Tower was getting rather more than his fill of a banquet composed wholly of imaginary equations, with mezzo-soprano cicada and basso-profundo-batrachian accompaniment.

"Dat dare custahd is better than all dem wicked words you been using," solemnly announced Mammy Poindexter. "Did you evah hold fo'th at a camp-meetin', Mistah Towah? You got Billy Sunday away back in de gallery—he, he he!"

Arthur Tower was the kind of a chap that could appreciate a joke.

Especially, when the burden of the joke was on the *y*-man. His face was lighted up as he followed his monitor into the house.

He had not located the *x*-man, but the *y*-man was accurately placed.

So was his motive. And so was a certain suspicion rising like a vicious tide that swirled in and around the whole interval between the remote office of Mr. George Black and this splendid mansion, just outside of which all this super-complexity had begun.

"Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other," in mathematics. And mathematics, Arthur was sure, was behind life.

The custard was almost as delicious to his fevered palate as the sight of Felice to his triumphant eyes. He fairly gorged it. Mammy Poindexter, from the invisible realm just back of the pantry door, looked on in high glee.

"He'll be a preacher, some day—mahk my words," she darkly told herself. "Dey all eats like wolves, when dey sees mah custahd! He, he, he! He will sho' be a powerful exhorter when he leaves the broad way that leadeth to—"

"*Felice!*"

There was a quite foreign thrill in the hushed tone of Mrs. Moran, that spiraled down the staircase into the spacious hall beyond.

"Yes, mother!"

The girl ran quickly to the spot. Arthur rose.

"Where's Foster?"

"Why, mother, I haven't seen him! Isn't he in his room?"

"No! I rang for him three times. *Felice—*"

"Mother! Don't be alarmed! Mr. Tower is right here in the dining room. Mammy Poindexter is in the pantry. What is it? Foster may have merely gone over to the garage for a smoke and a chat with Atkins—he often does, you know."

Intrigued by the semihysterical repetition of her daughter's name by his hostess, Arthur Tower was lured to rise and to walk toward them—quite forgetting the conventions of time or place.

"I went to the back of the house—the medicine chest, to get a tablet. My headache was worse." Mrs. Moran's tone was steadier as she looked down from above, but it carried the same quality of haste that Arthur Tower's tidal wave of ideas had held, when he was interrupted in his pursuit through invisibility, of the man who had stolen his bag.

"Speed!" he thought. "How it persists!"

"I happened to look through the side window," went on Mrs. Moran, clinging frantically to the banister, until her knuckles showed white. "There was a man—on—the—wall—by—the lattice!"

Arthur, abreast of the foot of the stairs, did not hesitate. The mathematician in him melted into the man. He strode toward the open window, the most convenient means of egress.

"*The pistol!*" whispered Felice.

He felt it beneath the cushion under his hands at the instant of her solicitous words.

"You keep it," said he, steadily.

He was through the window and on the ground. A man loomed up.

It was Foster.

"Oh, hello, Foster," said the guest. "Do you usually stay up so late?"

"Not usually, sir," returned the butler impassively.

He deliberately turned on his heel.

"Mrs. Moran wishes to see you," said Arthur, frowning at the fellow's studied insolence. Then he plunged along the winding graveled path toward the lattice. He could discern no one on the wall as he drew nearer.

But suddenly he distinguished a shadow much denser than the lighter umbra cast by the restless flowered vines—a shadow that did not move until he was almost upon it.

Arthur Tower metamorphosed into the mathematician.

Gold that eludes the most painstaking scientific search sometimes crops up at the feet of the ignorant prospector. And so, in mathematics, there are spontaneities which no amount of labored thought can evolve.

Superconsciously, they spring up in bewildering forms, but always in soil which has been patiently tilled, from which mental weeds have been laboriously removed—and then they burst forth as if at the behest of some hidden genie's touch, from realms man knows not of.

"Good evening, Detective Cassidy," said Arthur Towers calmly. "I rather thought I'd find you here. I'll trouble you for my unicorn."

Thus adjured, Detective Cassidy stepped from the shadowy shallows of his concealment.

He looked mightily chagrined. Arthur

Tower's smile was boyish, but still it hinted of the mathematician behind the man.

"How—how did you know I had your unicorn?" stammered the detective.

"I'll match you. How did you know I'd be in here about noon to-day?"

"Science!" said Cassidy cryptically.

"Mathematics," returned his late prisoner.

Cassidy stared.

"I like your nerve," he managed at last.

"I'm beginning to like it myself," said Arthur, "but my admiration of it falls far short of your ability at finding me."

Cassidy frowned.

"There's neither satire nor umbrage in my last statement," said Arthur, impersonally. "I told you on the train to-day that mathematics is behind science. That's how I was fairly sure you'd be here either late to-night or early to-morrow. And that's how I knew you had my unicorn."

"Was mathematics back of that stunt you pulled when you slipped away from us last night?"

"It was. It's behind everything. It was behind the man who mailed the letter you got in police headquarters about the time I left there this afternoon. A special delivery letter. My missing unicorn was in that letter."

"You're a fast boy, for one that's lived around Boston."

"Is that a compliment or a threat?" asked Arthur.

"You ought to know," said Cassidy with the same pallid irony that he had shown on their last meeting. "You know so much that you ought to know how the police department gets all its unicorns—unless this one is just a mathematical unicorn."

"The hole he left in his hat makes me suspect that he was mathematical," smiled Arthur. "But, that isn't the point. The point is—first, he's my unicorn. Second, he was stolen from me. Third, I've missed him sadly. His tail, you know, had a very fetching curve to it—flossy, I believe is the New York vernacular. And the motto: *Hic et ubique*, meaning 'here and everywhere,' has rather grown on me since I left Boston. That's why I yearn to have him back again."

"Why didn't you apply beforehand to the fellow you think mailed him to us?" craftily returned Cassidy. "And then you wouldn't have to ask me! I can't—"

He got no further.

The blow that felled him came from behind.

The man who had dealt it was masked and he was far too short to be the *y*-man.

So it would seem that the *x*-man had had seen fit to appear in person.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MASKS.

UNARMED, Arthur Tower should have been petrified by fear, especially after seeing Detective Cassidy so brutally stricken down; for, while he had adventured afar in deserts of algebraic formulas, wandered wide in wildernesses of lines and surfaces in geometry, and quaked amid the quicksands of calculus he had never before faced a masked man, much less with another human being stretched at his feet.

The mighty cable of habit held him, in spite of the action that followed his demand of his unicorn from Cassidy. Reason routed fear, for in the hesitancy of the *x*-man he discerned a bravo—minus bravery. Arthur crouched and leaped like a panther at the man of hidden visage. The bravo twisted aside.

The twist of his body was as swift as the stealthy stroke at the unsuspecting Cassidy. Like a serpent, his sinuous, eluding glide swept him around the corner of the latticed bower, while Arthur, plunging forward, encountered only empty space until he grasped the slender framework of the lattice to check his momentum.

Again balanced and free to follow, he descried the distant shadow of the prowler running with footfalls almost feathery. He wound his devious route amid the maze of landscape gardens, sprinkled with pergolas, hedges and other obstructions. Arthur could do little save step back to Cassidy, who moaned and tried to rise to his knees. The young mathematician stooped and lifted him. Presently he could totter along with Arthur's help toward the house.

As the sleuth groped back to consciousness, Arthur gently propelled him around the corner of the house toward the dwarf maple, encountering Foster and Lyons there, cheek by jowl. They were too absorbed to notice the others until Arthur and Lyons's partner were quite close.

"What's this?" truculently demanded Lyons.

Arthur briefly told him. Disbelief was written large on the other detective's face. He glowered at young Tower until Cassidy said faintly: "That's right, Bill."

"Get that fellow!" ordered Tower. "I'm going back to Miss Moran and her mother. How did he get over the wall and into the grounds? Get him before he gets out again!"

Lyons did not budge. His eyes were riveted on the speaker.

"What are you staring at?" challenged his late prisoner, thrusting his blunt chin forward rather belligerently.

Lyons growled. Arthur laughed.

"You told me on the train to-day that I'd better brush up on my mathematics. Excellent advice, Mr. Lyons. I've done little else all evening. Now, take back your advice, will you?"

"What do you mean?" bridled the grouchy Lyons.

"You also told me on the train to-day that you knew a little arithmetic. Add it up. While you stand there you're multiplying that thug's chances of escape. How did he get over that wall?"

He included Foster as well in the repeated query.

"Mebbe," parried Lyons, "he got in here the same way you got out of the station house last night."

The remark was like a blow in the face to Miss Moran's admirer.

It revealed the secret of Foster's recent insolence. Lyons had gabbled. And Foster had believed the statement. Coming hard on the heel of Foster's apologies, it was a fresh and vexatious element in Arthur's equation, for Foster might tell Mrs. Moran or Felice what Arthur had seen fit to reserve for the time being, at least, regarding his arrests.

"If you find it expedient to discuss police business with servants," countered Arthur, "that's your privilege. Your superior might think it rather unwise, however."

"He sent me down here," purred Lyons contentedly.

Arthur turned to Cassidy, sitting in the same lawn chair Arthur had used when trying to equate everything. The other detective rubbed his head and his fingers came away warm and sticky. Young Tower bent over Cassidy with an exclamation almost as guttural as the booming frog's distant note.

"He didn't hurt me—much," said Cassidy gamely.

"We'd better get a doctor and make sure," returned the young scientist solicitously. "An injury to one's head sometimes is more serious than it seems."

"Sometimes," sneered Lyons, "people step right into you, don't they? And then you got to do something."

Arthur looked at him. He did not in the least understand the remark, and said so, adding: "If you are trying to bait me, you're wasting your time, officially and personally."

Cassidy interposed, while Foster padded away into the house.

"Bill, why don't you lay off that grouch? Mr. Tower didn't hit me. He was at least five feet away and in front of me."

"Tom," quoth Lyons, "I was with you last night. Mr. Tower was with us, too. We were both within five feet of him. And then, he wasn't within five feet of us. We found him next down here."

Enmeshed in mysteries of his own, Arthur nevertheless could not avoid a feeling of momentary mirth at what Lyons deemed a very sage conclusion, despite the import of the remark.

He did not know why Cassidy and Lyons had returned, but he had already guessed, on catching sight of Cassidy in the arbor, that it was because in some way yet to be explained the missing unicorn cut from his hat had found its way into police headquarters.

He could not let Lyons's last remark pass unchallenged.

"Mrs. Moran," said Arthur to both

men, as Foster came back with a basin of water and bandages, " told her daughter that she had seen a man on the wall near the arbor. Miss Moran told me, and as Foster was not in his room, I came to investigate. I found Mr. Cassidy there, and I've nothing to add to what I've already said, except I'm going back to the ladies now. If you wish to see me later, I shall be at your service."

Suiting the action to the words, he retraced his steps, vaulted in through the low window, and found Felice sitting in the chair.

" There is no danger," he said, " for Cassidy, Lyons and Foster are all on the job."

" I'll tell mother," said she, " and then I'll be back. Wait here."

Arthur had a few inward twinges of his New England conscience. Perhaps he should have told Felice more. But, again, this mixed up mess was unravelling so that one statement led inevitably back to another. And he could not risk that.

The young mathematician's thoughts jumped suddenly to another phase of the situation.

" How did the *y*-man know I was likely to be hired? How did he know that I had received a reply to my letter of application? He must have known it, for he mentioned the fact to Professor Evans—and that was when Mrs. Evans saw him; and after she overheard his remarks, she was so impressed by his ill favored visage and remarks that she telephoned to me to the Crescent Laboratory. Aha!"

There could be only one answer to that. Some one who had access to the inner facts of Mr. Black's office knew the ad had been placed; some one had seen the reply which Arthur had written; and, with phenomenal speed, all things considered, some one had communicated with the *y*-man, and the *y*-man had hastened to Boston, thence to Schofield, and interviewed Arthur's reference, Professor Evans.

Arthur had no idea who this third party might be. But he put him down as the *z*-man for the present, and then abandoned all groping for the invisible web in which his feet had been so skillfully snared.

The mathematician merged into the man. Felice was coming down the stairs again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FELICE IS INQUISITIVE.

"NOW, where shall we begin again?" saucily inquired the young lady from her nook in the window.

"With the fiend in human form, as the headlines would say, that ran off with my camera containing your portrait."

She smiled at him with the eyes of a young fawn.

" Oh, no. We're going back of that. You must have been a very busy young man, since we walked down to the beach where you had breakfast, and then walked back with me to the side gate. You left me shortly before noon; you went to the city, got a job, made good on it, and then got back here again, all well inside of twenty-four hours. Some speed, Arthur!"

" I'm afraid you—"

" Don't look so shocked at my slang," Felice pursued. " I'm incorrigible, that way. At least, father says so. Instead, tell me all about that mysterious job, please. I'm simply dying of curiosity."

Arthur gave a very creditable exhibition of the uncharted curves of a defunct eel in a very hot frying pan.

If he told Felice the kind of a job he had been given, the kind of a man that had given it to him, the kind of a wad that went with the job, that alone would have been quite enough to make Felice think he should immediately change his name to " Ananias Munchausen."

He grinned as he thought how Felice would open her eyes in that divinely rapt fashion she had when surprised, if to those statements Arthur should add the queer habit Mr. Black had of folding his right ear down over the lower half of it. He launched another grin at her reference to " speed."

The ins and outs of his employment and subsequent events were certainly speedy enough. Then he grew grave and candid simultaneously.

" If you don't mind," said he, " I'd

rather report to my boss first. He expressly admonished me not to say anything about the work he had given me to do; and he even mentioned that no one else knew I was hired to do it. Business men are close lipped, you know."

Felice pouted adorably.

"You talk as if you had been hired to invent a new kind of soap," said she. "Well, what about your bag?"

"There wasn't much in it," said he guardedly, "aside from a few collar buttons, cuff links, a book of lectures, and the camera with your undeveloped negative. If the folks that filled it with all that rubbish thought they took away much worth while, I wish them joy."

"Have you any idea who did take it?"

"A suspicion, but no proof."

"Is it Foster?" she asked, leaning toward him, her eyes very bright. "You know he behaved very oddly this morning. And I couldn't help hearing that remark of his, when he met you, after you went out of the window."

"No. The theory of probabilities is very much against Foster's having taken it. Foster probably thinks he has other reasons to be studiously polite to me but no more. He seems to be a model servant."

"Y-e-s," agreed Felice hesitatingly, "but then you know, Arthur, that things aren't always quite what they seem. That's a proverb, isn't it?"

"I believe it is."

"And," she continued mischievously, "is the proverb strictly scientific?"

"Quite so, I dare say. Many things in science aren't what they seem to be at all."

"What kind of a boss is your new boss?" asked Felice, abandoning proverbs.

"A very good boss, I should say."

"Good?" she echoed.

"He reposed an amount of confidence in my abilities that was nothing short of phenomenal, considering he never heard of me nor I of him until yesterday."

"Can't you tell me anything about this job?"

"I can generalize on it."

"Go ahead, General Tower."

They both laughed. It was deliciously absurd.

"How did you solve the problem?" demurely persisted Felice.

"By applying principles resulting from the most modern scientific research," said he, unhesitatingly.

"What principles?" she challenged. Her eyes were bright, her color high. She was the incarnation of all the dreams that had come to him while following the dogged routine of a laboratory. It was hard to fight back with only duty between him and the desire of his heart to tell her everything.

"Principles even more ethereal than a thought itself," said Arthur. "Principles, of themselves invisible to human eyes, but which left their imprint on the problem."

"But how could you see invisible principles? Thoughts aren't visible!"

"Thoughts sometimes become visible in acts. These principles left like traces. Just as a vile deed implies an ignoble thought that prompts it, so these principles that made this problem what it was left their traces plain to see. Felice, dear, please don't press me for details. I'm bound in honor to say no more. You wouldn't have me break my word, would you?"

Felice gave him a ravishing smile.

"I'm—beginning—to like—science," she drawled. Then, with a naïveté at once adorable and brutally shocking, she added: "Did I tell you I had a proposal of marriage?"

He managed a negative shake of his head. The science all oozed out of him. But he rallied, as gamely as Detective Cassidy had tried to fight off the effects of the blow on the head from the masked intruder in the garden.

"According to the theory of probabilities that we were just discussing," he said bravely, "you should have at least one a day."

"Flatterer!" taunted Felice. "I've only had six so far."

"From six men?" he asked dully.

"Oh, no—not quite as bad as that."

"Well, I won't withdraw my last statement—for the theory of probabilities certainly justifies me in expecting that you will have one from another man that hasn't proposed—yet, one of these days."

She rose and walked over to him. Delib-

erately she sat down on the arm of his chair. Then she rumpled his hair with a caress positively motherly.

"Science," said Felice gravely, "is a very wonderful thing, isn't it?"

Then, swift as a hawk pouncing down on an unprotected chicken, but with a far different result, she remarked:

"I like you, Arthur. But I think I *might* like you a little better if you weren't quite so mysterious and elusive. The police, for instance—what did they want with you?"

It had to come—like everything else, so it seemed—that gruelling question. Felice was well within her rights to ask it. He bowed his head. If he hadn't been quite such a blithering jackass as to play fast and loose with the police, this moment of supreme humiliation might not—certainly would not—have come to him.

There is no fool like an old fool unless it is a young fool. For if there are self-imposed limitations upon pure mathematics, there are none upon that no less invisible but far more golden sagacity which goes with starry eyes, dewy lips and wisps of silken hair.

Then, like a mighty sun bursting through gloom, something happened which no mathematician ever born can equate. Lips which had always seemed carved from a celestial strawberry, since the night of that immortal prom at Schofield, brushed his own lightly—then Felice sprang from the chair like an elf, and glanced down at him, her finger upraised in warning.

Arthur, his brain spinning like a delirious sun in superspace and his heart pulsing with such speed that dejection had turned to glory, heard a discreet cough.

Foster was padding in from the rear of the house.

"May I have a word with you, Miss Moran?"

"Come in, Foster. There is no one here but Mr. Tower."

"The two gentlemen who were here at luncheon from New York wish to know if they can use the telephone."

"You may take them to the library, Foster. Papa's private wire is there, you know."

"Thank you, miss."

A moment later the three were filing past and into the big room opening at the right of the spacious hall. They entered the library.

As Foster switched on the light, the badly fuddled young man from Schofield could see, plainly, the gleam of the white bandage in which Cassidy's head was swathed.

The door closed. What unpleasant surprise were they planning now?

CHAPTER XXV.

CONFUSION BECOMES CHAOS.

WHEN the trio emerged, Cassidy spoke to Foster.

"Will you let us out of the side gate, please?"

"With pleasure, sir."

Arthur Tower thrilled. He glanced over at Felice. The side gate was not far from the big tree in the shrubbery which had been behind him when he had made the photograph of her.

His mystification had been rather profound; but now it suddenly became entirely too deep for even his keen, incisive analysis.

Felice, curled up in the window seat, regarded him enigmatically, with starry eyes. Then, as the three walked out, she turned to look almost wistfully at the great fronds of the tree outside the wall, its plumed branches etched against the indigo sky.

"I really must be going to bed," said Felice, presently. "Foster will look after you in the morning. Have you any plans for to-morrow?"

"I should go up to the city, I think, and try and get in touch with my boss. If I can do that, I may be back again."

"Do so. But can't you get in touch with him over the wire?"

Arthur sat erect, with a little jerk. "That's not a bad idea," said he. "May I use the phone in the library?"

"Why, to be sure. Use it any time. It's a private wire, you know. And from what you have said, I judge that your talk must be private."

"Thank you," said Arthur gratefully. "Felice, I am quite sure that all of this mess will clear up. I'm to blame for some, but

not for all of it. And it perplexes me quite as much as it does you—or more."

Contrition ran rampant through the admission. But Felice only smiled back at him.

"If you do decide to run up to town tomorrow," said she, rising, "and have time, why don't you call on papa at his office? You'll find him in the Church Street Terminal Building. If your own engagements permit, you might come back with him. Usually, he comes down Friday night—either by boat or train for the week-end. When he does not, he always comes by Saturday noon, if he expects to be here at all."

"That's mighty nice of you," said Arthur. "I'll bear it in mind and if I can I will."

Arthur waited a bit after she was gone.

Foster and the detectives were still outside the house—at least, he judged so—and probably outside the grounds. His unenviable status as the hypothetical assailant of Cassidy, at least from the point of view of Lyons, made it likely that they would return. In case they did return almost anything might happen.

A daring thought came to him.

He had not succeeded in getting in touch with Mr. Black earlier that day. What if he called Shelby 8900 again—even at this late hour?

It might be Mr. Black's residence in the city. Mr. Black might answer the telephone in person, and a quick solution of his problem might be effected without further delay—thereby enabling him to facilitate solving the rest of his vexations—including the police angle.

He waited a bit longer.

If Foster came back with the two detectives, whose message undoubtedly had been sent to headquarters for further instructions regarding the status of Arthur Tower since the advent of the man in the mask, it would be the part of wisdom not to be trapped into using the wire while there was still a probability of an interruption by them.

"I wonder why they went out the side gate?" he mused. "Oh, I won't wonder. Let the whole thing go hang! But, again, Felice didn't even remark that bandage on Cassidy's head. That's mighty odd."

At last he resolved to chance it.

The library door was open. The push button at the entrance gave him the necessary light. The room was empty. He went over to the windows, closed them, fastened them, and then seated himself at the phone and detached the receiver.

He waited. There was no reply.

He jiggled the hook.

Still no response from central. He hung it up with an exclamation of vexation. Then, looking down, he descried the trouble.

One of the two connecting wires leading into the box had been sheared clean off. He pulled up the wire and gazed at it in amazement, merging into a dull, hopeless wrath. This thing was getting more complex than any other thing that he had ever confronted.

He glanced at the door. Foster was looking at him. The servant's face was an enigmatic mask.

"Come over here, please," said Arthur.

Foster complied.

"Do you see this?" Arthur held up the severed wire.

"Yes, sir." The servant was imperturbable.

"When Mr. Cassidy and Mr. Lyons came in here to telephone about twenty minutes ago was this wire in working order?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Why are you quite sure?"

"Because they got their connection, sir, and Mr. Cassidy talked with the party he was trying to reach. Then they decided to return to New York after making a little further investigation."

"So far as you know, then," said Arthur, frowning, "the wire was in working order when they came out with you?"

"I am very sure it was, sir. And I came out with them."

Foster's manner held no trace of guile, although his air was bland. The blandness, however, might intimate that he had a suspicion that Arthur had tampered with the wire.

"After you had gone," said Arthur, holding his voice to an impersonal level that was a credit considering his seething thoughts,

"I asked Miss Moran's permission to use this same wire. The request arose from a suggestion on Miss Moran's part that it might save me a trip to the city on business in the morning. When I came in here I could not get the connection."

"I quite understand, sir," said Foster imperturbably.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I saw you coming in, sir. I was just returning myself. I was intending to ask you what hour you wished to be roused and if you would have coffee in your room. I waited, and then, hearing you exclaim, I stepped to the door, within earshot and sight of you, sir."

Arthur saw that if Foster was lying his dissimulation was perfect. His expression comported perfectly with his statement; and his statement was exactly what a discreet servant would do under like circumstances.

"Are there any other servants about?" asked Arthur.

"I think not, sir."

"How many—and their names?"

"The cook, whose name is Mrs. Poindexter; Pauline, who is Mrs. Moran's maid, and Jane, the housemaid. They are all in bed long since in the servants' wing. Alexander and Peter Rodwell are the gardeners. Alex sleeps in the little lodge by the main gate. Peter has quarters near the greenhouse.

"I roused him to get the keys to the side gate, which is chiefly for his use in bringing in material or taking out rubbish. He went with us, and I told him what had happened. I saw to it on my way back that Alexander was also informed of intruders, and he promised to keep a strict watch, in case trouble arose again."

Arthur nodded. Foster was an enigma. The sinewy chap belied his profession as a butler in all but his impassivity. He went on:

"That leaves only James Atkins, one of the two chauffeurs—the other man is in town, constantly, with Mr. Moran. I found Atkins asleep in bed over in the garage, and told him what had happened. He is a dependable fellow and quite fearless. He has worked for Mr. Moran for five years."

"Do any other servants sleep on the grounds?"

"There are no other servants, sir, except Benjamin Fisher, who is pilot and mechanic for the motor boat; and he sleeps down at the pier where the boat is kept."

"Thank you, Foster. Well, I will retire and go to the city in the morning. You may rouse me about seven thirty o'clock."

Foster bowed. Arthur followed him up to his room. There was nothing else to be done.

What had been confusion before was now chaos.

He remembered retiring. His next conscious thought was seeing Foster, standing bland and deferential, with a tray and a robe at the side of his bed. The pink and topaz of a new day was limning the room with ghosts of last night's largely futile conjectures and all-pervading confusion.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LITTLE LIGHT.

"OH! Good morning, Foster! You may put the tray here. Thank you."

"Good morning, sir. Did you sleep well?"

"Like the Seven Sleepers in the Oriental tale."

"The shower is ready, sir. Miss Moran says that her mother has a slight headache. She will not see you until your return from the city," said Foster when the guest emerged from the shower.

Arthur nodded and inquired the time. It was about eight and he speeded up by ordering the car brought around while he dressed. Atkins drove him to Bonicrest station in time to catch an express to the city, and shortly after nine o'clock Arthur was depositing a nickel in a coin box booth and calling "Shelby 8900." Nor did he forget to keep an eye out for the *y*-man with the tall figure and angular features. He saw nothing of him, however.

The same flat, distasteful voice, as on the day before, cut in with a reply.

"This is Mr. Smith-Jones speaking," said Arthur Tower, shearing his syllables off short.

"Yes, Mr. Jones." The viperish tones

were sulkily respectful, no more. "What can I do for you?"

"You can first chase out any temperamental cats that might kick over any expensive vases in your vicinity," grated Arthur with an indurated malice proportioned to the other's pseudo-civility. "When you have done that—"

"There will be no such episode this morning, sir."

"Thank you. Now, get Mr. Black on the wire—and no nonsense."

"At once, Mr. Jones."

"Tell him I've been reading that motto—he'll understand."

"Hold the wire, please."

Mr. Black's thrice welcome, albeit somewhat gruff, voice was titillating the carbon particles in the receiver glued to Arthur's ear in a trice.

"Hello, Jones—how's tricks?"

"The world is mine—and yours, sir."

"Eh? You did it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fast work, Jones. I didn't expect to hear from you for a week."

"Thank you. When can I see you? I prefer not to talk over the wire—for reasons."

"Reasons?"

"Leading to other reasons which I much prefer, also, to explain or discuss in person, sir."

"Right. I get you. Well, Jones, Saturday is a bad day for a man like me. But I'll look up my engagements and wedge you in somewhere. Hold the wire a minute, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, Jones"—Mr. Black lowered his voice significantly—"I don't know the Bostonese for cagy, but be it, will you?"

"Cautious, sir?"

"Oh, very much worse than that."

"Supercautious?" smiled Arthur to the mouthpiece.

"Yep. And then some," hoarsely whispered his eccentric employer. "If you feel like it, why, hire a bodyguard until you see me. But do not let any one know you're coming to see me, and be sure you're not followed."

From Mr. Black's manner and tone as he laid down the receiver it was evident that he was quite intent on preserving secrecy at his end of the wire.

Arthur's swift conjecture that the subordinate, who had "stalled" him the day before with a flimsy excuse to account for an irrepressible oath, was not trusted with the details of the work in hand, comforted him.

He didn't like that voice. It was as distasteful to him as the threatening hiss of a serpent. Mr. Black had flatly said, he recalled, "My own private secretary don't know I've hired you."

Following a delay, however, during which assorted sounds filtered to him, suggesting opening of desks, clicking of typewriters, and the like, the same hateful accents rudely jarred his mental jubilation.

Until then Arthur had expected Mr. Black to return to the phone in person.

"Mr. Jones?"

"On the wire."

"Mr. Black is temporarily detained. He directs me to give you these instructions for the interview with him."

"Very well."

"You will please make no written notation of them, as before."

"I understand."

"Intrust them wholly to memory, as previous instructions and data have been handled; and, to make sure that you understand them correctly, repeat them back to me."

"Very well."

"Mr. Black finds that it will be impossible to see you until about eight to-night. This he regrets. But as he did not expect to hear from you quite so quickly on the matter you are handling for him, you caught him rather unprepared.

"At eight o'clock to-night, therefore, you will go to confer with him. Leave your hotel in ample time to reach No. —— East One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street sharp on the hour. Ask for him at the door. You will be conducted to a room. Did you hear the street and number plainly, sir?"

Arthur repeated them.

"O. K.," returned the man on the other end of the wire. "Mr. Black enjoins upon

you until then a secrecy proportionate to that which he requested at the time of engaging you."

"I understand the importance of the request and will comply."

"He suggests that it might not be a bad idea to change your hotel. If necessary, change it more than once, to avoid the possibility of being followed by any one to-night. Just a second."

Arthur next instant heard the cheery tones of Mr. Black himself.

"All set, Jones?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sorry to have been interrupted. Visitors—important—see you at time set. So-long."

Arthur acted upon part of his instructions without delay. He went at once to the Romaine. The clerk of that hotel was rather frigid. He said Arthur's trunk was in his room, but it had been searched by the police, and his manner intimated that he would reach for the telephone to speak to them when the guest went upstairs.

"I know," smiled Arthur. "I saw Mr. Cassidy and Mr. Lyons twice yesterday. They know where I am staying with friends, at an out of town point. Phone right in to them if you have any doubts about it."

He paid his bill from the wad. It looked even bigger than when Mr. Black had given it to him. The bills corseted by the huge rubber band were actually more numerous, due to the fact that he had changed one of them.

The clerk was rather more civil when he came down, but Arthur merely called a cab, nodded, smiled and left.

He went to a railway terminal, gave the baggageman half of a five dollar bill, told him to take the trunk out again in fifteen minutes to the El Capitan Hotel, a monstrous and ornate hostelry hard by, without letting any one suspect it had not left on an outgoing train. After doing this he was to get the other half of the bill at Arthur's room.

"Boss," grinned the chap, "if youse say so, I'll throw it up on the front of the big clock outside and hang it on the minute hand. And if anybody finds out from me where it goes, I'll give 'em my mother-in-law free gratis."

By a devious route, through subways and buildings, Arthur reached the other hotel. Registered, he paid for a room with a parlor and bath, directing his baggage to be sent up the moment it arrived.

Ensconced within, he summoned the hotel tailor, and ere the trunk came with the grinning baggageman to get the other half of his gratuity, Arthur was submitting to various measurements under deft hands. Inside the hour Solomon, in all his glory, would not have despised meeting him in his new garb.

Arthur paid the bills, locked the door, and sat down for a few minutes' thought. The *xyz*-men, if they still had him in tow, would have to be more adroit than they had been so far.

As for the police, they were a factor still to be counted upon.

Mr. Black's instructions made it mandatory upon the young scientist to avoid any surveillance, even that of the "bulls." This, too, was as cryptic as everything else in his instructions, but not unlawful, of itself. Being a condition of his employment, he must obey it.

Until now Arthur had scant leisure to speculate on how his arrest at Bonicrest had been brought about. He started back on the chain of known facts. They looked simple enough.

"I was registered under my right name at the Hotel Romaine. After I slipped out of the station house they could have traced me through the Wolverine to the hotel, and next telegraphed or telephoned to Schofield. Evidently they did do something like that. They may have communicated with Professor Evans, and he may have alluded to the fact that I was a friend of Mrs. Moran and her daughter. I'll phone Professor Evans myself."

He did. Within five minutes the professor was in part confirming the statement. Only, the professor insisted that word had first come to him from the Crescent Laboratory that Arthur was in some sort of trouble in New York with the police; and the laboratory only knew that the man who cared for his laundry had been

reached first, by a man who asked who in Schofield had the mark " ATx " on his clothing.

As for the rest of it, the professor added:

" I was again asked, early Friday morning, by a man claiming to be speaking from police headquarters in New York, what I knew about you, your character and friends. I told them there must be some mistake. They asked, very insistently, about friends, if any, in or near New York. Believing you to be above reproach, I told them of the Morans."

Arthur assured him it was all a mistake. Then he hung up. He opened his trunk, spread out his meager stock of linen, and counted every piece. One handkerchief was gone.

He smiled down at his wardrobe.

" Not bad," mused the owner of the linen. " I'm minus one handkerchief. I'm compelled to admire the quality of a brain that conceived the idea of cataloguing laundry marks as a means of identification.

" Boston probably has a similar card file in headquarters for police purposes. It was simple, yet scientific and accurate."

Two of the perplexities were now resolved.

He was *en rapport* with his employer. He knew how the police had found him. He sent for his bill, paid it, sent his baggage back to the same railway station, met the same transfer agent, and by like methods to those used before his trunk was transferred to the Hotel Wisconsin, another huge hotel in another section of gigantic Gotham.

Here he had luncheon and then took a short nap.

Awaking, he went out to a public exchange and called up Felice. He wanted to make sure that she was all right. The presence of the masked intruder the night before was hardly to be expected a second time, especially during daylight, and with her father expected any hour.

For reasons connected with his employment, Arthur had found it inexpedient to call upon Mr. Moran at his office, as Felice had suggested. He also wanted to tell her of the circumstance of finding the wire to her father's private telephone in the library sheared off short. It was a very mysterious thing, especially when Cassidy and Lyons, according to Foster, had used the line so recently.

Felice happened to reply to the call in person.

Her thin, febrile tone, however, quite shocked Arthur Tower out of the sense of content which the events of the forenoon had bred in him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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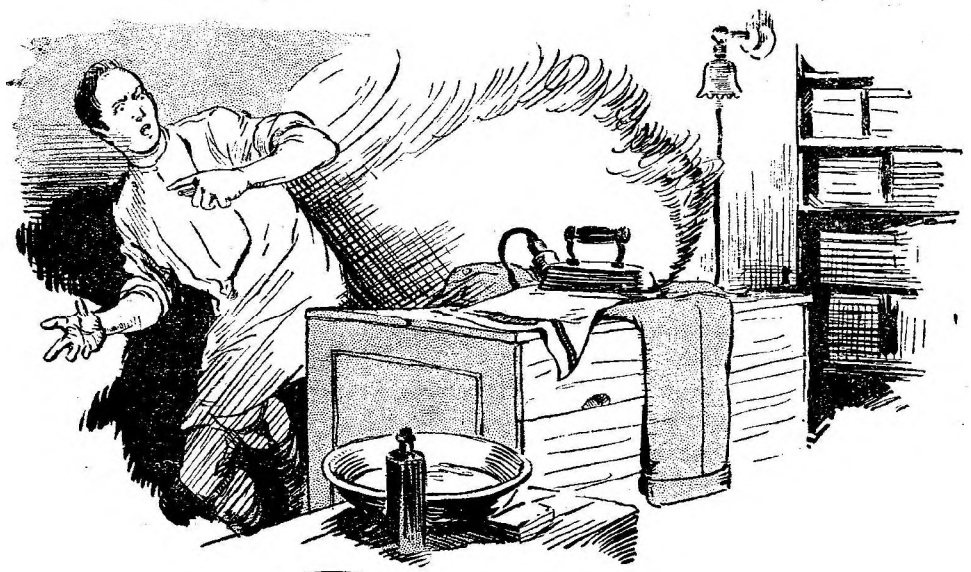
THE MYSTERY

MADLY rushing toward the shore
Two waves each other race;
They crash as one and then once more
Leave for their starting place.

Their starting place! Ah, where is that?
Will some one answer me?
I'm sure I don't know where it's at;
It is a mystery.

Each wave must have its starting place
Somewhere out in the sea—
No starting place, there'd be no race;
Explain this thing to me!

George A. Wright.



Credit

By JACK BECHDOLT

IT was pay day in the offices and factory of Morgan Hill, inventor, proprietor and manufacturer of "Peggony, the Game That Captured Kings and Kiddies," the one that has been advertised so extensively of late as the answer to "Why Men Stay Home." Mr. Morgan Hill, in person was paying off the hands.

The hands, to be strictly accurate, were two, counting from left to right. They were the slender, sensitive, white hands of Miss Alice Arnold, hands unembellished by ring or bracelet or gew-gaw and the more lovely because of it. During business hours Miss Arnold's hands fluttered like two white doves above the prosaic keyboard of a prosaic, second hand typewriter on which she wrote Mr. Hill's business correspondence and kept his office records.

It would be complimentary but not true to say that Miss Arnold's ten fingers could make the keys sing like the morning stars together and pour forth an incessant stream of clean copy. Her fingers were not as skilled as all that. They hesitated a great deal and used the eraser often which was one of the principal reasons why Miss Arnold's business day was fully occupied.

Miss Arnold was young—hard to say just what exact age. Sometimes, when her fingers got twisted up in the pot hooks of short hand and she had to ask Mr. Hill to please repeat what he had already dictated, Miss Arnold with her serious, gray eyes and repentant expression looked very much like a little girl of ten who is confessing a wrong and made Mr. Hill feel like her papa. Other times, for instance once when Mr. Hill lost his head and tried to hold one of her hands while he said something stammering and sentimental, Miss Arnold looked an austere empress of sixty. Most of the time her age was an indefinite thing which Mr. Hill forgot in amazement at her incessant loyalty and industry and admiration for her rapid progress in her profession. Three months ago he had hired Miss Arnold fresh from a business

college course. Within three months more, at least, he knew she would be expert.

Morgan Hill's age was around twenty-eight. He was lean, deceptively slight in appearance. His cheekbones were high and his eyes slanted upward at the outer corners. They were black eyes that met your gaze with a steady, sharp look. He had a short nose and a mouth and chin that expressed intense determination. He was almost invariably in a hurry going somewhere or returning, lips compressed, derby hat slightly awry, eyes gleaming, a typical young hustler.

"Oh, I stopped at the bank, Miss Arnold," Hill said offhand. "Here is your week's salary." He produced two bills, a five and a ten. "Fifteen is right?"

Miss Arnold's fingers seemed to take the two bills reluctantly. "If—" she stammered, then blushed and changed her mind. "Thank you," she added quietly. "You are always very prompt, Mr. Hill."

"Yes, yes! Of course!" Hill replied briskly. "Good business, you know. Always meet your bills promptly, Miss Arnold. Keep your credit good. Credit's a wonderful thing! The backbone of modern business."

Miss Arnold looked at the floor demurely. "Yes, indeed!" she agreed softly.

"Yes, siree! Without credit a little business like mine that started on a shoestring would have an awful time pulling through its first years. Credit—that's the ticket! I'm building on that policy here. If I can establish a clean, bright credit, you see—"

"By the way, Mr. Hill, this telegram came while you were at—the bank."

Morgan Hill made a pitiful attempt to take the telegram from his stenographer with proper nonchalance. His fingers were not quite steady as he ripped open the yellow envelope. Alice Arnold, pretending to erase a mistake in the letter she was typewriting, secretly watched his face.

Hill's firm lips twisted into a wide, illuminating grin which he tried to conceal by a cough. But his dark eyes still shone with joy as he turned to her.

"Mr. Moody is going to see me at dinner!" he exclaimed. "He accepted my invitation!"

"Isn't that splendid!"

Hill frowned judicially, covering an elation not in keeping with the dignity of business. "Humph, well it shows good sense on Moody's part. An account like ours is pretty well worth their consideration you know."

"Oh, yes—yes, of course. But I am glad—you wanted it to come out that way, didn't you? I'm very glad!"

"Thank you, Miss Arnold. And, let's see, I guess that's all for to-day. Must be past five o'clock."

Hill thrust his hand into the pocket where his handsome gold repeater—a legacy from his father—usually reposed. His fingers encountered instead of the watch a pawnbroker's ticket and he remembered too late that the watch had just been pledged to produce the two bills he handed his office force and some more for which he had immediate need. "It *is* past five o'clock," he amended hastily. "I know it!"

Miss Arnold rose from her machine and covered it with a dust jacket. She straightened her small desk and got her hat, pausing for a critical survey before the little office mirror. Then she turned impulsively on Hill.

"I wish you the best of luck with Mr. Moody," she said and her brown eyes shone delightfully. Her hand extended toward Hill's in an unconscious gesture and Hill grasped it fast.

"Alice, I—" Hill gasped. "Thank you very much, Miss Arnold. Thank you. Good night."

The door closed on Alice Arnold and Hill burst out in bitter self-reproach. "Damn! I nearly did it that time! Oh, damn! What an utter ass I can be when I get started!" He paced the room back and forth, clenching his hands and sometimes rumpling his hair till it stood all wild. "You peach!" he raved, addressing the door which had just closed on his stenographer. "You angel! You absolute pippin! Oh, damn!"

Hill paused in the middle of the room, his fists clasped and held rigidly at his sides, his entire body tense with emotion.

"Alice!" he whispered shakily. "Alice! If I can just swing this deal to-night, Alice,

I—Oh, boy!" He added in a reverent whisper, shamefaced but sincere, "Oh, God, help me out just this once. Help me put it over on this hard-boiled Moody!"

Morgan Hill was in the queer plight of a man pauperized by prosperity. The richer he grew on paper the closer he got to the poorhouse.

Hill began business with two assets, an idea and the house in Throckton, Ohio, where he had lived all his life. He sold his legacy and brought the idea and $3,500 to New York, the Mecca of commerce. He rented a handsome office and stock room in the Ajax Building and hired a sign painter to put his name on the door. He advertised for a stenographer and Alice Arnold appeared. Alice confessed frankly that she didn't know much, but then, she didn't cost much either! Hill made connections with a lithographer, a maker of composition board, a diemaker and a woodenware manufacturer. Then he was ready for business.

Nobody can tell about games. Morgan Hill's invention, which was pretty much like all other games played with pegs dating from the discovery of the cribbage board, became a craze almost overnight. The demand was far greater than his capacity to manufacture. Orders from the wholesalers poured in, orders for dozen gross lots that made Hill's head swim, orders marked "*rush*" in letters that shrieked to heaven. Every game he sold cost him twenty cents and brought him forty cents, but the twenty cents Hill paid out in cash and the forty cents ambled back to him with all the cruel, nonchalant deliberation of commercial practice. The $3,500 was almost gone when the young inventor discovered the peril he stood in. He had no credit!

Credit is the hardest fact of commerce and Morgan Hill, fully launched on his impetuous manufacturing career, ran head on into the credit question with a velocity that knocked the wind out of him. His money was spent, gone in cash payments to printer, paper house and manufacturer. The very fact that he had paid cash, that he had not built up a credit in the day when he had the money to afford to charge his bills, left him helpless when he must have credit or fail. Morgan Hill did a little figuring and saw then that he must find a business house which would take over the manufacture of his games and allow him from six months to a year in which to square accounts. Either he must do that or quit and he was not the quitting kind—not when he thought about Alice Arnold.

When he got back his breath after the abrupt collision with the credit bogey Hill acted. He discharged the boy who packed his orders and thereafter did the work of evenings, saving himself ten dollars a week. He considered discharging Alice and fought a hard battle against his inclination in which he came out second best. Alice Arnold remained.

The poor girl needed the job, Hill argued. She had never said as much, but anybody could see it. Why look at her, poor, inexperienced thing, living in a quiet boarding house trying to make her way alone! Anybody could see she had no resources except what she earned. She didn't wear summer furs or dangling Egyptian necklaces or earrings or rings or dew-dads. She didn't wear these new red and green sandals like the prosperous office employees you see on Fifth Avenue at noon time. She didn't buy any new dresses either, any of those smart, minute-ahead-of-the-mode dresses other girls wore—just stuck to those simple little blue silk frocks with white collars and cuffs, plain silk stockings, plain little shoes, plain little tailored hats with nothing at all on them except maybe a plain bow or buckle. Anybody could see that the poor girl was a pauper except for the fifteen dollars a week he paid her. He swore he would be damned if he fired her, and deep in his heart knew that the real reason was because he would give up life itself before he voluntarily parted with Alice.

Instead of firing Alice, Hill remarked to the landlady of his own boarding house that he would move out at the end of the week.

"I'm thinking of furnishing an apartment—getting a housekeeper maybe—or a valet, fixing up a little bachelor place I can call home," he explained airily.

"Well now! Isn't it fine to see you doing so well!" his landlady beamed. The

honest woman liked him. "Will you give me your new address so I can forward your mail?"

"Why, I—I haven't decided on just the place," Hill stammered. "I may have to go to a hotel for a day or two—"

"I'll send your mail to the hotel then—"

"I tell you what you do," said he seriously, "just forward any mail to my office. That's much safer. You never can tell about hotels!"

Thus it happened that while his business future hung in the balance—while Morgan Hill went vainly from place to place seeking to establish his necessary credit out of nothing—nobody knew exactly where he did live. Nobody cared very much, except perhaps Alice Arnold, and it wasn't her business to ask—and perhaps the owners of the Ajax Building, who, had they known, would probably have had the young man arrested for breaking at least a dozen city ordinances, including health and fire laws and violation of his lease besides.

For Morgan Hill lived in his own offices!

The stockroom door, which he was careful to keep locked, hid his dark secret from the world. Behind that partition supposed to guard a wealth in games of Peggony there was little enough in all truth—a spartan army cot with one blanket and an old overcoat for covering—a kitchen table once used for wrapping bundles and now furnished with a ten-cent store plate and cup, knives and forks and an electric stove to cook upon. An empty packing case held the food which he smuggled in and could have held its proper quota of goods besides without undue crowding. A drawer of his handsome flat top desk in the outer office concealed toothbrush and shaving kit. With orders for his game pouring in upon him, owner and proprietor of a business that promised to make him a millionaire, Morgan Hill ate two frugal, home cooked meals a day—and he was an indifferent cook—and slept on an army cot, his dreams broken by nightmares of discovery by the building's night watchman.

The night watch system was the hardest part of it. One elevator ran until midnight, and all tenants passing in or out were required to register and subsequently checked up by the watchman who made hourly rounds. Fearful of rousing suspicion by too frequent night appearances the wretched young man spent most nights a prisoner in his stockroom, hiding the glow of his light and trembling whenever the watchman's hand tried the door. It was a cramped, dismal, galling life, but his office rent was paid in advance and he was saving fully twenty-five dollars a week—enough to keep up the fight at least a month longer.

Well, he was still fighting and the fight was going to be won! To-night was the night! Hill fingered the telegram from Moody with caressing touch, rereading its brief notification that Mr. Moody would be glad to take dinner with him at the Ritzdorf that evening and discuss his proposition.

Moody was the general manager of the Corona Company, the biggest paper novelty and game manufacturer of them all. One by one Hill had canvassed other manufacturers and failed in his quest for credit.

Alice Arnold suggested trying the Corona people. Hill was almost aghast.

"They wouldn't look at me," he argued.

Alice insisted, and Hill was desperate. He wrote them his proposition. The Corona Company astonished him by displaying mild interest in his affairs. Correspondence followed, rapid and voluminous, as Alice Arnold could readily testify. Hill learned that the general manager would be in New York and staked everything on a personal interview. He invited Moody to dine with him and went out to pawn his watch.

Dinner at the Ritzdorf! Hill shuddered as he felt anxiously of the twenty-five dollars left from his recent transaction with the watch. The expense was fearful—almost suicidal—but it had to be done. Moody must be impressed with the idea that Peggony was a booming business. At least he'd get a decent meal! Always lately he seemed to be hungry, perpetually hungry. Perhaps going without lunches had something to do with it!

He laid the telegram aside with a start. From a lower desk drawer he got out an electric flat iron and unlocked the stockroom. Once in his sanctuary he gravely removed his trousers, laid them flat on a convenient packing case, and wetting a

towel, spread it over them. The electric iron was soon hot, and Hill began his pressing—a saving of fifteen cents, enough to buy a breakfast.

The watchman's rude hand rattled the knob of the outer office door. Hill held his breath, waiting for the man's passing. The knob rattled again and a fist beat on the glass panel.

Hill darted to the door. Remembering in time his airy costume he flattened himself out of sight, all but his head, and opened a cautious crack.

"Oh, it's you!" came the friendly growl. "I see your light burning and not getting no answer was coming in to turn off the juice. Excuse me, Mr. Hill!"

"That's quite all right, Murphy. Just working late—"

"You're a great worker, Mr. Hill—"

"Yes, business keeps me hustling, old man!"

At the moment he wished Murphy in the devil's clutches, but so friendly a smile did the young man give him that Murphy thawed and lingered.

"It's been hot," he stated with a gossipy sigh. "I was saying to me wife to-day if this heat don't let up—"

"Yes, yes, that's right!" Hill agreed, narrowing the crack of the door.

"You look as if you was feeling it, too! You look peakedlike, Mr. Hill. You'd ought to be careful, these hot days—"

"Yes, thanks, I'll be careful—" Hill broke off as the icy hand of fear squeezed his heart. His nostrils had caught a straying, errant wisp of scent—the scent of scorching woolen. That confounded electric iron! He had left it sitting on his trousers.

"It's a matter of proper eating, I say," Murphy was expounding genially. "Now take you, probably you're eating too much. Sure, everybody eats too much in hot weather. You should skip a meal now and then—"

"Yes, all right, Murphy. Sure, old man. Excuse me now!" Gabbling agreement Hill began to close the door. Murphy's broad toe caught it suddenly and wrenched it wider. Murphy's eyes were wide, nostrils dilated.

"Do you smell anything?" he demanded. "Do you smell smoke?"

"No!" Hill roared and slammed the door as Murphy hastily withdrew his foot.

He bounded like some Grecian dancer toward the stockroom. A cloud of smoke poured from his trousers, his best trousers—his only trousers!

He snatched up the hot iron, burning his fingers in the act, and groaned at what was revealed. He had bought the suit that spring, in the flush of his prosperity. It was a delicate gray suit, immensely becoming to him. In that suit, with his new straw hat, carrying his cane, his shoes shined anew, Hill could still feel himself a millionaire, even while he lacked subway fare. And now the electric iron had branded his trousers with an indellible brand of brown, scorched cloth. No tailor's artifice could ever erase that mark, Hill knew.

Even Napoleon, no doubt, had his moments of defeat. Hill saw the damage to his pants and declared in a stony tone: "I can't go. That settles it. I'm smashed!" He sat down on the packing case with a great show of stoic resignation. "Busted!" he observed to the barren stockroom.

Mad with despair, he crumpled up the offending trousers and raised his arm to hurl them out of sight. The arm lowered slowly.

"Alice!" Hill muttered. "What in the world will become of her now? Out of a job! Alice!"

Instead of hurling the trousers he shook them out and drew them on. He donned the coat hurriedly, and taking down the office toilet kit from its hook, propped it on a chair where he could see his reflection in its little mirror. His back to the mirror, Hill peered anxiously, stooping, standing erect, studying the elusive reflection with an earnestness that made him nearly cross-eyed. "I'll be sitting down, mostly," he observed hopefully. "And the rest of the time I can back against a wall, or keep behind Moody. Anyhow, the coat almost covers it—and I've got to go through—for Alice!"

Speaking of bravery, as we are, what is there among the catalogued deeds of the valliant Ulysses to compare with the courage of Morgan Hill, who went to the most im-

portant business dinner of his life in New York's most brilliant hotel, fully aware that across the slack of his handsome pearl gray trousers an electric iron had branded him deep brown? And all to save his stenographer from losing her job. Of such things are heroes made!

When he greeted Moody in the crowded lobby instinct of self-preservation taught Hill a jaunty pose. He held his straw hat behind him and teetered nonchalantly. He contrived a rather grave walk to the big dining room, his hands behind his back, holding the hat in place while he listened deferentially to Moody's commonplace remarks.

But at the checkroom the real test came. He had to give up hat and stick, and ahead of him stretched the dining room, vast as the Western prairies, crammed with people in brilliant dress and every one of them, so it seemed, staring full at him. Morgan Hill stuck it out, the long, weary, footsore pilgrimage to a table in the farthest corner. He stuck it out, but when an innocent burst of laughter rose from a table he passed, his knees turned to water. "Alice!" he repeated to himself and fixed his eyes steadfastly on that banner.

Moody was a gloomy, middle-aged man with a bad color and drooping lip. He was civilly polite to his young host, but his eye lacked luster. Moody was like the cutting east wind that can rob the happiest spring day of its charms. Hill viewed him with sinking heart.

The business of ordering dinner engrossed the younger man. With real enthusiasm he proposed: "Let's say Lynnhavens to start on, and some of the green turtle soup. We might try the sole with tartar sauce. Then how about this extra large English mutton chop, creamed potatoes, asparagus tips, heart of lettuce salad and—oh, this looks good! Say we add an order of the fresh string beans! When it comes to desert, use your own judgment. I'm very partial to the deep dish apple pie myself, especially when it has lots of hard sauce running over it. That and big cups of coffee with lots of cream—"

Hill stopped then. Subtle changes had been working in the gloomy face of Mr. Moody. Suddenly he held up his hand like a traffic policeman.

"If you please, Mr. Hill," he said firmly, almost wildly. "Order what you like, but give me nothing except some soda crackers and a bowl of milk, you hear, waiter? *Thin,* blue milk, no cream! My doctor's orders, Mr. Hill. I suffer, suffer dreadfully, from the stomach, Mr. Hill."

"Oh!" said Hill blankly.

At that moment some instinct told him he was a beaten man. He had pawned his watch in vain. Moody was not going to thaw.

But at least he would eat! For once he would taste all the delights of one square meal! His eyes, long starved of such sights, saw richly laden trays passing, observed waiters slicing juicy steaks and dismembering crispy brown chickens and guinea hens. His nostrils caught errant scents of roasted flesh and fresh baked rolls and spicy sauces.

"Of course you must order whatever you like," Moody went on quite needlessly. Starved too long to resist, Hill would eat this once come what might.

He ate, with a relish for gristly chop and heavily creamed vegetables that made Moody turn his eyes away. He ate with a joy almost savage, and not even Moody, the death's head, glooming over his soda crackers and skimmed milk, toying fretfully with them, could ruin his appetite. He ate because he had to, and at every vigorous bite a fresh shudder seized his dyspeptic guest until between envy and spleen Moody fairly loathed the young man.

When his famished stomach was in some degree sated, glimmers of reason began to return to Morgan Hill. He put aside thoughts of deep dish apple pie crowned with hard sauce, put aside even a brimming pot of coffee with thick cream on the side and foreswore the rich after dinner cigar his soul cried out for. He must fight on, fight—for Alice!

"Let me suggest a good show," Hill said enticingly. He considered his guest and added: "The Theater Guild has been doing fine work with one of those new Russian tragedies—"

"No, no, thank you, Mr. Hill. I—not to-night—"

"A little walk out in the fresh air then while we talk over this business—or, say, the lobby—"

"No, no, really! I—I would like very much just to stretch out quietly on a couch. If you'll come up to my room—"

"The very thing!" Hill was sincere in his pleasure. He had just recalled his scorched trousers.

For two hours, then, Hill addressed the recumbent general manager of the Corona Company, pleading his cause with all the enthusiasm and desperate courage of a man fighting for life and the woman he loves. He marshalled his facts and figures about the game of Peggony and painted the future in its rosiest hues. Moody tried to fix his attention on the recital. The manager had been favorably impressed with the possibilities of Hill's business. He was ready to keep an open mind on Hill himself.

Only one thing was in the way of doing business with Hill. The young man had no credit record. It was up to Moody to judge him on personality solely. And try as he would Moody could not forget his sufferings at dinner nor put the grisly spectacle of Hill's voracious appetite from his thoughts. Tactfully almost regretfully, he at last said: "No." Hill urged more desperate arguments. Moody waved them faintly aside. No. He had decided. They could not risk taking the account. Hill saw the decision was final. The suffering Moody wanted more than anything else to be rid of him. He went with mustered swagger that hid a broken heart. He strode out of the great hotel with rapid steps, anxious only to be alone with his bitterness, scornful whether or not his absurdly damaged costume was laughed at now.

Morgan Hill plowed his way down the street crowded with strolling couples, taking a heedless, headlong gait, blind to everything. His lips moved as he walked and persons he passed sometimes caught one bitter word: "Busted!"

Well, it was over! There was some relief in knowing the suspense had ended. Some relief, but not much. He remembered Alice Arnold and groaned afresh. Poor girl, poor little girl! Slaving so loyally for fifteen dollars a week, living in genteel poverty, going without the pretty clothes women love. What would she do now? Alice! He loved her and he had failed her!

Headlong he plunged across the street, through whirling traffic. A big limousine stopped abruptly with groaning brake, its fender touching him. He was stepping on with savage disregard for his life when a voice called him frantically. It was Alice Arnold's voice.

Alice leaned out of the big limousine and waved to him. "Oh, Mr. Hill! Please! Come here—"

He turned back almost reluctantly. He didn't want Alice to see his face just now! Even the circumstance of her being in the limousine, clad in a rich opera cloak failed to impress him as novel, so anxious was he to conceal his grief.

"Please get in a moment!" Alice urged him, leaning out and catching his arm. "I want you to meet Papa."

Her hand on his arm was beyond resisting. Hill stepped into the car and acknowledged the presence of a ruddy faced, middle aged man with crisp white hair. The rich interior of the car, the ruddy faced man in dinner jacket, Alice herself radiant in evening dress—these surprising facts began to dawn upon Hill. He looked at Alice for the explanation.

"I think you should know," she said quietly, "that my father is president of the Corona Company—"

"Really, Alice!" said the old gentleman a little testily. "We can't go into this again—"

"Papa is president—and boss when he wants to be—of the Corona Company which has just turned down the fine business chance you offered them," Alice repeated firmly, defiantly.

"Then you know—already?"

"Papa talked to Mr. Moody after you left. He is staying at the same hotel over the week-end you see. He came to visit his self-supporting daughter—"

"Alice has had this notion of earning a living for a long time," her father chimed in eager to divert the talk. "I must say I'm proud of the way she has made good all by herself!"

"I wish I could say I was as proud of

your business judgment," Alice cried, not to be put off. "You back up Mr. Moody!"

"My dear Alice—and Mr. Hill! Please be reasonable! Mr. Moody is manager of our company, picked from a hundred men and paid highly for his ability. It is not my policy to reverse his judgment and I have no intention of doing it—even in this case."

"Quite right, sir, I'm sure," Hill approved. "Of course, you miss a good chance, but somebody else will profit by that!"

"My misfortune," Arnold answered briefly, rather skeptically.

But Hill's gaze had turned on the radiant Alice. For her he had endured everything, gone without, suffered. To find her salary of fifteen dollars a week he had pawned even his watch!

"Good God!" he muttered, "what a fool I have been! Well, I get out here. Glad to have met you, Mr. Arnold. Good night, Miss Arnold—"

"Oh, say!" Arnold protested hastily, "let us drop you at your hotel. No trouble at all—"

"You must let us take you there!" Alice insisted. "Sit down at once. Mr. Hill—please!"

"Where to?" Arnold asked.

Hill submitted. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Let them have their way. It saved argument and he lacked the spirit to argue.

"Where to, Mr Hill?" Arnold asked again.

Hill realized the question with a start. Where to? Where did he live, anyway? Not in the Ajax Building! Not for millions would he admit his poverty now! The world had laughed at him enough, humiliated him enough. And this final joke, to find the girl he was fighting for was not a pauper—could buy and sell him a hundred times over in fact! Let her laugh with the rest of them? Not much.

"What address did you say, Mr. Hill?" Arnold repeated.

Hill had not said, but he did then. He remembered a building, an impressive hotel, quiet, exclusive—a club for rich men, presumably. He had looked at it on strolls, thinking of the day he might be rich and patronize it. He gave the address off-hand.

The limousine made quick work of it, but none too quick for Hill. Above all things he wanted to be quit of Alice and her father. He wanted to be alone with his grief and humiliation. He couldn't sit there and chatter like a fool, not even for Alice!

Once she reached forward and her fingers touched his hand. "I am so sorry," she said and her eye meant it.

Pride forced him to laugh lightly. "Oh, that's your father's loss, not mine! But I'm sorry to lose such a good secretary—"

Alice's eyes widened and her lip trembled. "Of course, if you want me to go—" she murmured.

Hill said nothing. Want her to go! As if he could endure the daily reproach of her presence longer! Besides—he couldn't find another week's wages for her under any circumstances. He kept silent and Alice drew back into the shadows, silent, too.

The limousine stopped before the address Hill had given.

"Here we are!" Arnold cried with assumed cheerfulness as he peered out. "Good night, Hill. Sorry we can't do business. Some other time, perhaps—"

"Good night—and thank you both," Hill murmured and leaped out hastily. He squared his shoulders and strolled jauntily across the pavement toward the handsome, lighted doorway. Confound them! They were still watching him. He affected to delay, looking at the sky, swinging his stick. The limousine would never go! He summoned his resolution and pushed through the open door of a vestibule.

The limousine moved on at last. Hill saw it from the corner of his eye and sighed with relief that he need push his bluff no farther. He emerged cautiously from the vestibule, saw the tail lights of the Arnold car round a corner and strode on his way to the Ajax building and what he called, with facetious bitterness, "home."

Hill pushed through his outer office, unlocked the stock room door and paused in the midst of the bare room, staring about at the inhospitable scene. Dishes, some of them unwashed, stood on the kitchen table. The electric iron and the damp towel he

had used to press his clothes cluttered the top of his packing case. An open suit case spilled forth several shirts and collars, signs of his hastily made dinner toilet. Hill eyed it all with keenest misery, realizing to the full his bachelor squalor, his pitiful bluff. Suddenly he aimed a kick that caught the suitcase fair and sent it aloft, shedding raiment over the floor.

"Busted!" he observed briefly, "utterly busted!"

He was aware that the door of the outer office had opened. That would be Murphy, who had seen his light burning and meant to turn it out. The stock room door stood wide, revealing his secret. Well, he didn't care now. It was all over!

A sharp gasp made him wheel about.

It was Alice Arnold who had gasped at that strange scene the open door revealed. Her father stood beside her and his shrewd eyes noted everything. In the background Murphy, who had admitted these insistent visitors, was disappearing through the door.

Hill's haggard gaze met the eyes of Arnold. He was past any shame now.

"Welcome to my hotel," he cried ironically.

Arnold nodded his head slowly. "So this is really it!"

"It is."

"Broke?"

"Oh, no!" Hill's lips twisted upward in a poor lopsided smile. "I'm worth millions—on paper!"

"And you've been bluffing it out here—hoping somebody'd take you at face value and give you credit, eh?"

"I couldn't afford to pay room rent any more: And the office rent was paid up. I cut down as close as I could—and just hoped, that's all—"

"And how about me!" Alice cried reproachfully. "You let me stay on—fifteen dollars a week—enough to lodge you decently—feed you properly—"

For a moment Hill's eyes wavered. Then he looked up trying to freshen his grin.

"I thought you needed the job," he muttered, blushing red. "I thought you were busted—like me. You broke! Funny, isn't it?" He added a hollow, "Ha, ha."

"Oh!" said Alice explosively. She turned her face away from the two men and her two hands clenched into hard little fists.

Arnold spoke, his voice severe. "Well, Hill! You're some bluffer, aren't you! I guessed it when you wrote us suggesting we take your account. But Alice here wrote me, too. and insisted I look into it. We did, and I must say we found out nothing against you—simply that you had no credit history. I left it to Moody and he turned you down. Now I want you to understand, young man, that on a question of business, neither bluff nor any plea of personal friendship—nor even the tears of Alice here—have a damn thing to do with making up my mind—"

"Oh, damn your mind!" Hill barked. "I was turned down. Let it go at that—"

"Wait a minute! Credit, Mr. Hill, simmers down solely to the question of a man's character—his courage and stick-to-itiveness and natural honesty—but mostly his courage. Well, we knew a lot about your nerve, but we had no way of knowing about your courage. We never would have known except that Alice got the idea you might do something desperate from disappointment in your plans and made me follow you in the car. And then after we set you down at your—hotel"—Arnold's eyes suddenly twinkled—"well, I got really curious to know where you lived and we followed you again."

Arnold coughed and hesitated. "I guess we've got a pretty good line on your character and courage, even if we were rather vulgarly curious. We know something about you, now. I—that is—Hill, you see Moody to-morrow morning and we'll fix up that contract you want. I guess you're the kind of young fellow that'll stick!"

Arnold's hand was out and Hill groped for it. And Alice's slender, warm hand caught both of theirs and held them fast.

Arnold chuckled abruptly.

"You bluffed pretty well, son! Yes, you did! But say, next time you pick out a New York hotel for your imaginary address, don't pick a Martha Washington. That's for women only."

Without Gloves

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "Snowdrift," "Prairie Flowers," etc.

CHAPTER XIX *(continued).*

CHRISTMAS AT NUMBER EIGHT.

THE word "gasoline" passed swiftly from lip to lip as the men crowded through the doorway. In the direction of the stables the clearing was already alight with flames. Force of habit carried them halfway across the clearing in their first rush from the bunk house. Then the portent of the word "gasoline" seemed suddenly to percolate their intelligence. The rush wavered as men halted and turned back.

"The hull camp's a goner!"

"When that car lets go, she'll scatter fire a half a mile!"

"We'll be covered with blazin' gasoline an' burnt to a cinder!"

The rush toward the flaming hay shed stopped. In every direction men were scattering for the edges of the clearing. A few wavered uncertainly, to stare in fascination at the wind fanned flames that were whirling and leaping about the box car.

Leonard, Sim Coughlan, and old Pap Hickman ran at the heels of big Tim Neely. At the little knot of wavering men the big boss paused.

"Come on, boys!" he cried. "There's enough of us to shove that car to hell!"

"An' git blow'd to hell doin' it!" retorted Sam King.

"It would be your chanst to go in good company!" snapped Neely. "Come on, boys! There's some of us has got red guts instead of rotgut inside of us! We ain't afraid of a little fire!"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 14.

At the words Pap Hickman, Coughlan and another fell in behind the boss. Leonard turned and ran in the opposite direction. For just an instant the men paused to watch the fleeing figure. Sam King laughed aloud, and turning, made for the shelter of the timber. Coughlan cursed under his breath, and old Pap Hickman chuckled.

As they passed the empty flats the top loader shouldered a pinch-bar.

"The roof's beginnin' to burn!" cried Hickman, pointing to the little red flames that licked at the edges of the car roof. But the roar of flames in the hay shed drowned his words.

Neely sprang for the ladder at the end of the car.

"I'll let off the brakes!" he shouted. "You. boys shove!" A bright light—brighter, whiter than the red light of the flaming hay—shot across the rolling smoke clouds, accompanied by a noise that drowned the crackling of the flames. The men turned to see the tractor rounding the blazing hay shed.

"My God!" cried Coughlan. "He can't git through there! It 'll cook him!"

"Go back! Go back!" yelled Neely, dancing about on top of the car; but the tractor came on, and the next moment was lost in a sheet of smoke and flame that whipped around the corner of the shed. The next instant it reappeared and, without stopping, cut around the end of the car and took its place on the track. With a whoop, the third man who had followed Neely seized the chain that dragged at the tractor's draw-bar, and made it fast to the box car. Shielding himself as best he could from the flames, Coughlan set his pinch-bar beneath a wheel. The brakeshoes slackened creakily.

"Let 'er go!" roared Neely; and clambering down the ladder, he placed his shoulder to a wheel. The tractor's exhaust roared. Coughlan bore down on his pinch-bar. The men pushed and strained. And the car moved! Slowly at first, then faster, until it was clear of the flaming shed. A hundred feet down the track Neely applied the brakes, while Coughlan and the others blocked the wheels. The tractor came to a halt, and all hands attacked the blazing roof of the car with snow. It was but the work of a few minutes to extinguish the blaze, and when the last spark went black the men stood and grinned into each other's faces.

"Where's the other feller?" asked Neely, glancing about him.

As if in answer to the question, a man stepped around the corner of the car. It was Andy Moore, and his grin was the broadest grin of all as Coughlan gripped his hand. "Well, I'll be damned!" quoth Coughlan, as the other hand came to rest on Leonard's shoulder.

"We couldn't of made it without the ingyne, greener," said Moore, and turned abruptly to Neely. "Say, boss, if I should happen to quit up to Number Nine, would you give me a job? I kind of like the work down here better, an' besides they's a few things about this here fightin' game I want to learn if the greener 'll wise me up to em."

Neely laughed. "Try it an' see," he said. "I don't never hire men offen another man's crew—but if a man should happen to quit, that's different.'

CHAPTER XX.

THE NEW FOREMAN.

LESS than a week after Christmas three men stepped from the caboose of the log train at Number Eight and inquired for Sam King. One man carried a tripod and a black case, another a sliding rod fitted with a painted target, and three pairs of snowshoes, while the third carried a thin metal chain and a huge suit case. Neely forwarded them to Number Nine, via an empty log sled behind Leonard's tractor.

"Surveyin'?" asked the greener, by way of friendly conversation as the outfit moved slowly up the log road.

"No, not exactly," answered the man with the tripod. "Going to run some levels."

"Railroad?"

"No. I don't know exactly what is wanted. Mr. Blodgett told us to report to

King for instructions. He wants to determine the fall of some river, I suppose."

Leonard mulled the information in his mind, but it meant nothing to him, and he decided to try again.

"Must be a nice job," he opined. "Wisht I had a job like that instead of runnin' this here damn tractor."

The men laughed. "I guess every one feels at times as though he would like to have the other fellow's job," said the one who had answered the first question. "But our work is no cinch, ramming around the woods with the snow belly deep to a giraffe, digging down to hard ground to set up, and pulling off your mittens to adjust your instrument."

"Guess that's right, at that," admitted Leonard. "An' what's it good fer when you git it done?"

"Well," smiled the men, "if you were figuring on putting in a dam, you would have to determine first the fall of the river. Then you could tell how high to build the dam, and how much land would be flooded by your pool."

"That's right," admitted Leonard, and immediately turned the conversation into other channels.

That night in the little office he asked abruptly of Neely: "What would old Blodgett be puttin' in a dam fer?"

"A dam? Where?"

"On the river, of course. Where in hell else would a guy build a dam?"

"What makes you think he's goin' to put in a dam?"

"Them guys that rode up to Number Nine with me says Blodgett sent 'em up here to run levels. Said they didn't know what fer. but prob'ly it was to tell the fall of the river so's old Blodgett could tell how high to make his dam, an' how much country it would flood over. Said they was to get orders from King."

Neely pondered over the information for some time. Then, suddenly, he slapped his leg with his palm. "I bet that's what his game is, all right!"

"Who's game, an' what is it?"

"Blodgett's or Sam King's, most likely. That's what Blodgett hired him fer."

"I don't make you."

"Didn't I tell you I figgered Blodgett hired King to come up here an' figger a way to beat MacAlister out of his timber? Well, wunst Blodgett gits a dam in, he's as good as got MacAlister's timber."

"How's that?"

Without answering, Neely asked another question. "You've be'n into MacAlister's timber—how high does it lay above the river?"

"What do you mean, how high?"

"The ground—is it high ground—hilly? Or does it lay like this tract, kind of flat an' level?"

"Yes, that's the way it lays. The bank you go up at the landin' ain't over three or four foot high."

Neely nodded. "I thought so. King, he's be'n over there, too. S'pose Blodgett would put in a dam jest below MacAlister. What would happen? He'd flood MacAlister out, wouldn't he?"

"Sure he would," agreed Leonard. "But—"

"But what?"

"He'd flood his own self out, too. This here land don't lay no higher than what MacAlister's does."

Neely grinned. "They can't build this here dam till summer. What 'll be left on this tract for Blodgett to flood? Nothin' but a lot of slash."

"But, hell," cried Leonard, "ain't there no laws? A man ain't got a right to dam up a river an' flood every one out of the country, has he?"

"Sure there's laws. But Blodgett will git the law on his side. All he's got to do is to git a bill through the legislature permittin' him to dam the Wild Goose River. Then he puts up a bond that he'll pay all the claims for damages."

"Then he'd have to pay MacAlister fer his timber—is that right?"

"Yup."

Leonard pondered the situation for several minutes while the boss watched him out of the corner of his eye. Suddenly the greener looked up.

"But, say," he cried, "who figgers out what he's got to pay? MacAlister?"

Neely laughed. "I was jest wonderin' if you'd overlook that. That's where the

steal comes in. No, MacAlister ain't got nothin' to say about it. They's three men app'inted by the court. Appraisers, they call 'em. MacAlister picks out one, an' Blodgett picks out one, an' them two picks out the other one. They go over the ground an' figger what the damages is."

"How do they figger the damages?"

"Cruise the timber an' figger out the stumpage."

"But, hell, man," cried Leonard, "that ain't no way to figger that piece of timber! Look at the way it's be'n handled! An' look at the young stuff! Would they make Blodgett pay for the young stuff same as the big sticks?"

"You ort to know by this time what loggin' men thinks of young stuff," answered Neely.

For a long time Leonard was silent, and when he spoke it was as much to himself as to the boss.

"He's be'n a long time workin' that timber. He's got young stuff comin' along that's better'n six inches through, that was seedlin's he set out in them back strips. An' the big stuff stands thicker to-day than it stands right here where it ain't never be'n touched. It's what he's laid by fer *her* —that young stuff is—an' by God, she's goin' to have it! They won't be no dam on Wild Goose, Neely, but how we goin' to stop it?"

The boss knocked the ashes from his pipe against the corner of the stove.

"Maybe we can't stop it," he answered. "Anyway, we've got quite a little time to figger it out. It might be we'll have to make a trip to St. Paul."

"I'd make a trip to hell to save her timber," said Leonard, as he drew on his cap and mittens. "But if I do old Blodgett 'll go along with me."

"Best to do it accordin' to law," advised Neely.

"Law's all right if it works," admitted Leonard. "If it don't, then we got to try some other way."

Opening the door, he stepped out into the starlit clearing.

Two weeks later the three level men came out of the woods, and again Leonard tried to engage them in casual conversation, but their answers were brief and evasive. Evidently they had been advised not to talk.

January passed without Leonard finding time to visit MacAlister's cabin. One morning early in February, Elija Blodgett himself stepped from the logging train, and proceeded at once to Number Nine, where he spent the night. Late the following afternoon he returned to Number Eight, and, after supper, retired with Neely to the little office. By way of opening the conversation, Blodgett expressed approval of the progress made in the timber.

"You have done very well, Neely, very well," he said, rubbing his bony hands together close to the stove. "Another sixty days will see the last of the timber on the cars, and the price is still mounting, Neely, still mounting."

"That's good," the boss replied. "Yes, sixty days will see the finish. Then I s'pose you'll be tacklin' the back tract next winter."

"Just so, Neely, just so. And it was to arrange for that that I came up here. A terrible trip, Neely, at this time of year—a most uncomfortable and disagreeable journey."

"Well, they don't run no Pullmans on this loggin' spur," admitted the boss with a grin. "But cabooses ain't so bad when you git use' to 'em. Looks like you could of waited till spring, though, if you ain't figgerin' on goin' into the back tract till next fall."

"And so I could, Neely, so I could, if it were not for the fact that the back tract offers very exceptional difficulties in the matter of getting the logs to the mills. It is, as you know, completely surrounded by a very considerable swamp, and were we forced to extend the railroad through this swamp the expense would be prohibitive."

Neely was about to interrupt, but Blodgett motioned him to silence. "Just a moment, Neely, just a moment. As I say, it was this that induced me to undertake this trip into the woods. And now, before we proceed further, and to avoid needless repetition of instructions, I will ask you to select a man from the crew who may be depended upon to stand loyally by us. He

must be a man of rather more than ordinary intelligence—a man capable of offering testimony—ahem—according to instructions, before a legislative committee. Is there such a man in the crew, Neely?"

"Yes, there's one that I'd figger would fill the bill. His name's Leonard. He's the tractor man."

"The tractor man!" exclaimed Blodgett in surprise. "Why, he is a green hand. Never been in the woods before, and knows nothing at all of timber or of conditions."

"Don't fool yerself, Mr. Blodgett," grinned the boss. "He was green when he come into the woods this fall, but he ain't no green hand now. There ain't no part of the job except the cookin' that he ain't got holt of. He's the smartest lad I ever had in the woods, an' he knows more about timber to-day than most of 'em that's worked in the woods all their life. An' when he tackles a thing he sees it through—jest remember that, Mr. Blodgett. When the greener starts a thing he sees it through. Kep' three mile of log road open by runnin' his tractor up an' down it fer forty hours to a stretch with the snow flyin' so thick he couldn't see ten foot in front of him with the headlight lit."

"Seems to be just the man we want. Bring him in here, Neely, and I will give you your instructions."

A few moments later Leonard followed the boss into the office, where Blodgett greeted him with a patronizing smile. "Ah, young man, Neely tells me that you have acquitted yourself very creditably; in fact, that you have shown extraordinary aptitude for the work. It is becoming harder year by year to find among the younger generation a man who is willing to go into the woods and learn logging in the camps. Plenty of white collar loggers who want to learn the business through the office, but few who will go into the timber.

"Just remember that hard work and loyalty to your employer will soon put you to the top, my boy. You will find that you have lost nothing by your diligence. I still have timber to cut, as Neely can tell you, and it is in connection with that timber that I am here. I want two men from this camp to offer certain testimony before a legislative committee. Neely will of course be one, and we have selected you for the other. I may add that the matter in hand will involve a trip to St. Paul, with of course all your expenses paid, and—er—extra compensation in the nature of a—er—bonus, we will say, which will in effect double your wages for the winter. Does the proposition appeal to you?"

"Le's see if I make you. What you're tryin' to say is, how'd I like to hit the rattler fer St. Paul, an' grab off a bunch of extry jack fer boostin' your game to this here committee? All right, I'm on. What is the lay?"

Blodgett stared at the speaker, and Neely laughed.

"It's jest his way of speakin', Mr. Blodgett. He's got a kind of funny lingo, but after you git use' to it you kin kind of figger out what he's drivin' at. He says the proposition suits him fine."

"Extraordinary, Neely, most extraordinary. I can scarcely follow him. I wonder whether the committee—"

"You mean," interrupted Leonard, "you're afraid them guys won't make me? Don't you worry, cap. I'll put it acrost. I never seen no one yet I couldn't talk to. Le's git down to cases."

A thin smile played about Blodgett's lips.

"Extraordinary, but at least unique. In fact, it may have a very good effect. A little humor at time is a valuable asset."

Neely grinned. "They won't git the kind of talk out of him they're expectin'."

"Quite so, Neely, quite so. And now if you will give me your attention, I will outline my plans and instruct you in the line of testimony which will be necessary in the furtherance of our undertaking. I may say here that Samuel King will be our principal witness, and you will be guided in a great measure by his testimony, which you are to corroborate.

"As you know, of course, this tract will be logged off by spring. My other holdings are in what is known as the back tract, a very good stand of timber, but at present inaccessible. The cost of a railroad across the swamps would be too great to attempt."

"Why don't you drive the stuff down

the Wild Goose?" interrupted Neely. "I cruised that timber fer you, you mind, a couple of years back, an' I come out down the river in a canoe. She kin be drove all right."

Blodgett frowned. "That is exactly what I am planning to do—drive the river. But, remember this"—he paused and glanced meaningly into the eyes of the boss —"in its present condition the *Wild Goose cannot be driven.* That is the important thing to be remembered."

"Sure it can't," admitted Neely. "An' neither could any other stream that size that I ever heard tell of. She's got to be cleaned up—snags blow'd out, down stuff cut out, an' some timber booms put in. A good crew could clean her up in fifty or sixty days."

Blodgett's frown deepened. "You are not a riverman, Neely. Your judgment in this matter must defer to mine. As a matter of fact, the Wild Goose cannot be driven, nor can it be cleaned up for driving, for the reason that it is too shallow. That is one thing you must both remember. The river cannot be driven, nor can it be put in condition to drive without the construction of a dam. I have had engineers engaged in running the levels, and their reports show that the average fall of the river is so slight that a dam constructed, say at a point about opposite here, would raise the water to a sufficient height for driving my timber."

"Raise the water back to your timber!" cried Neely. "You mean clean to the back tract? Why, Mr. Blodgett, as slow as the Wild Goose runs, an' as low banks as it's got, you'd spread water over half of Minnesoty."

Blodgett's frown changed to an icy smile.

"I have been at some expense, Neely—quite some expense—in procuring the introduction of a bill in the legislature permitting the building of a dam at a certain point on the Wild Goose River. The bill in question has had its reading, and has been referred to the proper committee. That committee will hold a hearing on this matter in the State Capitol at ten o'clock next Tuesday morning. It is very important that this matter receive favorable action in committee. I am assured that should the House committee report the bill favorably, the Senate committee will indorse it without further hearing. Everything will therefore depend upon our being able to convince the House committee that this dam is essential for getting the timber from the back tract to the mills.

"The demand for timber incident to the war, which, you undoubtedly know, is going sorely against the allied nations which are our friends, makes it the patriotic duty of every man who calls himself an American to do his utmost to produce lumber. This urgent demand for lumber will be a strong factor in the passage of this bill. The committee will consider its recommendation an act of patriotism, which, in fact, it will be. Therefore, your testimony must be in effect that such dam is essential."

"But you can't hold enough water back the way the land lays to raise the river at the back tract," objected Neely.

"A fact, Neely, of which I am well aware, and a fact, also with which you need not concern yourself. Nothing will be said about the back tract, except to introduce your own figures as to the amount of standing timber. I am asking no man to perjure himself. In fact, I should not for a moment tolerate false swearing.

"In order that you need have no compunctions as to swearing that the dam will raise the water level at my holdings, I have purchased a narrow strip of timber, bordering upon the river from this tract clear to the back tract. The fact is that now my timber reaches down to within a half mile above the proposed dam site, and you certainly know that a ten-foot dam will raise the water to that point."

"Do you call tamarack swamp timber?" asked Neely.

"Yes, standing timber, of course. What else is it?"

The boss sniffed contemptuously.

"Where is the dam goin' in?" he asked.

"The location of the dam will be the north line of section ten, at a point where the river cuts through a low ridge which will also serve as the wall of the pool."

"Section ten," repeated Neely. "That would be just about MacAlister's lower line.

Maybe you ain't heard of Paddy MacAlister, an' his timber, Mr. Blodgett?"

"What about it?" Blodgett's eyes narrowed perceptibly.

"Why, this here MacAlister, he's got three-quarters jest acrost the river from here that's mighty fine timber, so they say. He's be'n workin' it, kind of nursin' it along fer better'n twenty year. The way the land lays through here, a ten-foot dam on the north line of section ten would put his land about six foot under water. If you'd put in yer dam above, now—say—"

"Neely"—Blodgett's voice held a note of flinty hardness—"I didn't come up here to ask you, but to tell you what to do. As a matter of fact, I have had competent advice upon the location of this dam. As you may, or may not, know, Samuel King has had much experience in handling logs on the streams of northern Minnesota. It was more to secure his services in the matter of locating this dam than in running Number Nine that I hired him. His judgment is that the dam should be located on the north line of section ten, and that judgment was corroborated by the engineers who ran the levels.

"If there are small property holders who will be damaged by the building of the dam they have their recourse in the courts. I shall, of course, be required to put up bonds of a sufficient amount to cover such damage. The amount of such loss to small property holders will be fairly determined by disinterested appraisers, and I stand ready to abide by their decision."

"But the appraisers won't figger in nothin' but merchantable timber. That's all right in some cases, but not this one. This here MacAlister, he's farmin' timber, not skinnin' the land, but farmin' it. He's strip loggin' an' he's got young stuff comin' on that's worth as much as his big stuff, an' besides that he's worked his standing stuff till it's a better stand to-day than it was when he took holt of it. Floodin' his land will kill all that young stuff, an' the appraisers won't take no account of it. It ain't right, Mr. Bloodgett. An' I'm wonderin' if MacAlister's be'n notified of this here committee meetin' so he kin be there an' give his side of it?"

The blood had flooded Blodgett's face and receded, leaving it livid with rage.

"Neely!" he cried. "You forget yourself! Do you presume to intimate to my face that I have any ulterior motive in the placing of this dam? To dictate business ethics to *me?*"

Neely rose to his feet and faced his employer.

"I don't know nothin' about what kind of motors you got or ain't got—an' I don't give a damn! But I ain't fergittin' myself none whatever. I'm rememberin' myself so good that I'm histin' my turkey right here an' now. You kin git some one else to run yer camp, Blodgett.

"But before I go, I'm goin' to tell you jest what I think of you. You're a damned dirty crook—that's what you be! An' the only reason you want that dam to go in is so's you kin steal MacAlister's timber. You ain't smart enough to do it alone so you hired Sam King to tell you how. You know'd Sam was the man to go to when you had a dirty job to do. Others has used him before, an' you birds pass a good thing along among you.

"You've tried to buy MacAlister's timber, an' when you seen you couldn't, you figger on stealin' it. That's what it amounts to—stealin' it! You know an' I know all about appraisers. I've saw quite a bit of appraisin' done, an' I ain't never heard a millionaire loggin' outfit kick yet on their findin's. It's a dirty game, Blodgett, an' the hell of it is that it works. You rich loggers greasin' witnesses, an' legislators, an' appraisers, an' any one else that you have to, an' then sailin' in an' bustin' the little fellers. An' you figger on squarin' it with God by pullin' a long face, an' givin' honest men hell fer cussin', an' forkin' over a big slice of yer boodle to the church.

"That's you, Blodgett—a damned hypocrite! An' if you ain't in hell when I git there, it 'll be 'cause you ain't dead yet."

Neely turned to the desk in the corner of the room, and seating himself, drew out a checkbook.

"I'll jest write out a check fer my time, Blodgett," he said. "An' then I'll be goin'." He glanced over at Leonard, who had been a silent listener to all that had been

said. "Guess I kin make out yourn, too, can't I, son?" he asked. "I guess you don't want to keep on workin' fer no such outfit as this, do you?"

For just an instant Leonard hesitated. Then he cleared his throat harshly.

"No, I ain't quittin'," he answered. "Cap, here, he looks like a square guy to me. Even if he ain't, it ain't none of my business. I'm workin' fer him, not fer this here MacAlister guy, an' when he throws me a chanst to make a little easy money, I'd be a fool to pass it up. You're a fool to pass it up, too. What the hell do you care about any one else, so you git yours? I know what side of my bread the butter's on. I'll jest stick by Mr. Blodgett!"

The lumberman was on his feet, his voice shaking with rage as he pointed a trembling finger at Neely.

"You're discharged—fired! Do you hear? You will leave this camp on the train in the morning."

Neely folded the check, placed it in his pocket, and rising from his chair, proceeded to stow his personal effects in his turkey.

"The hell I will!" he answered. "You an' your hired liars will be on that train, an' I'm a little particular who I ride with. Looks like you've got things pretty much yer own way, Blodgett, an' with the money you've got, an' the witnesses you've bought, you'll prob'ly be able to steal MacAlister's timber. But it ain't goin' to be so easy as you figgered, Blodgett, 'cause, come ten o'clock Tuesday mornin' I'll be right there to the Capitol, an' so will MacAlister, an'—" He paused, and turned his eyes full upon Leonard. "An' so will MacAlister's gal."

A note of bitter scorn tinged his words as Leonard's eyes fell before his gaze. "An' as fer you, greener, as long as there's lumbermen like Blodgett, they'll be jobs fer you. You're smarter than Sam King. They'd ort to pay you well."

And swinging his turkey to his back he opened the door and stepped out into the night.

In the office Blodgett turned abruptly to Leonard. "You are foreman of this camp, in the place of Neely, who was discharged for incompetence. He didn't quit, he was discharged."

"Sure he was. I heard you fire him. But, hell, cap, you better git some one else fer boss. I can't run no camp, not yet. They's a hell of a lot I ain't hep to."

Blodgett reseated himself, and motioned Leonard to a chair. "Listen to me," he began sharply. "I want the testimony of a camp foreman. A logging foreman's word carries weight in matters pertaining to timber operations. You will be the accredited foreman of Number Eight until after the hearing. After that you will return to the camp in your former capacity."

"I make you, all right. But, say, cap, when do I get my mitts on that extry jack?"

"What?"

"Why, you said somethin' about doublin' the wages. When do you figure to come acrost?"

"Ah, you refer to the—er—added compensation for making the arduous journey to St. Paul?"

"Er—yes, that would be it. When do you figure on—er—slippin' me the roll?"

"You shall be paid in cash by an agent, upon conclusion of your testimony."

"That's all right, cap, but s'pose we just go fifty-fifty on the purse."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, how about passin' over half the jack *before* the testimony?"

Blodgett's eyes narrowed. "Do you mean to intimate that you do not trust me to fulfill my obligations?"

"No, no, cap, you get me wrong. I'd trust you—like a policeman. But this here agent guy. S'pose that there roll would stick to him. Where'd I be at?"

A thin smile played at the corners of Blodgett's lips, and without a word he slipped a wallet from an inside pocket and counted out some bills, which Leonard recounted, and thrust into his own pocket.

"And now," continued the lumberman, "is there anything about this matter that you do not understand? Of course King will offer his testimony first, and you will be guided largely by that, but have you the essential facts in mind?"

Leonard nodded. "Yes, I guess I've got the whole thing pretty well doped out."

"Suppose you just go over the salient features."

"Huh?"

"I say, I would like to have you tell me the main points of what you are to testify to, so I may be sure you have the story straight."

"Well, you want this here committee to pass a bill to let you build a dam on the north line of section ten. The reason fer the dam is to raise the water so you can float out your logs. Your timber reaches down to half a mile above the dam. The reason the dam's got to be right there is because there's a ridge of high ground there that will make a wall fer your pool!"

"Very good, Leonard, very good. And now have you ever seen MacAlister's timber?"

"Yes. I was through it huntin' deer."

"What do you think of it?"

"Well, they's a lot of little stuff not hardly more'n what you might say, brush. There's some big stuff, but he told me he's be'n hackin' away at it fer more'n twenty years, so it don't stand to reason there'd be so much left."

"Just so, Leonard, just so. A great share of it is what might be termed cut-over, if that is the case?"

"Most of it has be'n cut over all right."

"Don't forget that point. I shall instruct my attorney to bring out that evidence at the hearing—to ask you specifically about that point."

"Good idea, cap. I'll give 'em an earful."

"Very good. We will have plenty of time to-morrow on the train to go over the finer points with King. Good night."

"Good night," answered Leonard, and as he passed around to the bunk house door, he chuckled.

CHAPTER XXI.

"UP AGAINST IT."

IT was late that night when Tim Neely knocked loudly on the door of the MacAlister cabin.

"Who's there?" called a voice from the inside as a light glowed dully from the window.

"It's me—Tim Neely."

The door opened and MacAlister, clad in his underclothing, and holding a tin lamp, bade him enter.

"Who be ye, an' what dye want, wakin' folks up in th' middle av th' night?" asked the old man as he laid kindling in the stove.

"I got somethin' to tell you, an' there ain't no time to lose neither if you're goin' to save yer timber."

"Save the timber! What d'ye mane—save th' timber?"

"Blodgett's after it, an' we've got to move quick to stop him."

"He aint goin' to haul it off to-night wid this thractor, is he?"

"No. But you've got to get your clothes on an' hitch up yer team an' pull out fer Thunder Head to-night so we can catch the train in the marning for St. Paul."

"St. Paul, is ut? What the divil ye drivin' at? An' who be ye?"

"I was boss of Blodgett's Number Eight camp till a couple of hours ago."

The flames were roaring up the pipe, and the stove began to radiate heat. A sound from a corner of the room attracted Neely's attention and he saw that some one was descending the ladder that led to the loft. A moment later Mary MacAlister stood before him, dressed in checked shirt and heavy wool trousers, her feet incased in gray yarn socks. MacAlister had drawn on his trousers and stood scowling into the face of the big foreman.

"Boss av Blodgett's Number Eight!" he exclaimed angrily. "An we've had th' boss av his Number Nine, an' his thractor man snoopin' around here! Why don't he sind over th' rist av his crew?"

Neely returned the scowl. "Look here, Paddy MacAlister, you quit yer nonsense an' listen to me! My name's Neely—Tim Neely. An' my dad was Mike Neely that's worked side by side with you on many a job. I've heard him tell about you an' him always stickin' toegther in fights an' such, back in the early days—"

"Mike Neely's bye! An' why in hell didn't ye say so? An' what ye doin' workin' f'r a bla'guard like Blodgett. Oi mind the time down to Brainerd—"

"Yes, yes, I've heerd tell about how him an' you cleaned up on the hull camp of

Scotchmen. But listen to me, an' we can talk about that later. Blodgett's goin' to put in a dam on the north line of section ten."

"A dam! A dam, did ye say? On the narth line av siction tin! Why, bye, ut w'd flood me out!"

"Sure it would, an' that's jest what he figgers on doin'. They was some surveyors through here, wasn't they?"

"Sure they was, f'r th' new railroad. They spint a hull day where the narth line av siction tin crosses th' river. They said ut wuz a bridge they was figgerin' on f'r th' railroad to cross on."

"Railroad — hell!" exclaimed Neely. "They ain't no railroad comin' through here. It's Blodgett's dam they was layin' off."

"But King, he says how the company was figgerin' a cut-off line from Thunder Head to the M. and I."

"King was hired by Blodgett to figger out how to steal your timber an' he figgered that floodin' it, an' drown'din' out all yer young stuff, an' gittin' the rest appraised an' buyin' it in, was about the easiest way to git it."

The girl had listened breathlessly as she laced her boots. From behind some cheap curtains that evidently screened a bed came a low, tremulous wail. The girl crossed the room.

"Do be still, mother," she begged. "It will come out all right."

The low wailing continued, and the girl turned to Neely, her face deathly white. "Oh, he can't do that!" she cried. "Surely, he can't do that—after we've worked so hard all these years!"

The big man shook his head lugubriously.

"I don't know, miss. He's got the money. They's be'n things as raw as this pulled in the woods before now. We got one chanst, an' only one. We got to git to St. Paul by Tuesday mornin'. The legislature committee meets at ten o'clock at the Capitol, for a hearin' on this bill. An' we got to be there to fight it. I know a lawyer in Little Falls. We'll wire him to get on the train when we go through. We'll fight 'em—but Blodgett's got his paid witnesses."

"Where's — where's Shirly Leonard?" asked the girl, and Neely noted the tinge of color that flooded her face at the words.

"Leonard, he's—with Blodgett," he answered gruffly. "The dirty pup switched over as soon as Blodgett offered to pay us double our winter's wages fer to testify accordin' to instructions."

"Oi know'd ut! Oi know'd he wuz a domned spy! Av he'd of come back Oi'd av shot um!" cried MacAlister.

Neely interrupted him. "We aint got no time to lose talkin'," he reminded. "We've got to git the team hooked up an' light out fer Thunder Head. It's after twelve o'clock, an' Monday already. An' we got to be there Tuesday mornin', sure."

MacAlister slipped on his mackinaw and lighted the lantern.

"Git us a bite to ate, Mary, an' pack th' valise while we git th' harses out," he called, and as Neely followed the old man out the door, he heard a low, muffled sob that was drowned by the rattle of the iron frying pan that the girl placed on the stove.

"Gurl, ye'll not be goin'!" cried MacAlister, as at the conclusion of the hasty meal Mary drew on her heavy fur coat.

"Yes, I'm going," she answered, and Neely silenced the old man's further objection.

"Let her go, MacAlister," he advised. "She kin talk better than we kin. An' we need all the help we kin git. You can't never tell what'll happen when yer buckin' a man with money."

So MacAlister gave reluctant consent, and on the road to Thunder Head, between spells of shovelling drifts from the trail that wound endlessly through the cut-over, Neely told all he knew of the details of Blodgett's scheme.

In the gray of the morning they drew up before the hotel, where Pat MacCormack welcomed Neely and the girl while MacAlister put up his team. While they waited for breakfast Neely related the plot to MacCormack who listened with ejaculations frequent and profane. At the conclusion of the narrative the landlord shook his head dubiously:

"Mabbe ye'll bate the bloody owld divil, but, Oi'm doubtin' ut. 'Twas count o' him Oi'm peggin' round on this wooden

fut. Niver a cint av damages did he pay me, an' whin Oi lawed um, Oi got bate. He'd too much money f'r the likes av me to bate him, wid his witnesses all swearin' 'twas me own fault th' log was dropped on me fut."

A half hour before train time the Blodgett's logging locomotive drawing the caboose puffed onto a side track, but the occupants did not leave the car until the ticket agent unlocked the door of the depot. Then Blodgett stepped across and puchased the tickets, and returned to the caboose. A few minutes later Neely purchased the tickets for the three and wired the attorney at Little Falls.

When the single, long whistle of the big train answered the flag signal the three started from the hotel. As they reached the door they were joined by MacCormack who, clad in a severe black suit, was carrying a very yellow suitcase.

"Where you goin' to?" asked Neely in surprise.

"Who, me?" answered the landlord. "Oi'm goin' to St. Paul. Oi know somethin' about MacAlister's timber, an' th' time he's spint workin' ut, an' th' results he's got—an' av an-ny word Oi cud say wud do harm to owld Blodgett, Oi'm the boy'll be there wid a mouthful."

As the heavy train ground to a stop at the wooden platform of the station, the two opposing factions came face to face at the vestibuled door of the car. Standing between her father and Neely the girl studied the faces of the men who stepped on board. Blodgett, the collar of his fur coat turned up about his ears, kept his eyes severely to the front, noticing neither by word nor look the four who stood side by side on the platform. Sam King, carrying his employer's leather bag, followed, grinning fatuously as he eyed the MacAlister crowd. Last came Leonard who, with eyes averted, crowded hastily aboard the car.

On board the train Neely led the way to a day coach where, turning a seat, the four sat facing each other. A desultory conversation waxed and waned as the train clicked over the rails during the long hours of the forenoon.

Outside, the gaunt cut-over raced rearward—a desolate waste of scrub oak and maple, with occasional stands of jack pine or hardwood that had not yet been laid down by the saws of the fallers. It was desolate, indeed, to these men who knew the country as it had been only a few years ago, and as if to accentuate the desolation, bare, white squares showed at intervals—squares that were the snow-buried fields of settlers, who, attracted by the low price of the cut-over lands had built their houses, cleared the land of the stumps and brush, and were fighting the long, losing battle with the sand.

At Little Falls Neely stepped from the train and returned presently with a paper bag filled with sandwiches and doughnuts.

"Where's your friend, the lawyer?" asked the girl, as the boss resumed his seat.

"He'll be along pretty soon. I seen him git on the train, but I was afraid I'd miss gittin' this grub if I didn't hurry. Seen old Blodgett, too. He was at the telegraft office when I come through from the restaurant."

Nearly an hour passed before the attorney, a squat man, with an ill-fitting suit of store clothing, and necktie awry, approached down the aisle and halted beside the boss.

"Hello, Mr. Jenkins," Neely greeted. "Folks this here's Mr. Jenkins the lawyer I was tellin' about. This is MacAlister, an' Miss MacAlister, an' Pat MacCormack."

The man in the aisle acknowledged the introduction with a bob of the head that included the group, and addressed Neely.

"What was it you wanted of me!" he asked.

MacCormack arose from his seat. "Set here where ye kin chin between yez. Oi'll be goin' to the smoker f'r a bit av a smoke."

Jenkins slouched into the proffered seat, and Neely proceeded to enlighten him. When the boss had finished Jenkins scratched the side of his neck with a black nailed thumb.

"Jest leave it all to me, Neely," he said, complacently. "We've got 'em beat a mile. They ain't got a leg to stand on. You folks rest easy. You won't even need to appear before the committee. I'll fix

it all right, but it'll cost you somethin'. Can't afford to practice law fer nothin'! Here I am up to my neck in work an' have to leave off right in the middle of it, an' go down to St. Paul. It's expensuv business, Neely, but you come to the right man. It'll cost you two hundred, win or lose, an' another five hundred on top of it if we win. The two hundred is payable now."

"That's all right, Jenkins," answered Neely, reaching for his pocket. "I'll jest pay it, an' MacAlister kin pay me later."

Mary MacAlister laid a hand on the boss's arm.

"Just a minute, Mr. Neely," she said, and turned abruptly upon Jenkins. "What was it Blodgett has been telling you for the last hour?" she asked. "And how much is he paying you to lose this case for us?"

Caught off his guard the man flushed deep red.

"Why—why—Blodgett—him an' I's old friends—that is—we've knew one another a good while—I jest happened to see him settin' there in the sleeper, an' we set an' talked fer a bit—that's all—same as any one would do."

Piling bluff upon bluff, the girl shot another question: "And the check he handed you—what is the amount of it?"

"The check—Oh, that! Why, that was a balance he owed me fer some work I done fer him a while back. I hadn't never sent in no bill to him yet. They all come to me when they want a good lawyer."

For just an instant Neely glared at the other, then, as comprehension dawned on him, he reached forth a huge hand and literally swept the other from his seat and sent him sprawling into the aisle.

"You git to hell out of here before I brain you!" he growled. "Go back an' tell Blodgett about what a hell of a good lawyer *he's* got. We don't need none."

As Jenkins, mumbling threats of prosecution for assault, regained his feet and retreated down the aisle, Neely turned to the girl: "You see, miss, what we're up against. We don't even dare to trust no lawyer. We've got to go it alone. But, what I can't see is how you know'd he'd be'n talkin' to Blodgett, and about Blodgett givin' him that check."

The girl smiled. "In the first place I didn't like his looks, nor the way he talked. Then I remembered that it had been an hour since he got on the train. If the business you had with him was important enough for you to telegraph him to join us on the train, surely he wouldn't have waited an hour before hunting us up. There must have been a reason for his delay, and I figured that Blodgett was the reason. And if I was right, then Blodgett would have to pay him, and when I saw how insistent he was on collecting from us in advance, I though he would do the same with Blodgett."

"Well, you thought right," replied Neely, grimly. "An' if you kin keep on thinkin' that good, I guess we ain't goin' to need no lawyer."

He turned to MacAlister. "I was right about bringin' her along," he said. "Where'd we be'n now if we'd left her to home?"

Darkness had fallen before the train pulled into the station at St. Paul. In the glare of the arc lights Blodgett waited at the steps of the day coach. With him were two strangers. As Neely, carrying the MacAlister baggage, stepped from the car he was confronted by the two men.

"That's your man," said Blodgett crisply. "Arrest him,"

One of the men showed a badge and laid a hand upon Neely's arm. "You're under arrest, young feller," he said. "I'll read the warrant."

"Arrest!" exclaimed Neely. "What for?"

"Forgery, as charged in the warrant."

Blodgett stepped forward, a gleam of triumph in his eye.

"Forgery, Neely, forgery. You signed my name to a check drawn payable to yourself after you had been discharged from my employ. Mr. Leonard, the present foreman of my Number Eight camp, is a witness to the crime."

"Crime—hell! It's a dirty trick to keep me from testifyin' to-morrow!" cried Neely, glaring from Blodgett to the group of his paid witnesses who stood grinning in the background.

"That'll be about all out of you," said

one of the officers, gruffly. "You come along with us."

Neely extended the old-fashioned leather satchel to MacAlister, only to have it seized from his hand. "No you don't!" cried the officer. "Pretty slick, ain't you, tryin' to git rid of evidence right in under our nose."

"It's theirs," answered Neely. "I was only carryin' it fer 'em."

"You can tell that to the judge. But in the meantime, we aint overlookin' no bets."

Before any one could interfere MacAlister hurled himself upon the man, tearing the satchel from his grasp and knocking him to the floor.

"B'gobs, an' thot's me own valise, ye dirthy thayfe!" he cried, angrily.

The next moment the officer was upon his feet a leather black jack raised to strike. Like a flash Neely leaped forward and his big fist landed full in the man's face with a force that sent him sprawling in a limp unconscious heap a dozen feet away.

"Ye would hit an old man with that, would ye?" he cried, and the next thing, he knew a club descended upon his own head, and the world turned black, as two uniformed patrolmen came to the aid of the plain clothes men. In the mêlée, MacAlister had in turn launched a fresh attack upon the officer who had struck Neely down, and it was several minutes before the combined efforts of the two patrolmen could overpower the old Irishman, whose white hair bristled about his head like the quills of a disturbed porcupine.

Several minutes later, in answer to a riot call, other policemen appeared and dragged the still fighting MacAlister up the stairs to the waiting patrol wagon and carried the inert forms of Neely and the plain clothes man after him.

Leaning against an iron pillar of the train shed, the girl sobbed aloud, entirely unmindful of the little group of curious onlookers who had not followed the crowd to the wagon.

Picking up his own suitcase Pat MacCormack touched the girl gently upon the shoulder: "Come on, Mary, gurl," he said. "Ut looks like we're up against ut all right. But they's still two av us lift to fight Blodgett—an' moind ye, gurl—we're Oirish."

CHAPTER XXII.

KING TRIES TO DEAL.

AFTER the patrol wagon had moved away, and the crowd dispersed, Blodgett turned to the two men who stood beside him upon the sidewalk.

"I want you to report at my office—you know where it is, King—at half past eight o'clock to-morrow morning for a conference with my attorneys. You will then receive your final instructions."

"We'll be there," answered King. "An' if you should happen to want us fer anything between then an' now, we'll be to Wilson's Hotel. We might go to a show or somethin' to-night, but you leave word there an' we'll git it."

After registering in the office of the old wooden hotel that had served two generations of lumberjacks and rivermen, King led the way to the barroom.

"Give me a shot of red liquor," he ordered. "Old Blodgett's buyin' a drink. What's yourn?"

Leonard shook his head: "I ain't drinkin'," he answered. "Go ahead."

"Take a seegar, then," urged the other.

Again Leonard declined. "Nothin' fer me, thanks. I don't smoke."

King eyed the greener half contemptuously: "Don't drink, an' don't smoke!" he grinned. "You must live a hell of a miserable life."

There was a trace of a sneer in the words that Leonard was quick to detect. He knew that King detested him and that he had despised him from the day he had cravenly submitted to the insults of the loading crew on Number Nine's skidway—knew also that the man's hatred had increased when his advice had enabled Sim Coughlan to defeat Andy Moore in the bunk house, and again when he had so conspicuously aided in saving the burning car of gasoline after King, himself, had sought safety in the timber.

But all outward and visible signs of this

hatred had disappeared the moment King had found that Leonard had been selected by Blodgett to corroborate his testimony before the committee. All the way to Thunder Head, and later on the transcontinental flyer, King had assiduously devoted himself to being agreeable to the despised greener. Time and time again Leonard had grinned to himself at the awkward overtures of Number Nine's foreman, and the words of exaggerated praise with which King had detailed to Blodgett his feat of keeping the log road open during the blizzard.

Leonard knew that this sudden show of friendliness was but a clumsy mask of King's real feeling toward him—a mask of expediency. For if, as Neely had said, King had been hired to steal MacAlister's timber, upon the success of the undertaking depended King's remuneration.

Therefore, King exerted himself to establish friendly relations with his ally, the new foreman of Number Eight, and it was despite this exertion that the sneer had crept into his voice. He was quick, however, to cover the lapse, hoping Leonard had not noticed:

"Well, here's how! An' I was just kiddin' Leonard. Facts is, it ain't no one's business but his own if a man don't favor smokin' an' drinkin'. Some does, an' some don't—an' there y'are. Come on, we'll go in to supper, an' then we'll hunt us up a show somewheres. Use' to be a pretty good theayter over near the end of the Wabasha Street bridge, plenty of gals an' the like of that. You go to shows, don't you, Leonard?"

"Oh, sure, I go to shows, all right," laughed the greener. "Come on. Let's eat."

As they were leaving the dining room, Mary MacAlister and MacCormack entered. Leonard swiftly averted his eyes, and his blood boiled as he noted the insolent stare with which King's appraising glance swept the trim figure of the girl in the white shirtwaist and blue serge skirt. Involuntarily his fists clenched, as without a word, he followed the others to the office.

An hour later, Leonard sat at a small table, in a long room filled with similar tables, and drank vichy while King drank beer. Upon a stage at one end of the room a rather suggestive act was in progress between a lightly clad and heavily painted amazon and a caricature of a Jew comedian. Other painted women moved freely about among the tables selling bottled beer and drinking with the patrons. And all to the accompaniment of a brass-voiced piano incessantly and vociferously manipulated by a sallow-faced youth in a stained and ill-fitting dress suit.

Straying from the stage, King's glance fastened upon Leonard who had straightened in his chair, and was staring wide-eyed into the face of the girl who had paused at the next table to lean caressingly upon the shoulder of a cowpuncher who, with three or four companions, was taking in the town. The man's arm was about the girl's waist and he was repeating with maudlin insistence that he had brought a train load of beef from Chinook, Montana, to the stockyards at South St. Paul.

Slopping beer from a bottle into a glass, he held it to the girl's lips, and as she raised her head to drink, the boss of Numbe Nine saw her eyes meet Leonard's fascinated gaze. Seconds passed as the two stared into each other's eyes. Then the girl's arm slipped from the cowboy's shoulder, and the hand that held the untasted beer faltered so that when she returned the glass half its contents spilled.

In two steps the girl reached Leonard's side. "You!" she cried. "Mike Duffy! You—here!"

"Yes, Lottie, I'm here," answered Leonard. "But how about you? What's the matter with the big burg? What you doin' here? I thought you'd throw'd in with Bull Larrigan."

The drop curtain terminated the cheap skit on the stage, and the piano swung into the strains of a sentimental ballad. The cowboys rose from the adjoining table and made their way noisily toward the door, and the girl drew one of the vacated chairs to Leonard's side and settled her elbows on the table.

"Buy a drink, Mike, and I'll tell you. They won't stand for us girls setting around unless we're selling drinks."

Leonard ordered beer. King glanced quizzically at the two and feigned absorbed attention to the stage where the curtain had risen upon a buxom female who, in high-pitched, nasal tones, rendered the sentimental ballad. A waiter set a tray of bottled beer upon the table and deftly removed the caps. Leonard paid as the girl poured herself a drink.

"Bull couldn't stand prosperity. We lived high while his roll lasted, but it didn't last long. Between the booze an' the snow it got him, an' he's back again, holed up somewheres on Rivington Street like he was when Lefty dug him out to help train you—only worse. Bull won't never come back—he's through."

"But you—you didn't marry him. You wasn't dependin' on him fer a livin'."

The girl's eyes narrowed, and a gleam of hate flashed from between the heavily blued lids.

"They tried to frame me, damn 'em! They did frame me! But I was too wise for 'em. I sent my mouthpiece straight to the district attorney, an' when the smoke cleared away, Lefty Klingermann, an' Stiletto John Serbelloni, and the Sicily Ape goes up the river to wait till January 17, that's—why that's to-day!"

A smile of savage cruelty curled the too red lips. "If the buzzer worked all right there's three new faces in hell to-night, and I'm glad of it! They'd of framed me for a long stretch, but I fooled 'em."

Leonard stared into the cruel eyes, aghast.

"Lefty Klingermann, an' them Dago gunmen—the buzzer! Say, kid," he cried, suddenly. "It wasn't fer bumpin' me off, was it? I seen in the paper—"

"No. For bumpin' off Kid Morowitz. They'd of framed you for that—if they'd of found you. The Kid double-crossed Lefty, an' Bull tipped it off to Lefty that the Kid was in his room, an' Lefty's gunmen got him. They had you framed for the fall guy. Believe me, you're lucky."

A weight seemed suddenly lifted from Leonard's shoulders. He was no longer a hunted man! In the woods he had felt reasonably secure, but this trip to St. Paul had been attended by risk—not great, probably, but with the police of New York on the lookout for him, a risk, nevertheless.

"Then they don't want me," he breathed. "I seen that in the papers, too—how they was huntin' Mike Duffy—"

"Sure, that was part of Lefty's game, to swing the cops onto your trail, an' it was all framed. If they'd of got you, it would have been you shovin' against the straps this morning, instead of them."

"But, what you doin' here?"

"Oh, that was part of the deal. I was to get out of New York and never show up there again. They pay my fare to Chicago, and slip me a century to start right on, along with a lot of good advice. I hit the Big Windy and the first job I pulls I'm pinched."

She scowled savagely. "Start right—hell! What chance has a girl got to start over when the Chicago bulls is wised up before ever I hit their burg? They had my number all right, all right. And they shook me down for all I had except the car fare to get out of town. And here I am. I ain't had the nerve to try the stores yet—I don't dare to go to work without a fall roll. They've probably passed me along, and I don't want to do time."

Leonard passed his hand over his eyes. A great wave of revulsion had surged up within him as the girl shamelessly recited the details of her sordid story. Commonplace details they were—a little fragment of life—of a life he had known—had lived. A year ago there would have been nothing revolting in the recital. But, now—the air of the room seemed suddenly stifling.

The odor of stale beer reached his nostrils from the slops on the tray. His eyes closed. Above him he seemed to see the dark canopy of green that was the tops of pines. All about him giant boles swayed gently in the wind. A creek gurgled noisily among the ice-capped stones. He could hear the creak of runners on the snow of the log road, and the roar of his tractor exhaust. From somewhere came the whine of a saw, the hollow ring of ax blows. The far-off cry of "timber," and the long crash of a falling tree. Chains rattled. He stood looking across a narrow river, at the girl who had paused, water pail in hand, to

look back at him. The vivid splash of color against the snow—the face of Mary MacAlister—he opened his eyes with a jerk, and stared straight into the black eyes of Lotta Rivoli, who was regarding him curiously.

"I always did love you, Mike. You know that. It'll be all right, now. I'll marry you, and the two of us, we can put somethin' across."

She had risin from her chair and stood close beside him, so close that her soft breast brushed his shoulder. In his nostrils the scent of strong perfume mingled with that of stale beer. And this was the woman who had once fascinated him! A sudden disgust that was almost akin to nausea surged up within him, and he leaped to his feet, overturning his chair, and brushing at the place where her hand had rested upon his sleeve.

"You! Love! Marry me!" he muttered thickly, and with a short, harsh laugh, turned on his heel and threaded his way swiftly among the tables to the door.

The look of intense surprise upon the face of the girl gave place almost instantly to a blazing glance of hate. Her hand groped at her throat, and she seemed about to follow the man when Sam King stepped around the table to her side.

"Let him go, miss," he said. "I kin tell you where you'll find him if you want him."

The black eyes flashed to his, and the red lips framed the words: "Who are you? And what do you know about him?"

"Well," answered King guardedly, "I know quite a bit about him. He don't go by the name of Mike Duffy around here. Seems like you know'd somethin', yerself. I thought mebbe we might git together an' kind of dope out somethin'!"

Without a word she motioned him to the chair vacated by Leonard and seating herself close beside him, touched a button. When the waiter appeared she ordered whiskey, which she swallowed at a gulp.

"And, now," she said, turning to King, "come across. What's it worth to you to know what you want?"

King grinned craftily. "Quite yer kiddin'," he answered. "What I want to know is worth jest as much as what you want to know, an' not a damn cent more. I'll tell you this, though. He's got a good job, an' if you've got anything on him you kin make *him* come acrost—but not me."

"What is it you want to know?"

"Well, fer instance this here Mike Duffy business. I'd kind of like to git a line on what he's be'n doing before he showed up around here."

At the end of an hour, during which King bought several drinks, the girl had given him a pretty good account of Leonard's career from the moment of his entry into the prize ring. The net result was somewhat of a disappointment to the camp boss, as the alias had immediately suggested to his mind a criminal career that would have given him a hold upon the greener.

King left the beer hall, and as he threaded the streets he dismissed all thought of the greener from his mind. There remained one card he had not played. A scheme had been fomenting in his brain from the moment he had looked down into the violet eyes of Mary MacAlister from the top of the snowdrift upon the occasion of his first visit to her father's timber. It was, to the mind of King, a wonderfully simple scheme, and one that, should it work, would give him, and not Blodgett, control of MacAlister's timber.

Baldly stated, the scheme consisted merely in marrying MacAlister's daughter. MacAlister was getting old, he argued, and while he remained alive there ought to be better than wages for all concerned in working the tract as it was being worked. Then when MacAlister died—at this point a gleam of greed would flash from King's eyes as he envisioned the sweeping clean-up of every foot of merchantable timber on the tract. The first winter following the death of MacAlister would see the end of timber farming on the MacAlister holdings. The girl would object, of course. The man was wont to grin maliciously at this point in the story. Hadn't he handled camps of men for years? Guess he could handle one woman!

Over and over again he had planned each step of the proceeding. He had already succeeded in emplanting in MacAlister's

mind a distrust of the greener, whom he had looked upon as a possible rival. He had put off from day to day speaking to the girl, or to MacAlister, whose good graces he had been cultivating by presents, at intervals, of whisky.

There was plenty of time. Blodgett wouldn't start anything till spring. In fact he had advised Blodgett to "get next" to the legislative committee, reasoning that it would be well toward adjournment time before the lumberman would feel sure of his men. If the scheme worked—again King would grin, as he pictured Blodgett's rage when his principal witness should turn against him and expose the plot for flooding MacAlister's timber. In the game of dog eat dog, it is well to be the outside dog. The sum which Blodgett had agreed to pay him the day he got control of MacAlister's timber, was in no wise commensurate to the value of the timber itself. He could afford to wait till MacAlister died. It might not be long. Accidents happen in the woods, a loosened chain, a suddenly released binding pole, a rollway broken out at the wrong time. Lots of things could happen to shorten the time MacAlister's son-in-law must wait to administer the property according to his own logging plan.

Thus matters stood when Blodgett unexpectedly appeared with the information that they must appear immediately before the committee.

It was not yet eleven o'clock when King entered the deserted office of the cheap hotel. Seating himself in a chair he lighted his pipe, tilted back against the wall, and tried to formulate some plan for meeting the girl before appearing at Blodgett's office in the morning. At least he need have no fear of the greener as a possible rival. He had noted with satisfaction the look of scorn with which the girl had regarded him at Thunder Head, and again as she had entered the dining room. But he must see her. Maybe it was better, after all, that Blodgett had forced a show-down. For now the girl must realize the absolute necessity for acting immediately to save the timber. She was wise enough to know that King would be Blodgett's principal witness, and that should he swing over to the MacAliste camp, Blodgett's cause was irretrievably lost.

King stood up, and walking to the register, noted the number of the girl's room. He noted, also, that MacCormack's adjoined it. He hesitated. What would she do if he should knock quietly upon her door and ask for an interview with her? It was possible that she would grant it if she could be made to realize it was the last resort to save the timber, but it was more probable that she would take fright, awaken MacCormack, and precipitate a nasty row. Several minutes King stood staring at the register trying to make up his mind to act.

"Damn it," he muttered, "I got to do somethin', an' that's the only way I kin figger it."

A sound from the wooden staircase attracted his attention, and he turned to see Mary MacAlister, porcelain water pitcher in hand, coming down the stairs. The girl recognized him, and for just an instant she paused uncertainly. Then, without a sign of recognition, she negotiated the remaining steps, and crossing the room, pressed the faucet of the iron water cooler, and filled her pitcher.

As she turned toward the stairs King accosted her.

"Good evenin', miss. You're the very one I be'n wantin' to see."

The girl halted and flashed him a look of withering scorn. "I should think," she answered, "that I should be the very one you would not want to see," and continued her way toward the stairs.

"Hold on, miss. It's fer yer own good I want to talk to you. It's yer only chanst to save the old man's timber."

At the foot of the stairs the girl turned and faced him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean if you don't talk to me Blodgett will flood yer timber an' drown'd all the young stuff an' git the rest at the appraiser's price—an' you know what that means—him with the money he's got."

"Yes," answered the girl wearily, "I know what that means."

"Well, then, you listen to me. I'm the main one he's dependin' on fer to prove this here dam has got to be put in. I kin

queer his game to the committee in about a minute, an' show him up, to boot. I kin tell things that when they hear 'em, Blodgett'll be lucky to keep out of Stillwater."

"What do you mean?" cried the girl, eagerly. "That you would do that?"

"I might," grinned the man. "I told you wunst before, if you remember, that I liked to do folks good turns, now an' then —special' pretty gals."

King advanced a step toward her, and the girl shrank away from him. "Oh, you needn't be skeert of me. I wouldn't hurt you none. Of course, they'd have to be some consideration, as they say in the contracts, fer me throwin' old Blodgett down. He's payin' me pretty well fer my work. You see I ain't afraid to speak out when they's jest the two of us. One person's word's as good as another's."

"What's your price?" asked the girl dully. "Remember, we're poor. We can't pay much. We can't expect to bid against Blodgett."

"You kin pay what I want, all right, 'cause *you're* what I want."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean of you'll marry me, I'll have old Blodgett huntin' his hole in about two minutes after that hearin' starts to-morrow mornin'," Hot blood mounted to the girl's face, and she stared at the man in horror. Then, in a panic, her eyes sought the stairs.

"Wait a minute," commanded King. "I ain't expectin' you to love me nor nuthin' like that—not yet anyways. You'll find I ain't so bad if you use me right. Facts is, I'm tired of batchin' it, an' want to settle down. The old man an' I could work the timber, an' keep all the money in the fambly. I ain't hard to git along with wunst you come to know me. What I'm offerin' you is the chanst to make a deal to save yer timber. You kin take it, or leave it. But, if you don't take it, you'll take what a bunch of greased appraisers give you, an' Blodgett'll take the timber."

For just an instant the girl stood glaring into his eyes. "You beast!" she cried, "I wouldn't marry you if I knew every stick of timber we own would be stolen from us to-morrow! I despise you! I loathe you! I'd kill myself before I'd marry you!"

Her voice choked up, and she started rapidly up the stairs.

The frown that had greeted her first words turned to a leering grin upon King's face.

"If that's the way you feel about it, I guess we can't deal," he called after her, and turning away, crossed the floor and took his room key from its hook on the numbered board.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

LOOK UP

LOOK into the Empyrean's lofty height,
Then blame your soul and do not blame your sight
If you see nothing there but empty space,
And blame your lack of a supernal grace.

Look up and learn there is a God above;
Look up and feel the sweetness of His love.
When man looks down, alas, he sadly grieves—
His soul is sore;
He sees but what his little mind conceives—
And nothing more.

James S. Ryan.

The Valley of Sounds

By CARL HAVERLIN

WHEN the Pittfield expedition started on its slow trip up the Congo to the Mobangi, Jan Nordvek, botanist, and Genaro Aquilar, taxidermist, were friends. When the main body left them at the base camp, one hundred miles north and west of the Mobangi, they were still friends.

Just when and how the trouble occurred would be hard to say, although any one of the expedition would swear it floated from the Valley of Sounds on the damnable music that none of us will ever forget.

On the last two nights of the upmarch our bearers had pricked their ears at a strange rumble and dropped hints that many devil-devils were roaring in anticipation of our coming. We attributed the sounds to volcanic origin or some undiscovered falls. But we found that the blacks were right, as they usually are. By some innate sense they *know*.

We arrived at the Valley of Sounds about midday and decided to make camp, rest for a few days, repack some of our specimens and cache those that might be injured by such travel as we knew lay before us.

After lunch, Holcomb and Whistler said they would take a look-see and started down one of the little trails that twisted into the jungle. They turned and waved before they entered the dank growth. That was the last we saw of them until the next morning. I still shudder when I think of their return.

At sundown, Keith, who was chief of the outfit, wanted to send a search party after the two boys, but before it could be organized such hellish sounds came pouring out of the valley that I could only think of a

phrase I had read—Milton's, I think it was —about " the chaos of old night."

After a time the sounds seemed to divide into two groups, one calling, one answering. A fighting rhythm became faster and faster in the music. I say music for want of another term that lurks in the abyss of my memory; a word that I have spoken perhaps in another tongue. When I call it hellish I mean the insinuating evil of it. By the rising of the moon my mind had run an entire gamut of emotions and they were all evil: murder, rage, lust; one by one they swept over me.

It was with difficulty that Keith restrained the crazed search party from pouring into the darkness after the two absent ones. He instinctively knew it would be hopeless.

The blacks were maddened by the sounds. A great muscular one leaped to his feet and bellowed his challenge. The others echoed it. They were like berserk vikings peering through the darkness at an unknown shore, the blood lust in their eyes. They swayed with the music and before long were dancing, stamping on the packed earth until it boomed.

Keith tried to quiet them, but he might as well have tried to stop the rush of frightened elephants. Faster came the music, always with that dull rumbling undertone we had heard two marches away in those strange night stillnesses when, for some unknown reason, all the jungle folk are silent, for moments at a time, and sounds carry incredible distances.

After we were all deafened by the pull of that infernal music, the wildness of it died away and in its place came the most weird minor melody I have ever heard. It seemed to be played on harps and oboes—at least, it had those qualities; the haunting languor and the eerie mystery of the strings and reeds.

It was queer to see us react. We had all been under the spell of those malignant sounds so long that it was with difficulty that we brought our minds back from the bloody witches' Sabbath where they reveled. Then one by one we were overcome again—blacks and whites. I felt myself being subordinated to something primal, and my white man's pride rebelled, but not for long.

The new sounds called alluringly; held soft white arms to us; painted red, laughing lips on the jungle wall; tossed filmy veils from the hanging lianas, under which fleeted white bodies, and caressed us so tenderly that with the enervation of opium users we closed our eyes and dreamed the dreams the music bade us see. Music that was nothing but a little strain repeated over and over again with infinite modulations; but it compelled us, called us, commanded us to come to it.

Our first hint of danger was when the big black who had first answered the music rose and walked into the jungle. As he entered the music swelled in poignant sweetness. Another bearer followed, screaming as he ran forward with that frenzied sense of immolation seen in savages the world over when they run amuck. Then the twelve white men of the party, dreams broken, took up their " white man's burden " and fell upon the milling negroes with brutal ferocity.

Before the fight was decided the music stopped, and with it we all dropped our hands and listened. The stillness was absolute. Only our hoarse breathing could be heard. We were devilishly frightened, and sat up the remainder of the night, hardly speaking to one another. The blacks crouched close to us for comfort.

With the morning we gathered for consultation. Some were for cutting directly through the valley, but the cooler heads prevailed, as they knew the danger of spending another night in the midst of that music. It was finally decided to cache the greater part of our stuff, draw lots to decide who of us would stay with it, and take a forced march through the swamp lands that lay to the west.

At the mention of drawing lots, Jan Nordvek sprang to his feet and turned to the mouth of the valley, his face filled with a wildness that at first I took to be fear. Then uncanny lights flickered and burned far back in his eyes and his arms stretched out in appeal as though to call to himself the ghost terror of the jungle night that still walked by day.

Then I remembered, with a peculiar

thrill, that Jan was superstitious, not in the ordinary sense of the term, not fearful, but convinced of the close bond between things seen and unseen, and was ever delving into what he called the "night side of nature." He had proved this in a thousand ways. In far corners of the earth I had seen him standing with uplifted face and arms, hemp-colored hair tossing in the keen morning wind, as he waited to greet the glory of the dawn; watched him in ancient temples making fantastic sand pictures on the moon washed stones; heard him tell somber witch tales in a crooning voice as he looked into the coals of a fading fire.

In the same hushed tones I heard him say that he would stay—and watch. Then the wiry Aquilar spoke up:

"If Jan stays so will I." Then looking around at our questioning faces he smiled apologetically. "We are friends, you see."

After a time they had their way. We had turned to discussing what to take and what to leave when an outcry from the bearers brought us out of Keith's tent on the run.

Holcomb and Whistler had come back.

We didn't know what to expect at first, for all we saw was Whistler with something red and dripping on his back. We ran to meet him, but stopped within twenty feet, sickened and revolted. The less said about what we saw the better for my peace of mind.

Whistler was carrying a flayed and bleeding corpse upon which not an inch of skin was left to show whether it had been white or black. He staggered to the camp and stood with sagging knees, and I am shamed to say that not one of us offered to help him. It was horrible!

"They wouldn't bury him!" said Whistler suddenly and collapsed. Then we started to curse as we carried Whistler to a cot and wrapped Holcomb in a blanket. Some of us were crying before we knew it. Tears of rage and pity, our minds filled with burning pictures of the terror of the Valley and thoughts of Whistler through the night alone. And I know I asked myself if I would have been equal to it.

After Whistler came to he told his story in fragments.

"Little people in there—devils—caught us at sundown—thousands of them. They laugh and laugh. Not intelligent—but not negroids—we nearly got away—women caught Holcomb. Did I bring him in? I acted mad—they were afraid of me—music—thousands of them playing around a wooden idol—looked like a Billiken." He laughed horribly and then cried in great rending sobs. After a time we prodded him with a question and he wandered on.

"Poor Holcomb—they got him—women did horrible things to him—and squeezed the juice all over him—juice of flowers I never saw—by the river. I didn't leave him, did I? They threw him in the river—I got him—they wouldn't bury him—all night Holcomb and I were lost—he was dead—they followed us, laughing—laughing."

He rambled deliriously until the chief gave him an opiate, double strength, that put him to sleep.

It was a terrible thing for the party to do—walk away from that place of devils and leave two of our *compadres*—but science must fatten and man must feed on strange foods and in strange places. To our ears the jungle and the jungle folk cried: "You shall not pass," but we had to, and we did. With Nordvek and Aquilar we left Whistler, who could not travel, and two blacks to take him back to a trading post on the Congo when he could.

Our depleted party entered the swamp lands about noon and soon the camp and the clearing were lost in the green moistness that rose all around like a vapor.

What took place at camp I learned in part from Whistler when I met him years later in Saigon. The rest I burrowed out for myself, built something from almost nothing as is my wont. I reconstruct prehistoric monsters from a jaw bone or so for a living and read detective stories while working.

The little party of five became three, for the two blacks deserted late that afternoon, taking two guns, a camera and some surgical instruments. Neither goods nor blacks were ever heard of again. Then, with the passing of two nights of misery Whistler packed up and back-tracked, stumbling with weakness, vowing he could hear Holcomb scream-

ing in every note of the music that maddened the little party.

How he ever made the back trip, drunk with jungle fever, is more than he remembers. His last recollection before the Portuguese on the Congo forced whisky down his throat was of Nordvek and Aquilar quarreling murderously.

What follows is my own version of what happened in that place. There was too much "sign" about the camp for me to fail to reconstruct the story, and this is what I say happened to Nordvek and Aquilar.

Each night the maddening music frayed their nerves; flayed them with terror by darkness. By day the intense heat made sleep almost impossible. The steaming jungle pressed in on them. The stench of decaying vegetable matter sickened them. They occupied themselves for a week or two rearranging their cases and tabulating the specimens. Then with the time and humidity hanging heavily over them, they cast about for something to do.

Aquilar sulked, blaming their difficulties on Nordvek for volunteering. He in turn took to carving, at which he was very skillful. He soon had finished a set of checkers and a board, beautifully carved of teakwood. It was in the nature of a peace offering, for Aquilar had become very sullen and snapped at every word that Jan said, pressed every point to the cursing stage, and threatened to fight on the slightest provocation. The calm Swede kept things from the breaking point, and one night after supper presented the checkers with a broad grin of friendliness.

Aquilar was diverted by the game and played at it avidly until it occurred to him that he was losing continually, and he remembered the broad grin with which Jan had presented his gift. Inwardly raging, he blundered for a time and then lost another game. With an effort he steadied himself and set about to win a game, but Jan soon cleared his men from the board.

With Jan's chuckle of enjoyment Aquilar rose in a rage, crashed his fist down on the board, splintering it, and threw the carefully carved men out into the darkness. Just then they both realized that the war music was playing and that they were rising with the angry sounds to murderous heights. Jan calmed his ruffled feelings, but Aquilar sprang at him in a burst of horrid drumming from the jungle, lips writhing and teeth bared like a beast.

The leap carried Jan backward off his chair, but he rose with Aquilar held helpless in his tremendously muscled arms; held him squirming until the drumming war music stopped and the haunting melody that followed took all the fight out of them.

In the days that followed the rage, hate and rancor of the one, and the hurt surprise and childish vanity of the other, welded and merged into a deadly feeling that sank deep into their minds. With fear Aquilar would await the night, fearful that the music would madden the vibrant Jan, trembling in anticipation of the time when he would be torn with remorseless fingers that would eat into his throat at the command of the relentless throbbing from the valley.

The Scandinavian seemed a great tuning fork that trembled in answer to the song of the Valley of Sounds. He, Nordvek, seemed half fearful, too, of the inhuman feelings that threatened to drown him. He would stand fascinated in the open tent door, muttering and flexing his arms until he would rush to a bit of work to keep from flinging himself headlong into the mysterious valley. Then the two would sit watching and waiting for the first move that would kindle their smoldering hatred into flame. They knew it would not be long in coming, for a mental sore festers quickly in the jungle.

One night as Jan sat nervously carving totemlike figures on a staff Aquilar spoke. He started by asking Jan what he considered to be the most powerful. Was it luck or was it intelligence, knowledge, science? He was plainly angling for something that would start a killing quarrel. Nordvek did not answer at once, but sat staring through the gloom. Then he muttered that intuition, which was luck, was mightier than any knowledge, and cited instances to prove it, bringing up old folklore and ghostly tales. As a last thrust he explained his victories in the checker game.

"I let my mind lie sleeping. It sleeps and a rhythm fills me—like that music. I am a checker then, I am at one with all things. If I hunt I am an animal—I know what he knows—feel what he feels. In all things I leave my mind and pierce deep into the heart of nature. If that is what you mean by luck, then luck is my god."

More talk of this kind brought them both into shadowy ways where the words they spoke welled from hidden sources and cloaked hidden meanings. Without thought they spoke, and though they did not know it, their voices attuned themselves to the sounds from the valley, their words held the smell of ancient questions unanswered to this day, questions that were asked when man first wondered.

Aquilar finally spat out his derision of Jan's petty superstitions and pointed in scorn to a rabbit's foot tipped with gold, that hung to his watch chain. The Scandinavian glowered at this insult and rose to his feet, hands working strangely toward the face that mocked his gods.

It would have been a fight to the death, for both men were stripped to the raw, irritated by the constant burning of the sun by day and the monotonous horror of the night—had not the music stopped dead as they crouched ready for the leap, Aquilar with a keen edged knife held close to him, Jan with his great fists opening and shutting. Like pricked balloons they subsided and watched each other shamefacedly. Then they went to sleep on opposite sides of the tent.

Some time during the next day Jan discovered the absence of his rabbit's foot and spent an hour grumbling and searching, until Aquilar joined in the hunt for want of something better to do. All day long Jan pressed his quest of the missing charm and became sullen and quiet as the night came on.

Over their supper of canned beef, biscuits and tea, followed by a bitter dessert of quinine, Nordvek solemnly prophesied disaster for them both because of his loss.

Aquilar kept silent, rubbing his lips with a nervous hand, watching his friend with a queer shifting look. The darkness fell swiftly and with it the rotting vegetation seemed to puff up tenuous mists. They strained their ears, and in the stillness the snapping of the cooling specimen cases sounded like shots, startling for them, for they had not noticed the sound before this night.

Straining and breathless they listened again—and both realized that the jungle was not roaring. The silence was awful and harder to bear than the evil sounds of the previous nights.

Aquilar twisted to this feet and slunk across the tent to open the flap. A full moon lit the clearing with uncanny brightness. He stared at the impenetrable mass of the jungle for a long breathless period, then came to Nordvek, mincing like a cat, and spoke, his voice full of the night.

"You claim you are one with all things. You scorn knowledge—science—intelligence? Very well! Let us go into the jungle this night and prove our talk. You who are lucky at games—I who am not so lucky. We will go separately to the river and come back—perhaps—with the flowers of which Whistler spoke. So you hesitate? You fear to test your luck? Checker games! Are they all that you dare to play? How about a game with death? Come, a tournament—your luck against the knowledge you know I possess of jungle-craft and the ways and dangers of these devils from hell."

It was characteristic of Nordvek that he rose without speaking and with his carved staff in hand left the tent first.

Aquilar stared in amazement, breathed sibilant curses and snatched his knife from its sheath. He had not planned that Jan should escape so easily. If this big braggart should be flayed, it was he and he only who would strip his skin from him. He ran after the disappearing form of the man who had been his friend, but stopped at the sound of a song from Nordvek's lips, a song as ancient as the night itself.

To Aquilar it sounded like the frantic drumming of the little people as it boomed from the jungle. Then he knew that he could not follow—that his courage oozed from him with each note of the fading song—and he cursed, for he knew that Jan was one with the night, as he had said.

Like a cornered rat he ran from the jungle to the tent and back to the jungle, emitting little sounds of impotent fury. His words had been insane, he told himself, he had been moonstruck. He was sorry one instant that Jan was in danger, and the next he was foaming obscene blasphemies at him, for if he should return he would spit on a coward.

At last he threw himself upon his couch and wept with disappointment—and the sound of his crying was so loud that he did not hear the patter of little feet—the chatter of little men—until they peered through his tent door. Then he jumped for his guns, fired through the opening, and ran to look out. There was no one in sight, no sound of movement.

He backed into the tent and stood holding his breath—then turned and fired through the canvas at the back. There was silence and then the chattering commenced again. It sounded like the murmur of wind through threes—like the slithering of sand in the desert—or the rustle of leaves under a python's belly.

Hardly able to walk, he moved to the tent door holding his revolver far out in front of him. He heard something to the right and half turning put his left arm out to push the flap aside so that he might leap into the open facing his enemies.

As he jumped past the canvas something whistled and he felt a shock in his left arm —stared stupidly at the handless wrist that he dangled. Then he was inundated beneath a crowd of things that smelled hairy and very much like a fox's den. The last thought he had was that foxes were gnawing at him all over his naked body with their sharp teeth.

When Jan Nordvek returned in the morning he found a ruined camp and what was left of Genaro Aquilar. Him he buried swathed in a great bundle of the strange sweet flowers from the jungle river—and over his grave he put a plank beautifully carved:

Here lies my friend
GENARO AQUILAR
May luck be with him

This he did before he disappeared from the ken of white men. All around the plank he planted the strange flowers that grew now in two places—the river of the strange little folk, and the grave of Jan Nordvek's friend. They twine about the head of a staff upon which is carved totemlike figures that are like—very like—those on an amulet dropped by one of the little men who killed Aquilar. I found it months later near the hand that was cut from him, and strange to say in that hand of Aquilar's was gripped the rabbit's foot of Jan Nordvek.

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LATE SUMMER

WESTWARD wends the day
With backward wistful gaze,
Reluctant now to go
Since summer stays.

Robes of gossamer
Spread o'er plain and wood—
To us but shadows gray
Where bright day stood.

Closely in her steps
Follows eager night
Bearing a lifted globe
Of silver light.

Lilian Nicholson.

Mystery of Voodoo Manor

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

Author of "Ninety-Eight Degree Murder," "Exploits of Beau Quicksilver," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN BY THE HYDRANGEA BUSH.

THE crowd ceased its desultory conversation. Those who had wandered away to the outskirts of the human vortex, centered in rapidly and avidly for the auctioning. Some, entirely forgetful of any hastily assumed veneer of forbearance and courtesy, brushed forward rudely, elbowing and pushing a way toward the front.

Others stood with feet apart, stolidly planted against the onrush of more anxious and less considerate would-be bidders or morbidity seekers. Still others, obviously the village folk and some of the more timorous of the city visitors, kept well on the edge of the surging mass, as if fearful that the fatal knife on sale might still in some unaccountable manner exert baleful and unlucky influence.

Yet the man with the beard, carefully shadowed by the plainclothes man Nancy had previously instructed, neither pushed nor jostled. Nor did he furtively seek the rim of the crowd as if poised for attempted flight at the first hint of the untoward. He stood straight and tall where he had been beside the hydrangea bush.

There was no rigidity in his pose, but a lithe and easy grace, as though the figure had neither anything to fear nor any biting curiosity as to the outcome of the events hastily shaping themselves before his scrutinizing eyes. One hand rested easily in a coat pocket, while the long, slender fingers of the other toyed with the green of the hydrangea bush.

It was a figure which stood dignified and almost alone. Its pose, immobile and unhurried, gave out some secret hint of austerity and calm repose, as though insolently impervious to the petty greed and curiosity of mere men about him.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 21.

I frowned at the figure. Its act and presence were so incomprehensible. Yet undoubtedly the bearded man came in total ignorance of Solomon Isaacs's recent information. Why should he suspect that the pawnbroker would mention his ordinary and unsuccessful search merely for some kind of curio for a den, real or fancied? Nothing about his visit had breathed of any interest in a knife with an opal eye.

And certainly he could scarcely know of the later arrival of the man with the patch at the pawnshop with the mysterious dagger. But how came the man with the patch with the knife, anyway? Could he have stolen it and then sold it to Solomon Isaacs?

Perhaps, after all, the cook with her Celtic imagination working overtime had fancied that this mysterious person was the peddler. Bearded men were not unlike in general appearance. The man at the hydrangea bush was perhaps too far from the cook's point of vantage for infallible identification.

Mayhap the mechanical intonation of the voice was one of those queer coincidences with which many pages out of the book of life are strangely overburdened. Were this fortuity true, then what would be more natural than for the self-stated curio collector to come in quest of what he deemed a fitting souvenir for his den?

I hoped that he would at least make a bid. Certainly he would have to raise his voice above the much mentioned low monotone with which several dark figures in the pattern of the tragedy were already vested by certain witnesses.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the loud voice of the auctioneer, "I bring to you this morning a rare and valuable prize, indeed. I see before me people who are traveled, who are collectors, who have knowledge and taste in recognizing the unique and the valuable. Such a gathering instantly knows how much human events add to any curio, whatever its previous intrinsic and commercial rating."

Nancy had certainly selected a man who knew his business. In the hushed expectancy he went on:

"You are thoroughly familiar how such relics become enhanced in value by the passing of years. You know how the dagger of the infamous Italian Luigi, which dripped with human blood, passed from collection to collection until to-day it rests among the priceless relics of a certain Castilian noble. You know how the sword of Ivan, the terrible Russian, reeking with the gore of stirring events, has been fought over and purloined, so great has been the human desire to gain it for its history's sake.

"You know how the pearls of Megia, the Spanish ballet dancer, have more than once been dyed red as they have traveled from land to land and from hand to hand. You know how the blue diamond of the sheik of a certain Turkish province still exerts its exotic and hypnotic influence over the minds of men eager to possess it whatever the cost.

"And now we come to the famous dagger with the opal eye, which will go down in history as the instrument of death in the incredible mystery of Voodoo Manor. Were the knife itself without commercial value, the strange part it has played in this baffling crime would instantly elevate it to a rank of peculiar worth and facination.

"For we all love the mysterious, even though crime may cause some of the more timorous of us to blanch and shiver. And no mere bit of steel was ever more cryptically bound up in a strange mystery than this knife with the opal eye.

"But in addition to its recently acquired history, the dagger is a piece of rare workmanship, of extraordinary handiwork. It was old long before Miss Loring purchased it. Mayhap shrouded in the veil of the unknown it even possessed a nefarious history ere it came to its last owner.

"I frankly admit that this is pure speculation on my part. But I do aver that the rare beauty of the knife, its finished workmanship, place it, irrespective of its new history, in a class by itself.

"In my business it is my habit to deal with rare weapons. I am familiar with the make, the workmanship, and the history of many. And I tell you right here that I have never beheld in my years of experience so admirable a bit of tempered steel, or of such exquisite workmanship, as the one which it is my privilege to bring before you."

As the crowd tried to surge nearer, the

two policemen motioned them back brusquely. The man at the hydrangea bush still held to his quiet, unruffled pose. He was not even listening to the exposition of the auctioneer. He appeared to be watching the clouds as they came frowning up out of the former blue sky. His entire appearance was the epitome of careless ease and indifference.

I wondered more than ever what had actuated the man to come. He certainly betrayed little interest in the preliminary harangue of the auctioneer. Was it mere curiosity after all?

"Yet there is another thing," continued Mr. Maddox, "which enhances the value of this unique knife. In addition to all these worth giving factors, remains the great fire opal set in its handle. The stone is of unusual size, life and purity. It is a rare and valuable opal in itself, worth no mean sum. I have never seen a finer example, and certainly never so large a specimen."

"Show us the knife," came an impatient voice from the crowd.

Quite unruffled the auctioneer went on: "I would, therefore, keep before your mind the many qualities which set this dagger quite apart from the usual run of weapons, offensive or defensive. It has been associated with an extraordinary mystery; it has taken life; it has touched the hand of a strange assassin; and yet withal it is of exquisite workmanship, of the finest material and possessed of a rare gem of no inconsiderable worth."

He paused a moment to let his words sink in. The crowd strained forward in breathless attention.

Nancy now stepped up to the waiting auctioneer with Stebbins at her elbow. Both were armed, and I knew the two policemen before the steps also were. All were prepared to resist any unexpected move to steal the dagger, although such an act appeared improbable with the gates guarded and with so great an assemblage present.

Nancy handed a brown wrapped package to Mr. Maddox, who extended a hand to receive it. He held it unopened as he turned again to the throng.

"You will understand," he warned, "that there is to be no disorder. Bidding is to be done quietly and entirely in order. The knife will not leave my hands, nor will any prospective buyer come any nearer than his present position. We are here prepared to enforce these rules."

Docilely the crowd waited without adverse motion or comment.

Slowly the big fingers of the auctioneer unwound the lethal knife. The sun, as though mindful of an opportunity for a dramatic climax, came flashing out from behind the lead-gray clouds. As the man raised from its paper shroud the notorious dagger, a brilliant flash of sunlight fell full upon it.

The light brought out the polished length of steel, the dark funereal, exotic wood of the carved handle. But most tellingly of all, the eye of the sun gazed straight into that great flashing orb of opal, making it scintillate and blaze forth in gleaming, malevolent crimson.

The red eye of the dagger glowered and smoldered like a spark of fire soon to burst forth—into what? It seemed almost that the stage was set for a veritable conflagration of suspense, surprise and startling dénouement.

As one man, the crowd strained up and uttered a long, astonished "Ah!" In the chorus came forth admiration, mystification and desire.

"What am I offered?" bellowed the auctioneer, holding the dagger high, where it still continued its orbed duel with the sun.

A stoop shouldered, big nosed man started the bidding, thrusting high his knuckled hand.

"One hundred dollars," his voice shrilled out.

A burly curio collector took the bit in his teeth. "One hundred and fifty dollars," he shouted in a deep bass rumble.

"One hundred dollars—one hundred and fifty dollars," followed the parrot repetition of the auctioneer. "Only one hundred and fifty dollars!"

His indignant protestation was cut short by a third voice. This came from a fashionably attired woman, evidently a visitor from the city. "Three hundred dollars."

"Three hundred dollars," echoed Mr. Maddox.

This figure let loose the pent-up greed of ownership and excitement in the throng. Bids came flying thick and fast, like hailstones spatting about the auctioneer.

But still the figure of the bearded man stood motionless by the hydrangea bush. The only noticeable change in his pose was the folding of his arms, where his long white fingers stood out lividly against the black of his coat. Yet his hands were as still as the rest of him.

He appeared to be paying scant heed to the growing excitement about him. He was like a man waiting, waiting. But for what? If he came only to glimpse the knife, why linger longer? Mayhap he had a proxy in the crowd with orders to bid in the knife for him. Yet, if he had arranged for a substitute to buy the dagger for him, why had he come, even if he were obviously unconscious of the risk and the surveillance he was under?

The excitement and the mystery thickened momentarily. And Nancy stood waiting as quietly, as purposively as the dark garbed figure. For, despite the heterogeneous mass about us, these two, to my mind, stood out like beacons of sinister silence and hidden strength. Momentarily I began to fear that whatever lay in back of Nancy's ruse, she was pitting her wits against some subtle master mind.

A lull followed the bid for a thousand dollars. I was not surprised. The figure seemed ridiculous, extravagant beyond words to me. It showed to what heights morbidity could be played.

"One thousand dollars," repeated the auctioneer for the first time. Then he followed with more adjurations and lashing exhortations. Just as I began to think the knife would be knocked down for a thousand dollars, the big man who had made the second bid offered eleven hundred.

I began to wonder if this were the proxy whom I had begun to suspect among the crowd bidding for the man who stood aloof and away from it.

The same scene was reënacted by further pleadings from Mr. Maddox. Assuredly he knew his business.

A silence followed, unbroken by any belated bidder.

The auctioneer became a truly oratorical figure as he again harangued the people with biting philippics. I could feel Nancy's tense and strained attitude, as if she were poised and awaiting something. Now she was in striking contrast to the nonchalant, inattentive figure by the hydrangea bush. Did his attitude whisper that his purpose had already been accomplished, that he was confident and secure in the outcome?

"One thousand one hundred dollars, once!" The silence at last forced the auctioneer to the final calling. "One thousand one hundred dollars, twice—"

Still a thick silence.

Frowningly the auctioneer raised his gavel.

Then the man by the hydrangea bush insolently lifted his head. In a thin, high, yet singularly metallic monotone, his voice easily carried in the portentous stillness.

"One thousand five hundred dollars," he chanted.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT THE AUCTION REVEALED.

THIS arresting voice caused many a head to swivel back hastily, eager to catch a glimpse of the new bidder, who had obviously attracted little attention previously. Still the man stood as motionless as a statue. There was scorn and indifference in his expression as he looked haughtily over their heads, and for the first time surveyed the auctioneer.

"Ah!" recognized that worthy. "At last we have a connoisseur among us! It is indeed a pleasure that at least one person realizes his opportunity when he sees it."

Yet no one else showed any inclination to raise the bid.

At that moment Nancy took a handkerchief from her pocket. I could see the auctioneer's glance out of the tail of his eye as he acted on this preconcerted signal.

"One thousand five hundred dollars," he hastened on. "A real art critic has offered me one thousand five hundred dollars. Do I hear any other bid?"

He did not.

Quickly he went on: " One thousand five hundred dollars, once—one thousand five hundred dollars twice—going—going—"

As he raised his gavel the plainclothes man took a step nearer the nonchalant figure of the bearded man.

Bang went the gavel with the abruptness of a pistol shot. I jumped as if it actually were one. My nerves were that tightly strung at what I felt momentarily drew near.

" The knife with the opal eye goes to the gentleman of taste by the hydrangea bush for one thousand five hundred dollars. Let him come forward and make good his bid."

The crowd parted curiously with eager, straining necks.

Slowly, with unhurried stride, the man came forward. In the rustling movings of the crowd, I doubt if any one there, or even the oncoming bidder himself, sensed the close shadowing figure of the man in everyday garb.

The two officers below the auctioneer stood rigidly attentive. In fact, everything about me seemed strung for some extraordinary climax. Nancy's hand was in her bulging right coat pocket. I noticed the same ominous movement on the part of Stebbins and the officers.

Yet serenely unconscious of the stealthy preparations about him, the man came easily on.

" Stand back," roared one of the policemen in front of the auctioneer; " don't crowd forward so. Give the fellow a chance. He's earned it."

Good naturedly, the crowd obeyed, now that the excitement of purchase was over.

The tall, slight figure of the dark visaged man paused just before the steps. From an inner pocket he brought out a billfold. His heavily bearded face bent over it as his long, tenuous fingers began to open it.

Nancy coughed slightly.

At this further secret agreement the two officers at the steps closed in on the wholly unconscious figure. The man in plain clothes leaped forward. For a moment the three guardians of the law blotted out from my startled gaze what was actually occurring there before our very eyes.

Then the lethargy of the mysterious man fell away like a cloak. He was like a tiger in the unleashed fury of his struggle. Stebbins rushed into the fray. I actually expected to hear a shot or some sign that physical harm had been done. But it took the four of them to cow the tigerish figure.

At last the man with the beard stood with shackled hands, breathing heavily. He shrugged his shoulders as he finally recognized the futility of further contest before the superiority of armed numbers about him.

Bedlam was let loose in the crowd. As the police rudely half pushed, half dragged their captive into the house, the auctioneer, with the dagger no longer in view, bellowed out in his megaphone voice orders for the throng to disperse. Stebbins stood beside him to enforce the orders. But it was a good half hour before the heavy gates of Voodoo Manor closed after the last gesticulating, protesting, and wholly unwilling, leavetaker.

Nancy hid the knife away securely while the bearded man was kept under guard in the living room.

I waited nervously. For what purpose had she arranged the fake auction? Why had she staged everything just to handcuff this man when his monotonous voice made the eleventh hour offer for the knife? Obviously it had been her cue to act.

But why, *why?* She had sent away a none too pleased crowd, much disgruntled by the false and pretended sale. The thing was beyond me. I worriedly hoped that Nancy hadn't made a fearful blunder. Surely, if she had sought to trap Blanche Pembroke's mysterious accomplice, she had failed. And Blanche Pembroke had confessed!

So what earthly reason could Nancy have for taking in custody a man just because he was disguised, talked strangely, and had perhaps acted suspiciously in his several visits to the manor? One could not say for a certainty that there was anything incriminating about his curio quest at the pawnshop.

Then Stebbins, Nancy and I entered the living room.

The prisoner was picking with restless fingers at his clothes, despite the manacled condition of his hands. His dark skin gleamed startlingly pale against the heavy black beard. On closer view the eyes were singularly small, sunken and gray. A strange light shone in them, yet it was not the light of unreason, of insanity. Perplexedly I tried to fathom the uncanny brilliance of the restless, strange orbs.

"Now," directed Nancy at once, "remove the beard and the wig, Bland."

The bearded man jerked up his head. His eyes flashed darkly. He started to raise his hands.

"None of that," rasped Stebbins tersely. "We are all armed here."

With another shrug of his shoulder, superlatively expressive of resignation and baffled hauteur, the man suffered the wig and the beard to be none too gently removed from his face by the plainclothes man.

The removal of the disguise brought a startling change to the man before us. I had expected almost anything, perhaps even to recognize in his undisguised face the features of the masked man whom I had surprised in a shadowy rendezvous obviously awaiting his blond haired confederate.

Despite the mask I thought I could identify the shape of the mouth, the chin and the jaw. As a whilom artist, I had been trained in portraiture to recognize the slightest varying difference in characteristic features.

Yet I was doomed to disappointment. I was reasonably certain that the man before us was not the questionable accomplice of Blanche Pembroke. Without the beard and the wig, he was smooth shaven, his hair closely cropped and sprinkled with gray. The forehead was very high and white, of a mellow, yellowish hue.

The features were singularly refined and delicate, almost effeminate in their cameo clearness. The brown cheeks were high boned. The face was a clean cut oval, and the lips were thin, well chiseled and firmly shut. The chin was decisive and the jaw strong.

"Are you ready to talk or shall I?" asked Nancy crisply, after a sharp scrutiny of the man's features. "For your game is up, you know."

The man merely shrugged his shoulders.

Interpreting them as a refusal Nancy went on:

"I am certainly aware of the reason for your disguise. It was first assumed when you appeared as a peddler to the cook, in order to fix firmly in your mind necessary information about the arrangement of Voodoo Manor."

If this shot struck home the man gave no index of it.

"Furthermore," went on Nancy, "when I was bound to the polished leg of the table the other night, my assailant considerately left the mark of his thumb on the highly polished surface. I have carefully transferred it as proof in case you are so ill-advised as to attempt to deny my accusation. Get his thumbmark, Mr. Stebbins," she requested abruptly.

As he rose to obey, Nancy warned her captive. "You'd better submit gracefully. It will do you no good to struggle against the inevitable."

Something in her tone seemed to carry conviction. The man offered no resistance. With evident relief Stebbins triumphantly handed the result to Nancy.

She brought out another piece of paper and compared it with the print just obtained. She showed the two to the constable.

"You see they are identical," she remarked quietly.

"No doubt of it," agreed Stebbins.

Still the dark visaged prisoner sat motionless except for the flicker of his swift moving eyelashes.

"So," went on Nancy, "thanks to this convenient little clew, I am convinced that the man before us is unquestionably the man who so unceremoniously bound us to the table, stole upstairs and spirited away the death knife from behind the locked door of Room Number 13. Subsequently this malicious prowler, adamant to the decency and the respect usually accorded the dead, entered Miss Loring's room and turned her dead body face downward."

Even the thought made me shiver.

"Now," continued the criminal investigator, imperturbably, "the removal of the knife from the death chamber was a clever bit of clap trappery, obviously designed for two purposes; one, to regain possession of the knife, and the other, to mystify us and make the hocus-pocus of the whole thing all the more obtuse.

"Yet the taking of the knife is not difficult to explain. Only a picture was hung over the door where the panel was broken. An ingenious rascal could put a hand through, and by a cleverly contrived contraption coax the knife from the room.

"This could no doubt be most simply accomplished by using a stick with a magnetized steel end. If powerful enough, it could easily attract and hold the steel blade of the dagger."

She paused a moment.

"The knife was within such reaching distance of the hole in the door. But its theft in this admissible way meant something far more to me than the strange and seemingly morbid desire to possess the death weapon."

We all strained forward eagerly.

"I mean," asserted Nancy, "that the thief had a very significant knowledge of the exact placement of the dagger in the death chamber. He could not possibly see it from his kneeling position before the door, even though his groping arm and the long stick could fumble about until it attracted the object he knew to be there.

"Now, no one except the coroner and Mr. Stebbins as well as Miss Deming and I knew where the dagger was placed after it was drawn from the dead woman's neck. I returned it to its customary silver salver with a purpose.

"I knew that if it were later mysteriously stolen from the room, that the theft must be made by a person who had previous knowledge of its usual resting place in the unfrequented Room Number 13.

"Since we are the only living persons who should have this knowledge, it follows that the one who stole the lethal dagger is also the one who killed Felicia Loring."

Our eyes all turned toward the quiet figure in the chair.

"And the man who committed that outrageous, brutal deed sits before you."

CHAPTER XX.

THE CLEW OF THE SCRATCHED BLADE.

IN the ominous stillness about us my thoughts circled around blindly. If this man were the slayer of the mistress of Voodoo Manor, for what reason had he disposed of the knife to the man with the patch, after he had entered the house and bound Nancy and me in order to repossess it? Then he was again so anxious to get it back that he came to the sale and tried to bid it in for the considerable sum of $1,500!

And who was this man with the patch who had sold the knife to Solomon Isaacs? Was the pawnbroker lying? Had he created from his own cautious mind the story of the man with the patch to shield the real seller of the dagger, the man before us?

Where did Blanche Pembroke enter the tightening mesh? For, when the dagger, which Miss Loring had shown only to Nancy and me, was described, she had fainted away. Obviously this indicated that the instrument of death was not unknown to her. Really, the more Nancy explained, the more befuddled I became.

The prisoner still doggedly refused to talk.

So Nancy went on: "You were aided and abetted in your nefarious assassination scheme by other untoward, yet wholly independent, events, which were shaping themselves simultaneously with your own fell plot. The unsavory character of the hapless Room Number 13 gave an excellent superstitious element to the whole occurrence. Miss Loring's pitiful cynicism against all superstitions furthered this weird and uncanny atmosphere.

"Then, unbeknown to you, another interloper about Voodoo Manor had been perfecting his machinations, helped by an inside confederate, the shameless niece of the dead woman. They schemed, not for Miss Loring's life, but for her earthly possessions.

"The light haired, light fingered woman, under the pretense of nocturnal headaches,

managed to pass along to her accomplice many a valuable bit she had purloined. He, in his turn, sold the stolen articles to some unprincipled 'fence.'

"They may have even planned more audaciously, hoping to unearth the hiding place of Miss Loring's reputed fortune in pearls. Be that as it may, they soon found how futile such a discovery would be in the impregnable, perpetually locked room."

Still, I couldn't see the peculiar significance exerted by the death knife over these people, Blanche Pembroke, the man with the patch, Solomon Isaacs, and the man before us.

"After Miss Loring confided in us, showing us the knife which was to play so signal a part shortly, she took the dagger downstairs to cleanse it. She was much excited at our coming and because she had revealed the secret of her room to us. In addition, by some strange presentiment, she felt the evil doom which was closing in about her.

"She was called away from her cleansing of the knife by some excitement in the kitchen. She subsequently forgot that she had taken the dagger from its customary place behind the locked door of Room Number 13."

Little lights began to dance behind my eyes. It seemed to me that Nancy was getting herself into a fearful tangle.

"By chance Blanche Pembroke saw the knife for the first time. She recognized the value of its exotic, exquisite workmanship as well as the beauty and the size of the opal set in its handle. So she added this unexpected prize to her other light fingered accomplishments. During our absence from Voodoo Manor, she slipped away unnoted and gave them all to her accomplice.

"She also gave the information that we had gone to the city. Upon this knowledge the man acted later when he tried to waylay us in the woods.

"Subsequently, without knowing how Miss Loring had been killed, this man sold the knife to Solomon Isaacs, as the pawnbroker testified. The injuries resulting from being thrown into the road by our car were covered by a leather patch. So, you see, Solomon Isaacs's story is true."

"But, Nancy," I breathed, reckless in my excitement, "how can you be so sure that his story is true? Of course, you realize that he may have bought the knife before the crime. I should think this fact would point an inescapable finger toward Solomon Isaacs."

The prisoner stirred slightly. A sneering smile swept over his lips to be smoothed away instantly. I wondered what about my words had caused this obviously sarcastic smirk.

Nancy shrugged wearily. "It is a complicated affair, and I do not wonder at your difficulty in following it. Your reasoning would be correct were Issacs or the man with the patch guilty of collusion in a murder.

"But as I have already told you *this* is the assassin. You see, I possess more knowledge than you do. After entering the crime room and examining its contents, I have been at least one step in advance of you because of one significant observation which I made at the time. There is one thing you do not know—among others."

"What is that?" I queried weakly, still floundering helplessly at Nancy's imperturbable calm in the face of what I thought would prove a stinging blow to her theory.

"That," she stated clearly, "is the factor of a second duplicate dagger."

"A second dagger!" Stebbins and I exclaimed simultaneously.

Nancy nodded. "You know, the original knife with the opal eye owned by Miss Loring was not in her room the night of her murder. Blanche Pembroke had already stolen it and passed it along to her confederate, who in his turn sold it to Solomon Issacs, as the pawnbroker told us."

"B-b-but," I stammered, "—this second knife! Miss Loring didn't show us that."

"No," answered Nancy, soberly. "I doubt if Miss Loring even knew of its existence. This duplicate dagger was brought by the man before us with the premeditated purpose of killing Felicia Loring. It was his own dagger which, behind the locked door of an impregnable room, irrevocably silenced the owner of the other dagger.

"When the death knife was withdrawn from poor Miss Loring's neck, I subjected

it to a microscopic examination. I noted that there were tiny scratches on the blade. You remember that, do you not, Drusilla?"

Of course I did. Hadn't Nancy openly called them to my attention when she discovered them? Hadn't these scratches puzzled me all along? Now their significance was startlingly simple and clear.

It was quite like Nancy, trained by long practice to observe the seemingly trivial things, to notice instantly the character of the original dagger owned by Miss Loring. That blade was obviously unscratched. And it was indeed typical of the astute Nancy to observe those tattling fine lines on the death dealing dagger and instantly know that there was a duplicate dagger and that this was it.

"So," went on Nancy, "when I knew we had to consider the machinations of two opal-eyed knives, I began to sense many things. The crime did not appear so impossible of execution, now that I realized that the perpetrator did not first have to obtain the original dagger from the room before killing Miss Loring. So I advertised for any knowledge of an opal-eyed dagger.

"When the duplicate was next taken, I knew then it must have been by the assasin, who would be tremendously anxious and eager to regain it. My advertisement, in the face of the known theft of what was presumed to be the only knife, seemed natural enough. But my ruse had a two-edged purpose.

"I strove primarily to trace where the confederate had disposed of the knife stolen by Blanche Pembroke. I wondered also whether or not the assassin would show his hand, though I naturally felt sure he would not. But my advertisement was sufficiently successful.

"As I had hoped, I regained possession of the original dagger owned by Miss Loring. My examination showed the blade to be unscratched. So that left the duplicate knife back again in the hands of the murderer who had come back and regained it in the dead of night from Room Number 13 as I have already told you."

She paused and looked at us triumphantly.

"Yes, yes. I follow this much," I exclaimed. "But even the intrusion of a duplicate dagger does not tell us how the criminal struck down Miss Loring within her locked and impregnable room, leaving not the vestige of a clew as to how it had been done."

"Ah," reminded Nancy, "you have forgotten one thing."

"What," I asked perplexedly.

"That I have already told you that the man before us knew of the accustomed resting place of the original knife with the opal eye on the silver tray on the table. Now, how could he obtain such knowledge?"

"W-w-why," I stammered, "he must have found it out by snooping about."

She nodded in confirmation. "Exactly—and some time before the crime was committed since it was not there that night."

"But how?" I objected. "The room has never been unlocked."

"The presence of the knife in the room of death was descried in the same manner in which death was consummated."

We stared incomprehensively at the amazing Nancy. She had already declared that the knife had to be seen in the room before the crime, as it was gone the night Miss Loring met death, since Blanche Pembroke had stolen it. Now she added more confusion by stating that the original knife had to be seen in the same manner that death was accomplished!

"I give it up," I sighed.

Stebbins's expression was ludicrous as he listened in bewilderment.

"The criminal had to be vitally sure that there should be no slip-up in his plans. The accomplishment of them meant more to him than you can ever fathom. In fact, the certain taking-off of Felicia Loring was of such moment to him that he even had a rehearsal of the crime before carrying it out with the fearful fatality which we know."

She paused. The prisoner was now looking at her with a queer expression in those canny eyes of his. At last he seemed to be shaken from his wooden disinterest. He was obviously listening intently.

"I found," continued Nancy, "that the

room was impregnable of lock and was without secret panels or passageways. I found that the fresh white walls of the house and the recently sown ground were absolutely unmarked around the window beneath. And above, a dusty roof proved conclusively that the crime was not committed by dropping a line down opposite the window.

"That left only one recourse. I looked beyond the window. The nearest tree, however, shoots up a straight trunk at an oblique angle from the window. And the trunk was unmarked by any clew to indicate that a person had tried to scale it. Even with such indices, it would have told little. For the tall tree trunk was out of angle, out of alignment with the window, and full twenty feet away from it."

The man still gazed at Nancy, a quiet, unblinking stare.

Not unmindful of this, she went on: "So I looked elsewhere. You will all remember that while below the window and around the tree lies freshly planted ground, yet there is a peninsula of old grass running from the old lawn out under a big branch of the tree, fully nine feet in length. I examined this neck of grass carefully for foot-prints.

"And I found them. But they were something more than ordinary foot-tracks. By the character of the deeply embedded toes—there were no heel-prints—I knew that the assassin had been running swiftly as far forward on the neck of grass as he could without leaving any incriminating marks on the newly planted earth beyond.

"The toe marks gave me a startling theroy as to the crime's possible commitment. The overhead branch projects from the trunk in a line parallel to the window. So, if you follow me, while the tree is not in alignment with the window, a spot some feet out on the branch is. You see, from the position of the tree, I had previously thrown it out of my considerations. This branch, too, though opposite the window was a goodly distance from it.

"Even a long ladder placed against the branch would be of little use to the slayer intent on killing Miss Loring with an opal-eyed knife. Gravity and the distance would be against his flinging the dagger unerringly."

"But the marks of running feet on the neck of sod underneath this branch?" I reminded her.

"Ah, yes," Nancy replied. "This is the strange explanation."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CRIME FROM THE CLOUDS.

"THE wily villain probably scaled the wall by means of a rope flung into the branch of a pine tree hanging over it. But this plotting criminal brought along more rope with him, coiled and ready. He is very expert in the use of those long and sinewy fingers. And as I told you, his plan had been perfected by preliminary practice when he had previously glimpsed the position of the knife belonging to Miss Loring on its silver tray."

Stebbins's eyes were popping out ridiculously in his mental struggle to follow Nancy.

"With a supple, expert cast he flings his rope above his head until it snakes around and over the big tree branch. It was weighted so that it could be played by skillful manipulation to return within reach. Then he fastens one end of it with a slip-noose.

"By climbing up this rope he can easily tie the other end to the branch, taking care that the distance between the two rope ends is directly opposite the window. This leaves him with the loop falling from the tree trunk just the right distance below the branch and above the grassy neck of the old lawn.

"In other words, he looped a rope swing to that branch so that it came exactly opposite the window. It was then a simple matter to seat himself in it, run back smartly along the neck of grass to get the swing under momentum, and then, as his running start comes to the end of the grass, to pull up his feet like any swinger. He shoots high in the air and nearly on an eye level with the sill of the window in Room Number 13."

Stebbins struck his knee a resounding

clap. "By cracky!" he thundered. "Think of that for deviltry! The thing is now as plain as the nose on your face."

"So," resumed Nancy, "on the trial night he ascertained just how much force was necessary to swing him high enough for what he purposed. In full range of the window he also glimpsed the knife with the opal eye shining forth from its silver salver across the room.

"Then on the fatal night, with the duplicate dagger in his hand, he swings high opposite the sill of the open window. Miss Loring is unconsciously seated between it and the pitiful casket, head and shoulders above the sill.

"The man is well trained in the art of throwing daggers. So his expert fingers fling the knife out with deadly precision just as he swings in range of the seated figure. The blade strikes home. Felicia Loring has paid the penalty."

"Penalty?" I echoed. "Whatever do you mean now?"

"There is one race in the world, skilled above all others in the use of muscles and in the ability to throw daggers—the Hindus, particularly those of a certain province of India. That was why this man knew beyond peradventure that flinging the knife from his improvised rope swing on the great branch opposite the window would not fail. It was as easy as play with him."

"A Hindu!" exclaimed Stebbins. "Of course they can do all sorts of knife throwing tricks. But why should this man plan such a thing?"

"Revenge!" asserted Nancy.

"But what could he have against poor Miss Loring?" he persisted.

At last I began to understand the explanation of the strange light in the man's deep-set and brilliant eyes. It was not the light of insanity, but that of a kindred evil —fanaticism.

"He was actuated by no personal animus against Miss Loring," admitted Nancy. "For, if I mistake not, the Hindu before us is a priest of the Piuchis, a peculiar sect buried in the recesses of a little known corner of India.

"Miss Loring kept in her possession the sacred dagger of the Piuchis, stolen from their temple by the sacrilegious hands of unbelievers. And though the thing was done some years ago, the memories of the priests of that sacred order are long, and their search to avenge the infamous sacrilege has been inexorable and untiring.

"I confess that at first, after such a lapse of years, the portent of the sacred knife quite escaped me. It is difficult to believe that fanaticism is so long and wide reaching in the tentacles it stretches out to mark down the place of a sacred relic. It has taken even all this time. Nor has expense been spared.

"The priest chosen for the final expiation of the sacrilege—for the killing of the hapless infidel who now possessed their sacred knife—has come thousands of miles. In accordance with their customs, which are not unknown to me through my research work, this emissary would lose his life if he returned either empty handed or without killing the woman in possession of their sacred emblem.

"So he planned craftily, cunningly, and with dreadful success. He was only the instrument of an implacable and incomprehensible religious cult.

"The moment I found the scratches on the dagger blade and knew it to be a duplicate, I began to sense that, with pitiful fatalism, the superstitions of a fanatic Hindu sect had at last taken the life of the woman who had spent her years in collecting ill omens that she might show her scorn of them. A strange reaction certainly, and pitifully ironic in the penalty it exacted!

"So with Miss Loring's knife regained from the pawnbroker, I next announced a fake auction for the sale of the knife with the opal eye. While I had no intention nor any right to dispose of the returned dagger, I knew that such an opportunity to regain the second knife would not be lost on the Hindu.

"He had already killed his victim and recovered his own knife. Yet his life would still be forfeit should he not obtain the stolen relic and return it to the priests. I was correct in my theory.

"And what had the man to fear? He had no knowledge that Solomon Isaacs had

told of his visit to the shop before the knife had been pawned. Nor did he know how closely he had missed finding it there. So cunningly had he carried out his scheme for exacting the death penalty that he felt very sure we had no knowledge of how the mysterious crime had been committed.

"Confidently and securely he came to the auction, as I felt sure he would. And when he felt certain that the bidding had stopped, he insolently and haughtily bid in the sacred property of the Piuchis. This movement on his part placed him just where I wanted him. And you know the rest."

"Nancy," I asked eagerly, "why did this man turn poor Miss Loring's body face downward the night he bound us? Did he still expect to find the dagger about her? For he must have been greatly mystified when he saw it no longer in its accustomed place that fatal night."

"No," she answered, "I think not. Undoubtedly, to this particular sect such an act represents the consummation of all indignities toward death, especially toward the demise of one whom they thought had defiled their sacred dagger."

She now turned to the Hindu. "Have you anything to say?"

Slowly he lifted his finely featured face. The great gleaming eyes of fanaticism and accomplished purpose smoldered there. Almost proudly, yet with supreme hauteur and resignation, he raised his head. The singsong voice spoke again for the first time since he had uttered the momentous and fateful bid for the lethal weapon.

"A priest of the sacred Piuchis neither explains nor denies. It is for the Occidental race of blasphemers and infidels to take their will on his defenseless body."

He stared out with bright eyes upon the gray day which had settled down like the cloak of doom about his incarceration in the house where he had wrought the death will of his peculiar cult. At a nod from Nancy he was taken away.

As the monotonous falsetto of the Hindu again fell upon my ears, I realized my error in inferring that such a voice had been assumed for the purposes of disguise. From Nancy's insistence in ascertaining the characteristics of the peculiar voice, I felt sure that she had long ago suspected that the peddler was an avenging Hindu—that the bearded man who searched Solomon Isaacs's shop in vain for the dagger was undoubtedly the same Hindu.

And she had been further convinced of the fact when she herself had heard the voice the night when he returned for his knife. I also knew perfectly well that with this premise Nancy had sensed the true identity of the man with the patch as Blanche Pembroke's accomplice, whose voice had actually been disguised by the use of an expressionless tone.

How plain it all was now! When the tramping footsteps had died away on the gravel walk Nancy turned to me.

"Now, what is it you wish explained, oh, eternally vigilant interrogation mark?" she asked whimsically, although the shadows of the tragedy were still over her face.

"What was it you discovered among Miss Loring's papers in her desk that you wouldn't tell me?" I began promptly.

"The record and bill of sale on the knife with the opal eye—the Evil Eye of the Piuchis."

"And the little brown book?"

"Miss Loring's diary for that year, which she kept according to her custom. Now listen to what she wrote under the same date as set down on the bill of sale:

> "To-day, after much patient waiting, I buy that consummation of all evils, the wicked eye of the Piuchis. The Hindu shopkeeper wagged his head soberly and with fatalistic wisdom. 'Ah,' he said, 'you little know at what a cost this knife left its native temple and lands. You little guess its bloody history and the dire deeds with which it has been concerned. I took it under protestation, knowing its evil lineage. For the reckless Englishman who sold it to me seemed glad enough to be free of it, for a poor pittance far less than it was worth. And I, on my part, am glad to be rid of such a luckless and ill-famed relic. I destroy all papers concerning it. But I warn you that it is the symbol of evil. Beware!'

"But," went on Nancy, "Miss Loring evidently forgot all about the danger of buying such a thing after so long. She forgot that the sleeping Hindu gods of fanatical justice work exceedingly slow,

but equally sure, in avenging any act against their sacred though monstrous cult. So, pitifully enough, and by some inverse psychology, Miss Loring died by the hand of one of the very superstitions which she had scorned all her life."

"Oh," I defended, "that was just chance. Surely you would not have me become a fatalist?"

Nancy shrugged. "These are the facts. Make your own explanation, your own analogy."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FINAL SECRET.

"OH, another thing, Nancy," I queried. "I had all but forgotten it in the multiplicity of enigmas."

"Yes?"

"What was Julius Cæsar's ghost? He said he saw a dim figure swooping down in the soft moonlight. He saw the light through it. And it was so transparent that even its skeleton could be descried."

Nancy smiled, then sobered again. "The creed of the Piuchis is very punctilious in many respects. Undoubtedly this Hindu messenger believed himself to be but offering a sacrifice on the altars of their dogmas, to propitiate the wrong they believed done by the purloining of their sacred relic.

"So, as the Hindu priest swept along stealthily, he was probably clad in the soft silk of the altar gown. It is fine spun and as transparent as heavy veiling. And it would be gray. So his underclothing showed through black, looking to the superstitious Julius Cæsar like a bony skeleton."

"But where was this Hindu when Julius went out to investigate?"

"He could easily have been at the top of the first rope he had thrown over the branch and in the act of fastening the second one. When he heard Julius coming out it was easy for him to remain there quietly. The foliage on the tree is very heavy and the shadows proportionately dark. Such a position offered an admirable hiding place for the dark garbed figure."

I sat pondering over the scene her words conjured.

"But one thing now remains for explanation," she said abruptly.

"And that?" I inquired, striving to think of any remote point in the incredible mystery of Voodoo Manor which had not been already elucidated.

"I must now try to fathom the riddle of the pearls."

I had all but forgotten that not inconsiderable fortune invested in precious stones and hidden away somewhere.

"Where do you begin?" I asked.

"In that room which has played so sinister a part in the life and the death of Felicia Loring."

"Ugh! Well, I don't want to go in there again until—"

"Well?"

"Unless you find them in some very uncommon spot. Then I might just stand inside the door. But for further poking around in that room—you may just count me out."

"I do not wonder at you. It is hardly a desirable task for me. But I owe it to Miss Loring. It is her wish. And since I have vindicated her death, I must now fulfill her other desires."

So saying Nancy disappeared, leaving me staring out on the pattering raindrops and the gray, weeping day. It was as though all Nature paid belated tribute to the mistress of Voodoo Manor—and bemoaned the strange beliefs of mere men who rise and fall in accordance with the dictates of their dogmas.

I do not know how long I sat there musing. I was conscious at last of the swish of skirts, of Nancy poised on the threshold. An apple blossom pink suffused her oval face, and the dark eyes glowed with hidden lights. It was her success face!

She nodded at the question in my eyes.

"Yes. You see, thick crowding events had not previously admitted of a thorough search on my part. It was uniquely done. Come."

When Nancy applies that word "unique," which the casual person uses too, too much, I know it is that and more.

So, stifling an impulse to remain away from the ill omened room, I pattered up the thick carpeted stairs after her. I could hear the gentle raindrops sounding a requiem to the accompaniment of the soughing wind in the pine tree tops. And again was borne home to me the silence of the house.

Without the dissonance of speech we entered the room—or rather Nancy did. I stood backed against the closed door. She went to the trunk and looked down upon it with a strange expression, half awe, half compassion, filtering across her features.

"I first searched the trunk," she explained. "But its secret was then lost on me. Next I went about the room. Unsuccessfully.

"So back again I came to my bequest. Despite my failure to find any enlightenment there at first, I knew it must be there. I took out everything again. I went through the lining, tapping the trunk.

"Then I sat in a brown study. I felt reasonably sure that the fortune in 'tear drops' was not cached in this trunk. But a directive message was probably there. It might be set down on very thin paper. So methodically I began to withdraw certain tacks."

Hypnotically my eyes ran over the shining conical heads, beading the edges of the sturdily bound trunk. They stopped at the significant thirteen on the end toward me.

Nancy followed the route of my eyes.

Half perceptibly she nodded. She put out a slender hand. Full from the center of the lower curve in these brass heads fashioning the three, she picked out a single conical headed tack which she had previously loosened.

"See," she said, stepping toward me, "I put it back nearly as I found it, that you should share in the joy of the find, even though you refused to participate in the search."

About the slender shaft of the tack running into the conical head was cunningly wound a wisp of thin paper. Delicately, Nancy's sensitive fingers brought it out. She spread it on the palm of her hand where the ink of its writing showed plainly against the white background of her skin. I read:

> I know that success will attend your search. For it is synonymous with you. The pearls you find inside the stuffed owl with the opal eyes on the mantel. Success to you always.
>
> FELICIA LORING.

"I left the 'vivisection' of the owl until you came," Nancy declared, going swiftly to the mantel.

The two of us sat on the floor as her quick fingers flew over the feathered trophy with its blazing opalescent orbs. It was a clever place for concealment.

Doubtless she depended upon this superstition, secure in the thought that any opal adorned object would be doubly repellent to the ordinary searcher after her death—particularly should it occur suddenly or violently as the poor mistress of Voodoo Manor had so strangely sensed.

A penknife was busy following certain lines cunningly left by the clever hands of Felicia Loring. Then from inside the bird came forth a chamois pouch. Nancy turned the contents on her lap.

An astounding array of satiny drops looked up at us! And among the pear shaped beauties were some of those rare gems in pearldom, the pink ones.

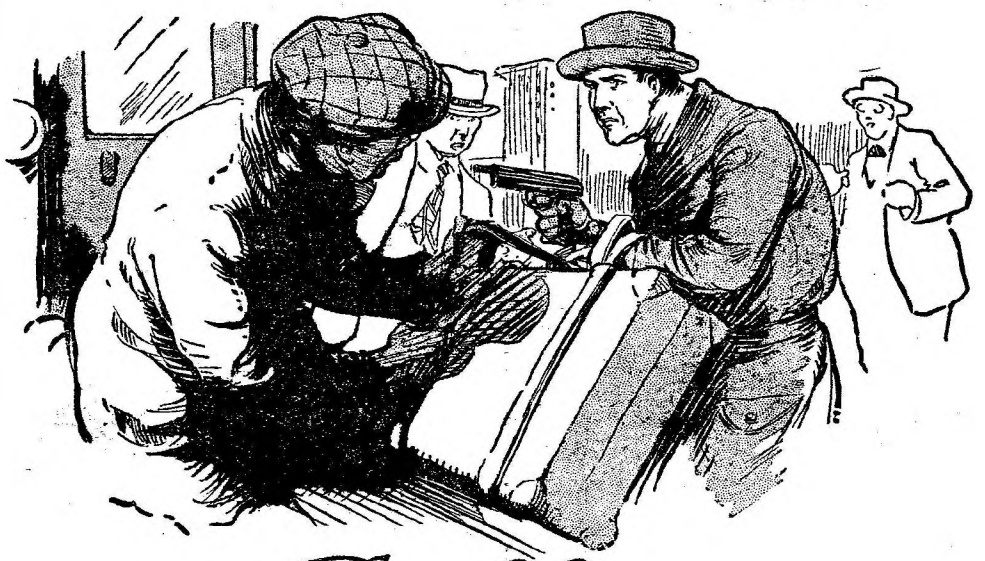
"A considerable fortune," she recognized, placing them back with thoughtful, gentle fingers. "They must remain in their feathered safe for a bit longer. This luckless room is equal to a strong box. People will avoid it as they do a malignant pest. Such is ill fame?"

"But those ill omened knives, Nancy?" I remembered.

"Ah, yes," she responded, "I shall see to it that both are returned with all expedition to their native Hindu province. They have worked harm enough already to leave them longer in this country."

Once again we pattered down the wide staircase. And I knew that when the great gates should clang behind us, the mystery of Voodoo Manor would always be double starred across the strange pages of our memory.

THE END



Reflex

By CHARLES MAGEE ADAMS

"And not only is it the right thing at the right time that we thus involuntarily do, but the wrong thing also, if it be an habitual thing."—WILLIAM JAMES.

IT was nine o'clock. Without consulting his watch yet punctually on the vertical moment of the hour, Bruce Morrison stopped examining the morning's batch of checks, lifted the telephone toward him, and took the receiver from the hook.

"The garage, please," he directed.

Twice a month the eight years he had been cashier of the Atlas Metal Products Company he had called the company's garage like this, and as he had answered that call those eight years the voice of Camp, the garage superintendent, came promptly over the wire.

"The garage, Camp speaking."

"This is Morrison. Will you have a car ready for me at ten, please? This is pay day, you know."

He had always made his quiet request in the same words, and Camp had always made the same reply. But this morning, the morning when it mattered more than on any other, Camp's customary "Sure" was not forthcoming. He hesitated.

"Why, Bruce," he explained instead, "every car in the shop's out and the chances are there won't be one in till near ten thirty. Will that be too late?"

Late? There had not been a pay day morning those eight years when he had left after ten o'clock, and this morning: "Yes, it will be too late," he countered, his voice raised. "That won't leave us time to get the money distributed. It 'll have to be ten."

Camp considered. "Then I'll try to have one for you, Bruce," he promised. "Seems everybody wants a car this morning."

There was a seemingly unnecessary sternness in Morrison's reply. "I'll count on you. Don't fail me. Ten sharp." And, replacing the receiver, he resumed his methodical examination of the neatly stacked checks.

Everything Bruce Morrison did was methodical. He always went to lunch at twelve twenty, played Sixty-Six with Briggs, the production manager, Tuesday evenings, straightened the kinks in the cord before replacing a telephone receiver, and carried his matches in his lower left waistcoat pocket. Habit took care of that.

Habit took care of almost everything; made him keep his cigarettes on the left end of the mantel, order chops for dinner Mondays and Thursdays, tap three times on the blotter over his signature; even some things other men had to decide deliberately. Not that he was an automaton.

His gray eyes were clear, his figure erect, and his movements purposeful. The Atlas had never had such a competent cashier. Habit, from its seat in the brain and spinal cord's interlacing network of nerve paths, had simply taken over one by one the things he did repeatedly. It had taken over honesty like that.

He could not remember when he had been consciously honest. He probably had, but the path from nerve center to nerve center had become so worn meantime that choosing between honest and dishonest had become as much a mere reaction as putting on his right sleeve first or winding his watch in the morning. He had never used company stamps for personal correspondence or charged personal telephone calls to the company toll account. A good many hundred thousand dollars passed through his hands every month, but no audit had ever cast the slightest suspicion at him.

There was never a struggle, a matching of right against wrong. There was simply a set of shunts and by-passes for honesty as for any habitual reaction, and the impulse flashed across these to produce a response as effortless as any other.

Windy Vance and Puss Greenway had no such reactions. Windy and Puss had grown up with Morrison in the same little Ohio town, gone swimming in the same creek, played on the same high school football team, and left home at about the same time. But until a night two months before he had not seen them for seventeen years. That night they had hailed him on his way to a Kenwood car, and talked for an hour.

The years had changed them. Windy's blue eyes were more metallic, his lean shoulders more defiant. Puss had become blander, his plump body more feline.

Morrison had not tried to shun them. He knew acquittal had failed to clear them of robbing a hardware store in the home town, that as boys they had been particularly apt at stealing football clothes, and that letters from home had contained hints as to their present livelihood, hints which found subtle substantiation now. But he greeted them unashamedly and talked over the old days with them in the confectionery where they went, until Puss shifted to the present.

" So you're cashier out at the Atlas Metal Products?" he remarked after a question had elicited Morrison's occupation. " Well, that's fine! Big concern. Must handle a lot of jack for them."

Morrison had nodded, and Puss had stirred the ice in his glass. " Aren't you afraid you'll get stuck up?" he had continued.

" I never thing about it," Morrison had answered truthfully.

Puss considered. " Well, you're right, Bruce," he had agreed. " It's nothing to worry about. The fact is, if a stick-up job's pulled off *right*"—his round face had become guileless—" it's often a *nice* little experience for a cashier."

Morrison had caught the twist of emphasis on " right " and " nice," but he had simply smiled. " I don't think I'd call it exactly nice," he had said, and changed the subject. But " right " and " nice " with that twist of emphasis had stuck.

During the ride back to Kenwood, in his room again, with a cigarette, the two words kept repeating themselves as Puss had said them: " Right " and " nice." " Right " and " nice." If he wanted to— But why hadn't he wanted to? He had frowned at the question and at length it had come upon him with a curious depression that this not wanting to, like his whole life, had been dictated by habit.

A year from to-day he would be shaving at the same moment, checking the same accounts, and wearing a blue serge suit identical with the one he now wore. He might

be earning a few hundred more dollars, or—"Right" and "nice." Why not "right" and "nice"?

He did not have to follow every dictate of habit. He was a man, not an automaton. And gradually during the days that followed a bitter rebellion rose within him, seethed and fermented with a steadily mounting pressure until one Tuesday night a month later he had halted at Briggs's door, turned, and gone deliberately into the city, found Windy and Puss, and faced them with a feverish steadiness.

"I see a cashier out in Minnesota was stuck up yesterday," he had said. "How do they generally split in those deals?" And that night they had made the first draft of their plans.

This morning as he emerged from the Commonwealth National at ten thirty-three with eighty-four thousand dollars of Atlas money locked on his wrist in a heavy leather cash bag and paused before crossing the street to where the company car with its armed chauffeur and company policeman waited, a big black touring car with drawn curtains would swerve and stop squarely before him. The tonneau door would be flung open, Puss, masked by an upturned collar, would reach out and seize the bag and him. There would be a struggle, enough to register resistance on spectators. Then Puss would drag him into the tonneau, Windy would send the big car leaping forward, and by the time the amazed chauffeur had turned the company car about, they would be blocks away toward the Brier Swamp.

Every step had been timed to synchronism, every trifle foreseen and provided against. Vance and Greenway would take to a waiting flivver and Morrison would be discovered by the posse supposedly dazed by a blow on the head, his third of the money having been hidden meanwhile. Viewed from all angles, there was not a loose end. He had even made a mental memorandum that he must wear his hat while bumping his head against a rock to produce the appearance of a blow. But would Camp have a car ready at ten?

Morrison was working. Habit kept him preparing for his trip to the bank and running through the stack of vouchers and requisitions awaiting his O. K., as if this were nothing more than any ordinary pay day. Evans, his assistant, was busy at his desk near the wicket. The office had the air of merely intent activity. But would Camp have a car? He dared not call the garage again. That might arouse suspicion. But if Camp failed to provide a car punctually—

He rose, went out, conferred with Fitzhugh, the paymaster, across the hall, and Bannet, the treasurer, next door, all routine, preliminary to drawing the pay roll, and returning, began the necessary transfers to make the money available. But would Camp have a car on time?

He tried firmly to repress that uneasy question, but could not. Why were all the cars out? That had never occurred before. He finished drawing the necessary checks with his usual thoroughness, and at nine forty-five began preparations for his trip.

The cash bag in which funds were carried to and from the bank was made of heavy leather, wire lined, and fitted with a shoulder strap and a steel band, the latter to be locked about the wrist of the bearer. It was always kept in the corner at the end of Morrison's desk, but now, as he stepped to the spot and reached down, he stopped abruptly. The bag was not there.

He looked sharply into the corner and frowned, a quick new uneasiness rising within him.

"Did you have the bag? Where did you put it?" he called over his shoulder to Evans.

The assistant looked up from his work. "Why, no. I haven't seen it since yesterday," he replied. "Isn't it there?"

Morrison shook his head. Whether he carried the money in this particular bag or another seemed trifling. But it could make a significant difference. This was the only bag in the building fitted with a wrist band, and for his purposes the money must be securely fastened to his person. That was the ostensible reason why Vance and Greenway had to take him along instead of merely wrenching the bag from his grasp.

Evans left his desk, and together they searched the room, peering into corners and

uncovering every spot where it might have been misplaced by a careless porter. But the bag was gone.

"My suit case is here. I brought it in when I came back from my week-end. You can use it if it 'll do," Evans suggested.

Morrison considered, that new uneasiness increasing with a sharp restless tension. "Let's see it," he said.

Evans drew the suit case from his locker. It was large, heavily framed, and what most attracted Morrison, fitted with two heavy straps completely encircling it. He pulled these off and tied one about his shoulders and the other wrapped round and round his wrist.

"It 'll do," he decided, adjusting this second strap.

It would do as a makeshift, but who had removed the bag and why? Had they done so deliberately, or for some less significant reason? A score of wonderings and possibilities rose out of that new uneasiness, but it was nine fifty-five. Putting the prepared checks and passbooks in the suit case, and taking his hat from his locker, he gave Evans a parting instruction or two and went out.

The headquarters of the Atlas police department were on the ground floor, and on his trips to the bank Morrison stopped there, procured a pistol from the arms supply, and returned it on his homeward trips. So now as he reached the foot of the stairs, he turned and entered the big room.

As usual, the headquarters sergeant was there behind the desk, and, as he often was, Frank Higgins, the chief, was also there, a big man with a big imperturbable face, but a certain resilience about him and blue eyes so steady they seemed almost contemplative.

He looked up from his newspaper as Morrison came in and nodded. "'Morning, Bruce," he said.

"Good morning, Frank," Morrison replied.

The sergeant turned to the arms cabinet, drew out a pistol, and was handing it across the desk to Morrison when Higgins interrupted.

"Just a minute," he said, and putting down his paper, took the weapon.

Pulling out the clip, he thumbed the cartridges rapidly into his big palm, eyed them, tried the action, examined the clip, and then replacing clip and cartridges, handed the weapon over to Morrison.

"Just wanted to be sure everything was right on pay day, Bruce," he said quietly, but with a look, a curious searching in his blue eyes that brought an added uneasiness surging suddenly up in Morrison.

The cashier took the pistol and slid it into his pocket. "All right, Frank," he replied, and turning, walked out and down the corridor to the front of the building.

The car was there. That uncertainty was removed, he saw, as he found the machine drawn up against the curb, a plain-clothes company policeman in the tonneau. But what had that look of Higgins's meant?

"Good morning, Mr. Morrison," the policeman said, swinging open the door.

"Good morning," Morrison replied, and stepping in, sat down, the suit case between himself and the guard. "Damp, isn't it?"

"Yes, I wish it would rain or clear up," the guard replied, and began a desultory conversation.

Morrison took up his share while the car swung around the office building toward the main gate, but his conscious attention was striving to probe Higgins's look. What did it mean? Did it have any relation to the misplaced cash bag and Camp's reluctance to promise a car?

The car headed toward the city, and Morrison continued talking. He had been over this route too many times in the past eight years to be diverted now. But what had Higgins meant?

That uneasy tension twanged sharply taut and a confusion of doubts and possibilities swept upon him. Did Higgins have reason to suspect? He could see no flaw in their plan, detect no weak link, but it was possible that Higgins was preparing a trap for him and Vance and Greenway.

He did not know what he said during the next five miles. Should he avert that swiftly approaching scene before the Commonwealth National? He could not communicate with Vance and Greenway. They were already moving the big black touring car into an inconspicuous position two blocks

below the bank. He could not signal them as they swung in toward him. That bit of action was to be staged too quickly. But he could overstay his time.

A minute more inside the bank would not be noticed by Higgins and his men, but timed as exactly as their plan was, even thirty or twenty seconds too much would permit Vance and Greenway to pass the trap without springing it.

A quirk of confidence replaced his uneasiness as he thought of this. They reached the street on which the Commonwealth National stood, and as they drew near the impressively columned building Morrison scanned it intently but could not make out a watching company policeman or a waiting company car.

A tremor of returning tension ran through him. Was everything here as it seemed?

Punctually at ten twenty-four they swung into the curb ten yards below the bank entrance, stopped, the guard stepped out, and the car moved on. At the entrance it stopped again, and Morrison stepped out, the suit case in his left hand. Again the car moved on ten yards above the entrance and the chauffeur stepped out. This was the regular routine for protection.

Morrison waited, glancing up and down the street as always, but looking for traces of Atlas policemen or Atlas cars. Then, finding none, he crossed the sidewalk, his pistol in readiness for a frontal attack and protected at flank and rear by the two outposts.

Inside, there were the usual lines of patrons before the tellers' windows and the usual groups busy over check book and deposit ticket at the writing stands. Morrison scanned them, too, but nowhere was there an Atlas man, and that tension within him tightened again.

At the door in the grilled barrier an employee tripped the electric latch and as Morrison stepped through, Furgis, one of the assistant cashiers with whom he usually transacted business, looked up and greeted him pleasantly. Morrison set his suit case on a counter, opened it, and began removing its contents, but looking about sharply the while.

Everything was normal. Not a man was there who did not belong, not a glance more than usual was being cast in his direction. A feverish something came into that mounting tension.

It was ten twenty-eight. Furgis verified the checks, made the proper entries in the passbooks, and replaced these in the suit case. Morrison responded automatically to his remarks, and moved with him to where the bundles of currency were stacked ready for packing.

Glancing through the barrier, he could see the company car at the opposite curb as usual, in position now to begin the return trip. But there was not another Atlas car or man in sight. Did Higgins really suspect? There was nothing here to indicate that he did.

Furgis stowed the packets of currency in the waiting suit case, dropped in the few plump bags of specie, and snapped shut the lid.

"Quite a load," he remarked.

"Oh, I haven't far to carry it," Morrison replied. That feverish tension rose higher and higher. Did he dare after all?

It was ten thirty-two. Still no company guards or no city detectives. Morrison slipped the carrying strap over his shoulder and wrapped the other about his left wrist. He was aware of what he was doing, but dazedly, as if that feverish tension had blurred everything into far distances. Did he dare? Did he dare?

The long minute hand of the clock began moving away from thirty-two toward thirty-three. He eased the carrying strap into position, nodded to Furgis, and turning, walked through the barrier, across the foyer, still filled with its lines of motley patrons, his step unhurried, unwavering, reached the entrance and stopped to look up and down, his right hand as always in his side pocket on the cocked automatic.

The sluggish stream of traffic was even more sluggish than usual. A motor truck stacked high with lumber was trundling noisily down the street and a small roadster was disappearing in the opposite direction. But below, at the exact predetermined distance, was a big black touring car with curtains drawn.

Morrison recognized it, knew that the instant for which he had been planning was only seconds away, but faintly through that blurring haze of far distances.

He moved forward again. In the middle of the sidewalk he heard the purr of the oncoming motor and a pace from the curb perceived the shadowy bulk of the car, but still dimly.

The car slid across his path and halted, veering toward him. The door burst open and a man swung out, only eyes visible above a high turned collar, seized the suit case, gripped Morrison's right elbow, and jerked forward.

Morrison resisted. Resistance had been agreed upon, but this resistance was not that sort. Atlas money, eighty-four thousand dollars, intrusted to him, was being taken. Without decision and so swiftly that his blurred faculties could not have checked it, an impulse flashed through brain and spinal cord over shunts and turns worn deep by previous impulses.

He bent back. His right arm shook off the smothering grip, and his right hand came out of his side pocket, finger closing on the trigger even before the pistol was quite raised.

But there was only one click, and the big quiet voice of Higgins said through the upturned collar, " Never mind, Bruce, it's all right."

An hour later in the chief's little private office adjoining the Atlas police headquarters, Higgins took his pipe from between his teeth and leaned forward, his big body stiffening with the flash of scorn that lighted his blue eyes.

" Why, they haven't got nerve enough to be stickup men," he snapped. " They've never done a thing but a lot of dirty yellow frameups. So when they came around last night and asked me if it was worth five thousand to the company to know it was going to be robbed to-day, I told them to prove it was going to be robbed. They told me about the job they said you'd planned with them, and I told them they lied. Then they said for me to take their places and see. So I got hold of Fitzhugh, and we told them we'd pay them their five thousand if you did what they said you were going to do." He chuckled and his big body relaxed. " Only we were playing a sure thing, because we knew you never would."

Morrison shifted slightly. He was sitting, head sagging, face stamped with numbness. He moistened his lips.

" But I was," he repeated, voice dull and mechanical. " I—I wanted to—but when the time came I—I just couldn't."

He made a rattling noise in his throat, vaguely like an ironical laugh. " Guess I've been straight so long I can't be crooked when I want to."

Higgins considered, then nodded, taking deep puffs at his pipe. " Yes," he replied with quiet conviction. " I've seen a good deal in my time of men that were crooked and wanted to be crooked, and let me tell you, Bruce, when a man's gone straight as long as you have he gets into a habit of going straight that's just about too strong for him to break."

His eyes shadowed somberly. " Of course it can be done," he added. " That's why I put dead cartridges in your gat and had all the cars out this morning so you'd have to insist on having one at ten sharp, and took your cash bag so you'd strap the suit case to your wrist. Those little things might have been useful evidence in case—" He smiled. " But we'll simply go ahead as if this had never happened."

Morrison gaped at him stupidly. " But I—I intended to! I planned—"

Higgins leaned forward and laid a big hand on his knee. " Forget it, Bruce," he said, eyes softened understandingly. " You demonstrated this morning that you've built up a guard rail that can keep you from going off the road, and for my part I'd sooner trust a good guard rail than a driver that can't handle his car. Don't you see?"

Morrison sighed bewilderedly and gripped Higgins's big hand with spasmodic pressure.

" It's sure mighty—mighty white of you, Frank," he said huskily, and producing a cigarette, reached as usual into his lower left waistcoat pocket for a match. Habit, of course, had taken care of that, too.

A Wallop by Wire

By I. J. SHULSINGER

I AIN'T had a lot of experience with the so-called fair sex, but I know enough to know what a wicked wallop they can pack. No matter how big, or rough or upstage a guy may be, there's always some frail somewhere who can tell him where to get off and how.

Take the case of Kid Kennedy for instance—the sweetest boxer and the best meal ticket I ever had. I never had no trouble managin' the Kid until he fell into a lot of dough; then he put on the high hat and nobody could tell him nothin' until—well, figure it out for yourself.

I been managin' fighters since as long as I can remember, but I never was lucky enough to land the real thing—a boy who could work his way up to the top and grab off the heavy dough. Every bozo I picked up proved a flivver after a few fights and left me just where I was before, which was nowhere at all. But I always kept my eye peeled for a comin' champ and when I met the Kid I thought I grabbed one at last.

I'll never forget how it was I come to meet up with the Kid and see what a wow of a socker he was. I was managin' "Battling" Bennett in those days and we was tourin' the tanks takin' on any of the second raters the hick promotors could set up for us. It was in a little burg down in Oklahoma that I met the Kid—one of those oil towns where they have a lot of oil wells on Main Street and every guy has a gusher in his back yard.

Now, we all has our little weaknesses and Bennett's was women. The poor dumbbell thought he was a demon with the dames and wherever we went I had my hands full keepin' him from gettin' tangled up with the village vamp. His usual stunt was to stand in front of the hotel and make wise cracks about all the flappers that blew by.

Well, the Battler was doin' his stuff in front of the hick hotel in the little Oklahoma town I told you about; I was stickin' to him closer than a red flannel undershirt as it was the night of the fight and I didn't want him to get mixed up with no frail. We was just about to go back into the hotel when the neatest little dame I ever saw floated past. There was a young fellow with her, but we wasn't givin' him the eye or no part of it. The little lady was gettin' our attention absolute and complete. And, as usual, the Battler couldn't be satisfied by just givin' her the o.o., but has to make one of his wise cracks.

"Some chick for a hick town," he says to me.

He didn't intend for the fellow with the girl to hear him, but he did. He stops quick, turns around, and walks up to my fighter.

"I heard what you said," he tells him.

"Well, what of it?" barks the Battler.

"Just this—you got to apologize and do it quick."

I saw that trouble was brewing, so I steps in between them.

"Listen, young fellow," I said to the boy. "My friend here don't know no better and he didn't mean nothin'; besides, he's Battling Bennett who is goin' to fight here to-night. Battling Bennett, see? So you better forget it."

"I don't care if he's Jack Dempsey," says the hick. "He's got to apologize."

The Battler was gettin' het up fast.

"What d'ya mean apologize?" he yells. "I guess I can talk to the dame if I want to. On your way, feller, before I knock you kickin."

The fellow starts away all right, but only takes a coupla steps. He stops sudden, wheels around and before Bennett knew what it was all about he was settin' on the sidewalk. This small town bozo had caught him right on the button with as quick and neat an uppercut as I ever saw and he'd gone down like a hunk of lead.

When the Battler realized what had happened he gets up and goes after the hick and, boy, what a battle! I've seen some of the classiest scraps that was ever pulled, but never nothin' like this. They fought all over the sidewalk and overflowed into the street; the thought of all that fightin' bein' done for nothin' give me a terrible pain. They never had no ring, no seconds, no nothin'. They fought on until one of them dropped for keeps—and that one was Battling Bennett.

The Battler got the beatin' of his life and when it was all over he was a wreck. Of course, a big crowd had seen the fight and soon the news was all over town that Battling Bennett, who was to have gone on in the star bout that night, had been licked by one of the local boys. It ruined my fighter as an attraction, but it didn't make no difference anyhow. About the only way he could have gone into the ring that night would have been on a stretcher.

I had figured on a big gate, but this street scrap knocked all my plans cuckoo. The girl's fellow—Tom Kennedy was his name—said he was sorry he'd spilled the beans and what do you think he offered to do? To help me out, he said he'd go on that night in Bennett's place. I told him to go ahead and do it. I was right up against it and willin' to take a chance on anything and I was so sore at this baby for ruinin' my fighter that I was hopin' somebody would knock him dead.

Well, Kennedy went on that night and there was nothin' to it. He knocked his man all over the ring for two rounds and in the third round he knocked him cold. For all I know, the poor bozo is out yet.

I had seen enough of Kennedy's fightin' to realize he was a wiz and I made him a proposition right away and he accepted it quicker than that. He was up against it for money and the idea of knockin' guys cold for a bunch of bucks looked good to him.

I tagged him "Kid" Kennedy and we went to it. I got a bunch of set-ups and second raters for him and he went through 'em like a cyclone through Kansas. Then I picked some of the tough babies for the Kid, but it didn't make no difference. They all looked alike to Kennedy. I figured I had grabbed a live one at last and I was settin' pretty right on top of the world. And then I got the big chance—a match with "Sure Death" Dolan.

Now Dolan was the leadin' contender for the lightweight title and a win over him meant a fight with the champ. Also, it meant a whale of a house and about fifteen grand for yours truly and his cute little battler—the first big league coin I had been on speakin' terms with for a long time.

The Kid was tickled to get the chance and settled down to do some real trainin'. All of the wise ones gave him the once over and pronounced him the goods. He looked so good to my friend Red Reilly that Red bet three thou that the Kid would kayo Dolan. Red and I were old pals. I had told him how I dug up the Kid and was glad to see him go back of the boy with his dough.

About a week before the day of the fight I was called out of town for a few days. When I got back it was late at night and I hustled right over to the little hotel on Seventh Avenue where me and the Kid had been stayin.' But when I goes up to get my key the clerk hands me a piece of news that knocks me cold.

"Mr. Kennedy," he says, "has checked out."

"Checked out!" I gasps.

"Yes, sir, shortly after you left."

"You mean he's left town?"

"No, not left town—just changed hotels. He's moved over to the Ritz."

I looked at the feller to see if he was kiddin' or lit or somethin', but he was as sober as a bootlegger. Kid Kennedy at the Ritz—without any dough—without anything. I couldn't figure it out at all, but I beats it over to this joint as quick as I can. I busts into the lobby and just as I does so the Kid blows in—all dolled up in a soup and fish and everything.

The guy who said "fine feathers make fine birds," musta had the Kid in mind. I never saw such a change in a bozo in all my life. He looked like a million dollars in that swell fittin' soup and fish and from the way he acted you'd have thought he'd been wearin' scenery like that all his life.

I was so cuckoo I couldn't say nothin' but just stood there gettin' an eyeful. But the Kid was right at ease.

"Come on up to my suite," he said.

"Your which?" I gurgled.

The Kid didn't answer. He just led the way to the elevator and the next thing I knew I was in some rooms that must have been fixed up special for this here Prince of Wales. Class? It was the classiest joint I ever saw.

"Not bad, eh?" says the Kid, grinnin'.

By this time I was beginnin' to get back to earth and I was workin' up a good head of steam. I didn't know how the Kid had managed to crash into the Ritz and the glad rags, but what made me sore was for him to break trainin' this way, and with the big fight with Dolan just a coupla days off.

"What's the idea?" I yelled. "I don't know who you croaked to get the dough for this party, but I do know you got no business stayin' out late and playin' around, with the big fight only two days off."

"Fight! What fight?" asks the Kid.

"What fight!" I hollers. "Why, the mill with Dolan, of course."

The Kid takes off his spike-tailed coat and hangs it in a closet where there was about a dozen suits parked already.

"Oh, that," he says.

"Yes, that," I tells him. "And you're gonna get out of this joint pronto and I'm gonna see that you keep in condition for the fight."

Then I got the hardest jolt of all.

"I'm all through with fights," says the Kid.

I thought the poor bird must have gone nutty or somethin', but I can see he's as cool as one of these here ice cream Cohens.

"Through with fights!" I raves. "You mean you ain't goin' to fight Dolan?"

"Not Dolan nor anybody else."

"But what the—"

The Kid kinda laughs to himself, then walks over to a little desk, picks up an important lookin' paper, and hands it to me.

"Give this the once over," says he.

I read the paper, and I'm ready to pass out then and there. For all it said was that oil had been struck on some piece of land the Kid owned in Oklahoma and the dough was rollin' in on him so fast he'd soon have Henry Ford lookin' like a flivver. No wonder the poor nut had parked himself at the Ritz.

Old Dame Fortune had slipped the Kid a great hand all right, but with the same motion she had dealt me a sock right where the baby wears the beads. All my life I'd been tryin' to find a real fighter and get him a fight that meant money, and now that I'd got the combination my fighter becomes a millionaire and gives me the air.

Well, you know what dough will do to a guy. The Kid had always been easy to handle, but it was a different proposish now. I stayed there almost the rest of the night arguin' with him, but it wasn't no use. He said he was a gentleman now, didn't want to fight, didn't have to, and wasn't goin' to.

Next day I took up where I left off and used up all the language I knew trying to get the Kid to go through with the fight, but I might as well have been talkin' to this here King Tut. The Kid wouldn't even talk about such a common thing as prize fightin' and the interview ended when he left for his tailor's. Laugh that one off!

I spent the rest of the day wonderin' what to do, then beats it over to Red's office. Red had three thousand up on the Kid, and I wanted to tip him off so he could hedge his bet. But he said before he'd do that he'd like to take a crack at the Kid himself, so we both goes back to the hotel.

The Kid was in the dinin' room, but we busted right in and sat down at his table. He was keepin' three waiters busy and he had a line-up of dazzlin' dishes in front of him that would have croaked a coupla goats.

Red didn't waste no time.

"What's this stuff about you not goin' through with the fight?" he says.

The Kid was so busy inhalin' the fancy food that he couldn't speak right away. He keeps up the eatin' business for a coupla minutes, then he turns and seems to notice us for the first time.

"Just this," he tells Red. "I ain't in the fightin' game no more, and I ain't gonna fight Dolan or nobody else."

"But you can't quit this way," says Red. "Everything's all set—you got to go through."

"I ain't got to do nothing," says the Kid. "I got lots of dough now, and I'm all through with prize fights—and guys what runs 'em."

And he gives us both a nice mean look.

Then Red cuts loose and told him what he thought of him and of his layin' down this way. When he was all through, the Kid sorta shook his head like he agreed.

"Yes," he said, "this fill it of soul is great stuff."

Red was so sore he got up and walked out. I was right behind him.

"Well," I says, "I better beat it over to the Garden and tell 'em the Kid won't go on."

"Don't do it," says Red. "They ain't counted ten over me yet. I'll make that bozo fight or know the reason why."

"But it can't be done," I said. "I better go spill the story and get it over with."

"Lay off and leave it to me," says Red.

Now Red was a wise old bird. I knew from experience that he was there in a pinch, but there wasn't nothin' he could do in this case. However, I didn't know what to do, so I didn't do nothin'.

Next day was the day of the fight, and I woke up feelin' like a guy that's just about to be sent up for life. I was way up in the air and didn't know how to come down. Nobody but me and Red knew that the Kid wasn't goin' to fight, and Red wouldn't let me put 'em wise. I could figure what was goin' to happen to me when it was time for the Kid to step into the ring.

I had sat up so late wonderin' what to do that it was almost noon when I got up. I figured I'd better beat it over to the Kid's hotel and make one more try to get him to go through. But when I asked for him at the desk, what do you think the clerk said?

"Mr. Kennedy left word that he was not to be disturbed, sir."

Twelve o'clock and the poor boob still sleeping. I decided to hang around and wait for him. It was two thirty before he came down. He had on a suit that Reggie Astorbilt must have picked out for him, spats, cane—the whole works—and I must say he looked nifty.

"Kid," said I, "you simply gotta go through with the fight to-night. Everything's all set and we can't call it off now."

The Kid went right on puttin' on his gloves.

"You know how I'm fixed now," he said. "I told you I'm done with fights, and I meant it. I wouldn't go into that ring to-night for a million bucks."

"But think of me," I said.

"I ain't got time."

"But—"

Just then a flunky came up.

"Your car's in front, sir," he said.

"Thanks," said the Kid, and handed the flunky a buck.

"So-long," he says to me, and strolls off.

Two thirty in the afternoon and the fight was to be that night. It was all off. I didn't know what to do. I figured if I told them at the Garden I'd get in bad for waitin' till the last minute to do it, and if I didn't tell 'em I'd get in worse.

I made up my mind to beat it out of town. Then I unmade it. I wasn't exactly crazy about the idea of runnin' away. I musta walked around the block about forty-two times, tried to eat some dinner, couldn't; then wandered over to the Garden. It was pretty late by then, and the first preliminary bouts was already on. I walked around to the dressin' rooms and run into Red. I wanted to bawl him for keepin' me from puttin' 'em wise, but I didn't have the heart. The poor cuckoo was as worried as I was. He kept pacin' up and down and lookin' at his watch.

"Almost time for the main bout to start," he said.

"Yeah, but it never will," I replies. "The Kid will never come near this joint. He's forgot there was ever such a thing as a prize ring; it means curtain for me all right. I'll never get another fight here. I'll be lucky if I get away alive."

"It does look bad," says Red.

Just then the door opened and in walked the Kid.

"Gimme a lift," he says to me. "I gotta go on in a coupla minutes."

Was I knocked silly? I'll say I was. Here was the same bozo that had told me that afternoon he was all through with prize fights throwin' off his clothes and gettin' ready to climb through the ropes. But I didn't have time to do no wonderin'. I was too busy fixin' the Kid to go on. They were just gettin' ready to announce the main bout. Dolan was already in the ring and a minute later my battler was in there with him.

Of course, you know what happened. The first three rounds were all Dolan's. The Kid was in bad shape because of the way he had broke trainin', and it was only his grit that kept him on his feet. But in the fourth round he began to find himself. The fourth and fifth was about even, but in the sixth the Kid cut loose and did the classiest scrappin' of his life, and in the seventh he knocked Dolan for a row of bamboo huts.

As soon as Dolan was counted out, the Kid climbed out of the ring, and I hustled him to the dressin' room. The crowd milled around him, everybody and his brother wantin' to shake his hand or pat him on the back or somethin'. Part of the crowd and a bunch of the newspaper boys crowded into the dressin' room and sort of surrounded the Kid. I started to get his street clothes for him, and then I noticed somethin' layin' on the floor that must have fell from his pocket when he was takin' off his clothes. It was a telegram and it said: "Will be there to see you win the fight, Tommy dear." It wasn't signed.

When the Kid had dressed and got away, I started lookin' for Red. I wanted to put the thing up to him, as I couldn't figure it out at all. I found him over collecting his dough, and he was feelin' like a million bucks. I slipped him the story, but it didn't seem to surprise him none.

"But I wonder who sent the telegram?" I asked him.

"Don't waste no more time wonderin', stupid," he tells me. "'Cause I'm the guy that did the sendin'—that is, I sent it for another party without puttin' the party wise."

I didn't get him at all, and I told him so.

"Here's the low-down on it," he said. "Now you and I did everything we could to get the Kid into the ring, and he paid as much attention to us as if we had been

a coupla mummies. But at the same time I knew that if he thought somebody that counted expected him to fight, he'd do it in a minute. And the only one that does count in a case like this is a dame; she packs the real wallop.

"And then late to-day it hit me right between the eyes. I remembered what you had told me about how you met the Kid—how quick he had fought for his girl. Bein' a small town lad and regular, I figured he was as strong for her as ever, and if he knew she had come to New York to see him lick Dolan he was goin' to do it. So I sent the wire for her."

"But you didn't even know her name," I says.

"I had to take a chance on that," answered Red. "I didn't sign it, but I figured he'd know who it was from. They always do."

"But it was just before the fight and anybody could have sent him a telegram," I argued.

Red give me a long look.

"You musta mislaid your brains," he says. "Sure, anybody could have sent him a telegram, but nobody would have ended it 'Tommy dear'—except the girl," said Red, disgustedlike.

And the funny part of it was that the girl was there. She had read about the big fight, and had got her old man to take her to New York so she could see it. She didn't send no message because she wanted to surprise the Kid. Of course, he went up in the air some when he found out how Red had framed him, but he wasn't sore much. A guy ain't got much time to get sore when he's busy gettin' married and takin' one of these here honeymoon trips to Europe.

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THE WILD HONEYSUCKLE

FAIR flower, that dost so comely grow,
Hid in this silent, dull retreat,
Untouched thy honeyed blossoms blow,
Unseen thy little branches greet;
No roving foot shall crush thee here,
No busy hand provoke a tear.

By Nature's self in white arrayed,
She bade thee shun the vulgar eye,
And planted here the guardian shade,
And sent soft waters murmuring by;
Thus quietly thy summer goes,
Thy days declining to repose.

Smit with those charms that must decay,
I grieve to see your future doom;
They died—nor were those flowers more gay.
The flowers that did in Eden bloom;
Unpitying frosts and autumn's power
Shall leave no vestige of this flower.

Philip Freneau.

The Millionaire Piker

By CHARLES HOBBY BASSFORD

THE law firm of Remington & Talmage started in business on the second day of January, 1919. The firm was composed of Thomas Remington and Anderson Talmage, two gentlemen of unimpeachable reputation and standing, university graduates, men well known to the bench and bar for their integrity. It was, however, a partnership conceived in iniquity and dedicated to the proposition of applying brains to rascality.

The offices of the firm would have impressed any one as being the offices of lawyers of the highest standing. Their location was the best in New York. Their building was full of lawyers of the most unassailable character. Their suite was small, consisting of two private offices with a connecting door, and a small outer office in which sat the firm's stenographer, Ethel Keyes. There was nothing to distinguish it from any high class small law office.

The partners spent their first day in their new offices in answering congratulatory letters on the formation of the new firm. At five, Remington went into Talmage's room and said, " Tal, let's celebrate the new firm by eating dinner together."

" All right," his partner replied. " where will we go?"

" How about Hong Low's?"

" Good. Come on."

Hong Low's is one of those Chinese restaurants that are numerous in the few blocks in the vicinity of the Chatham Square station of the elevated. There must be half a dozen of them within a radius of two blocks from the station. The best of them all is Hong Low's, where they serve the best chicken chow mein and fried noodles in New York. There is a main dining room one floor up from the street. The front of the main dining room faces the elevated. The kitchen is in the rear, and along the two sides of the room are rows of small private rooms, across the front of which a curtain can be drawn by those who wish to eat in great privacy. It

was a favorite resort for the two men, and as a matter of fact it was in one of the small cell-like private rooms that they first discussed the subject of a partnership several months before they finally went into it.

The partners sat down at a small table in the main dining room. They ordered their meal and sat waiting for it to be served.

"Well, Tom, we're off," Talmage remarked. "I'm betting we make a lot of money."

"We'll have to make some pretty soon, Tal. We sure sank a lot of money getting started. How about Anneke Jans? Have you done anything about that matter?"

"Not yet, but I'm going to get started to-morrow. I've got to locate Bannon, and there's a fellow out in Cottonwood, Idaho, who is supposed to have trunks full of records."

It might be well in passing to remark that Anneke Jans was a respectable Dutch woman who died in New York in 1663, and whose descendants have from time to time attempted to prove title to a huge tract of land in the heart of the city. The claim is entirely valueless, but the partners, or rather Talmage, had an idea that the firm of Remington & Talmage might somehow succeed in earning a substantial fee out of the situation.

"Just how do you intend to handle that Jans matter, Tal?" Remington asked.

"Oh, I'm going to—" He stopped in the middle of his sentence. "Say, isn't that John Garreston who just came in with that girl?" he whispered.

"By golly, it is, and some chicken, too."

"Tom, there goes our first case. Anneke Jans can wait."

"Perhaps it's his daughter."

"Daughter? Nothing. Do you get that complexion and the length of that skirt? Nobody's daughter ever looked like that."

"What about it even if she isn't his daughter?"

"What about it! Say, haven't you been reading the newspapers lately? Garretson has been in the news."

"Oh, yes, I remember his wife sued him for a divorce a year or so ago, didn't she?"

"Yes, she sued him, but she didn't get the divorce. She wants that divorce a lot, and he'll come across to keep her from getting it. There's a row, too, in the Traders Bank. Garretson got too much publicity out of his divorce case, and there are rumors that the board would like to see him resign. About one more scandal would fix him there."

While they were whispering, Garretson and the girl passed their table, nodded cheerily to a waiter, and passed into the only stall that was still vacant, which happened to be the one nearest the table where the partners were eating. They pulled the curtain to after them, and about all the partners heard for some time was a low murmuring. Once they heard the girl's voice say, "Now, Howard, you shouldn't," and then a masculine "Sh-h," and her voice sank to an unrecognizable murmur again.

Remington whispered to Talmage, "Did you get what she called him?"

"Yes," his partner returned, "I heard it. I wonder what she thinks the rest of his name is?"

"I don't know, but I'll bet she doesn't suspect it's Garretson."

"You can't get me to take that bet. What's our next move?"

"We've got to find out who the girl is first of all."

"That will be easy. We can trail her from here."

They finished their meal and paid their check. Then Talmage went out and got a taxicab, which he had wait in front of the restaurant for an emergency. About half an hour later, Garretson and the girl left their private room and passed out of the restaurant just ahead of Remington and Talmage, so close in fact that they could hear the couple addressing each other as "Mildred" and "Howard." As they got to the curb, Garretson told the driver of his taxicab, "Take this young lady to 835 Universal Avenue," and handed him a bill.

He also handed the girl a bill. She looked at it, and then said, "Can't you make it a hundred, Howard? I want to buy some curtains and things."

"I can't, Mildred," he replied. "I'm flat till pay day."

Remington and Talmage hopped into their own taxi and Talmage told the driver, "Take us to the Hudson Terminal."

Remington asked his partner after they entered the car, "What now?"

Talmage replied, "We'll have to talk it over. We've got her first name and her address. We couldn't get more than that if we followed her home. We'll give her plenty of time to get there and then go see her. Meanwhile we'll have to have an alibi. Let's go to the movies on Park Row. We can talk on the way over, stay there for a few minutes, and then go up to call on Miss Mildred."

They got out at the Hudson Terminal, walked down one incline and up another.

"We've got to be very careful on this," Remington remarked. "Garretson's probably been held up before, and he's on to the game. We'll go to the movies for a few minutes and then hustle uptown to see the young lady. We must get her to come and see us of her own accord, of course. Then we'll forget about this trip uptown, and when you get down to the office tomorrow morning you can tell Miss Keyes about the fine movie we saw together tonight. That'll be your part of the game. I'll do the talking to—Miss Mildred whatever-her-name-may-be to night."

They came to the theater just then, bought tickets and went in, but they came out in a few minutes and took the subway uptown. The house in Universal Avenue was a five story walk-up apartment house for ten families. An examination of the names in the hall showed that one "Mildred Long" lived in the third floor front apartment.

"There's our client," Remington said as he pushed the bell.

The lock clicked, and they walked upstairs. As they reached the third floor, an apartment door was opened by the Mildred for whom they were looking. She looked at them in surprise, then invited them in.

Remington told her, "My name's Remington, Miss Long, and this is my partner, Mr. Talmage. We're lawyers. You know John Garretson, don't you?"

"Never heard of him."

"Are you sure?"

"Say, who do you think you are around here asking me questions? Sure, I'm sure. I don't know anybody by that name."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Long, but I am greatly interested in John Garretson, and I know you know him, for I saw you with him early this evening."

"You saw me with him this evening!"

"Yes, at Hong Low's."

"I was at Hong Low's this evening, but not with anybody named, what was that name?"

"Garretson, John Garretson."

"No, I wasn't there with him."

"Then, whom were you with?"

"None of your business so far as I know. Who's this Garretson man?"

"My dear young lady, John Garretson is the president of the Traders Bank."

"That's a good one on you. The fellow I was with was Howard Andrews, private secretary to the president of the Traders Bank. And you thought he was the president of the bank! The joke's certainly on you. I wish he was president of the Traders Bank. He's going to marry me, though *he* doesn't know it yet. I'd be in some soft, married to a bank president."

"I'm afraid, Miss Long, that the joke is on you. That man was John Garretson."

"Garretson, nothing! I know better. He's Howard Andrews. As if I didn't know him well enough to know his name."

"Miss Long, where does he live?"

"I don't know."

"Did you ever write to him as Andrews?"

"No, he said not to write to him."

"Did you ever call him up at the bank?"

"No, he said he was right in the president's office, and the president wouldn't allow personal telephone calls."

"He certainly was right in the president's office. He's been stringing you, Miss Long. It's Garretson all right, and he's not going to marry you, for he's married already."

"Oh, you're all wrong. That fellow is Howard Andrews, not John Garretson. How could he be married when he's been

keeping company with me regularly for months?"

"But, Miss Long, I know John Garretson, and I know that the man who tells you he is Howard Andrews is lying to you. Perhaps he has lied to you in other particulars. Did he tell you that he has ten million dollars in his own name?"

"Ten million dollars! Ten million! You're crazy, man. Why he's so hard up now that I have to keep my job downtown to earn money to help pay for the furnishings of the apartment we're going to have after we get married."

"Then, Miss Long, he's as tight as he is rich."

"You can't be right, but, if you are, he's some piker, that's what he is. How do you know who he is?"

"Miss Long, I've known John Garretson by sight for a dozen years, and I'm not mistaken. We even keep our money in the Traders Bank. But, to be sure, you know where the bank is. Every morning about half past nine, John Garretson drives up to the bank in a limousine bearing his initials. Suppose you get down there to-morrow morning and wait for him. If you recognize him and are sure that your Howard Andrews is actually John Garretson, just you come across the street to our offices at 101 Main Street, and we'll see what we can do for you.

"However, Miss Long," he continued, "we are most reputable practitioners. We have never engaged in such a matter as this before. You must come to us entirely unsolicited. So when you come into the office you are to state that you do not know either of us. Please be sure to do this. Otherwise we will not see you and cannot help you."

"If you're right about this, Mr. Remington, that piker will suffer. The idea of letting me work! The idea!"

"Good night, Miss Long," the partners said as they went out.

II.

ANDERSON TALMAGE was gazing out of the front windows of his office the next morning telling Ethel Keyes of the interesting movie he and Remington had seen the previous evening. She wondered at a smile that flitted across his face, but she had not seen the limousine that drew up at the curb on the other side of the street, and even if she had, she could not have known the thoughts that were in her employer's mind.

Talmage had returned to his room, and the Trinity chimes had just sounded ten o'clock when the door to the Remington & Talmage offices was opened by Mildred Long. Miss Keyes looked up questioningly from her desk.

"Whom do you wish to see?" she asked.

"Is Mr. Remington in?" the visitor asked.

"Yes, what is your name?"

"I'm Miss Long."

"Does he know you?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Have you an appointment?"

"No, but I must see him."

"Sit down, please. I'll see if he is busy."

Miss Keyes knocked at Remington's door, and on being asked to enter, did so.

"Lady to see you, Mr. Remington," she said. "Her name's Miss Long."

"Does she know me, Miss Keyes?" he asked.

"No, sir, but she says she must see you."

"What's she like—old, young, good-looking, or what?"

"She's very young, Mr. Remington, and quite good-looking."

"Ask her to step in, please, and ask Mr. Talmage to come in here, too."

Miss Keyes went out and held the door open for Miss Long.

Remington stood up. "You wish to see me, Miss Long?"

"Yes," she said. "I want to see you if you're Mr. Remington."

"Well, I'm Remington all right."

Just then Talmage stepped into the room, and Remington continued, "And this is my partner, Mr. Talmage."

He turned to Talmage and said, "Tal, this is Miss Long."

Then Remington asked, "What can we do for you, Miss Long?"

"You can help me in a law case."

"What kind of a case, Miss Long?"

"How do I know? That is your business, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course, it is our business. But what is your law case all about? Are you being sued, or are you going to sue somebody?"

"I'm going to get some money from somebody, that's what."

"Get some money from somebody? Who is this somebody?"

"It's John Garretson, as you well know."

"As we well know? What do you mean by that, young lady?"

"Oh, all right, have it your own way. It's John Garretson, president of the Traders Bank."

"John Garretson, of the Traders Bank! Impossible! It's impossible!"

"Aw, cut it out. I guess you know as much about it as I do."

"My dear young lady, what are you driving at? What do you mean by saying we know as much about it as you do?"

"What do I mean? As if you don't know."

Talmage interrupted. "Mildred Long," he said in a low voice, "if it hadn't been for us, you wouldn't have had any claim against John Garretson at all, and if you don't remember that we never met you before, we won't handle the matter for you."

"Oh, all right, if you insist."

"Now, if you'll remember that, you can go ahead and let us have the story."

"This fellow Garretson has been going around with me. He said his name was Andrews."

"What do you mean by going around with you," inquired Remington.

"Say, are you asking that question because you are ignorant or because you think you ought to ask it?"

"Young lady! Young lady!"

"If you don't know what I mean you haven't as much sense as I think you have."

"Do you mean to imply that he was engaged to you?"

"What do you mean, engaged?"

"Did he ask you to marry him?"

"Well, he never asked me in so many words, but he certainly led me to believe that he was going to marry me."

"What did he do or say?"

"Well, he and I were furnishing an apartment out in Jersey—in Newark—to which we were to move next month. I don't know what he expected, since I understand now that he is already married, but I know darn well that I thought he was going to marry me."

"Then you base your right of action against him on an implied promise arising out of a course of conduct?"

"I don't know what all those words mean, but I want you to get me a wad of his money because he is a skunk and a piker. You put that in as fine legal language as you can. That's your business; you're lawyers. But get me the money, that's all."

"Miss Long, let's get down to facts. You weren't specifically engaged to Mr. Garretson, that's so, isn't it?"

"That's right, but he must have intended to marry me, or at least I thought he did."

"Who is there who knows of his relations with you?"

"There isn't any one who knows of John Garretson's relations with me, but I can bring men and girls who know of Howard Andrews's goings on."

"Do these people know him well enough to identify him?"

"Do they? You bet they do—they know all about him."

"All right. Now, when did all this commence?"

"About six months ago."

"Have you seen much of each other since then?"

"Have we? Not more than three or four times a week. He's rushed me some."

"Have you and he had any other apartment than the one you rented in New Jersey?"

"No, that's the only one."

"And you never lived in that?"

"That's right."

"Who paid the rent for this apartment?"

"He did. The landlady is one of the people who know him. Of course, she knows him as Howard Andrews."

"I don't care about that. You said something about your contributing toward the expenses of furnishing the apartment.

" That's what makes me mad. He said he was so hard up that I'd have to help out. Why, even yesterday he gave me only fifty dollars for some curtains and things after promising me a hundred."

" You say you haven't lived in the apartment in Jersey?"

" That's right. We've had it only a month, and we're just beginning to get it comfortably furnished. Say, I wonder what he thought he could get away with? Married already, was he? You can bet I'll fix him."

" Miss Long, I think you have a perfect case of breach of promise against Mr. Garretson."

" I think so myself."

" How much damages do you think would recompense you for the way he has treated you?"

" What do you think you can get for me?"

" I don't know, but we ought to get at least twenty-five thousand dollars from him, out of which we would want ten thousand for our services."

" Say, if you can get me fifteen thousand dollars, go to it, and don't waste any time. I need the money."

" All right. I'll call Miss Keyes to take your statement, but please don't interrupt me during the dictation. I know the facts that are necessary for you to be successful, and you had better leave the narration of them all to me."

He stepped out of the room and returned with Miss Keyes. He started to dictate: " Memo. of statement made to Thomas Remington and Anderson Talmage this third day of January, 1919. Paragraph. My full name is Mildred Long. I live at 835 Universal Avenue, Borough of Manhattan, New York City. I am—"

He turned to his client and asked, " How old are you, Miss Long?"

" Twenty-two."

He continued: " I am twenty-two years old. I met John Garretson about six months ago. He told me his name was Howard Andrews, and that he was employed by the Traders Bank, that he was secretary to the president of the bank."

He interrupted the dictation to ask another question, " When did you rent this apartment in Newark, Miss Long?"

She told him they had rented it on the first of December and had been furnishing it since, and he continued:

" On December first he and I rented an apartment in Newark, New Jersey. We were to be married and move into it as soon as we had it fully furnished. I have been saving everything I could out of my salary as a stenographer and have put it into household furnishings. He told me that he was very hard up, and so I have put about as much money into the furnishings as he has."

" That is right, isn't it, Miss Long?" he asked.

" Every word of it," she replied.

" Take this, Miss Keyes. Paragraph. Two months after I met him he asked me to marry him, telling me that he was tired of living as a bachelor and that he felt the need of a wife and of a real home. I told him I would have to have time to think the matter over, and he told me to take all the time I wanted. Two days afterward he asked me if I had come to a decision, and I told him then I would marry him. He was delighted, apparently, but said that we would have to wait until about the first of the year, for he expected a promotion at the bank. Paragraph. Yesterday, while in Hong Low's Restaurant in Chinatown, he informed me that he would not marry me. That made me suspicious, as he gave me no reason for not marrying, and in fact he refused to give any reason. I then made some inquiries, and I found out, much to my surprise, that he is John Garretson, president of the Traders Bank. I stood out in front of the bank this morning and saw him get out of his automobile and enter the bank. Paragraph. The following people have met me with Mr. Garretson and know of his relations with me, although they know him as Howard Andrews. Tabulate these, Miss Keyes."

He turned to Miss Long and said: " You give her the names, please."

Miss Long then said: " First, the landlady, Mrs. Adolph Aaronsohn, then Matilda Matthews, my pal, Leong, the waiter in the restaurant. We used to go there a

couple of times a week. Then there are Jack Raymond, Russell Swout, Margaret Campbell." She hesitated a moment and asked: "Isn't that enough, Mr. Remington?"

"Oh, I guess so."

And then he added: "That statement is entirely true, isn't it, Miss Long?"

"Absolutely," she said. "It's even better than I could do myself."

"Then, Miss Keyes," he said, "you had better write that out at once, and we can have Miss Long sign it before she leaves. You had better make three copies of it. And by the way, you had better make a memorandum of the terms under which we are to handle this case. Just take this:

"Messrs. Remington & Talmage. Dear Sirs. I wish you to handle my claim against John Garretson, alias Howard Andrews. You are to take it entirely on a contingent basis. I am to pay you nothing more than your actual disbursements unless you collect something from Mr. Garretson for me. In the event of your collecting anything, you are entitled to retain forty per cent of the amount recovered as your fee. It is understood that you have authority to settle with him for any sum not less than twenty-five thousand dollars. You are not to settle for anything less than that sum without first consulting me."

He turned to Miss Long and asked: "Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes," she agreed.

"All right," he said to the stenographer. "Make two copies of that please."

The two documents were quickly written out, and Miss Long left the office. The partners then called Miss Keyes in, and Talmage dictated a letter which was short and to the point. It read:

JOHN GARRETSON, ESQ.,
102 Main Street, New York City.

DEAR SIR:

Miss Mildred Long has asked us as her attorneys to write to you. She tells us that she became engaged to you several months ago under the name of Howard Andrews, and that you have repudiated the engagement. Before we bring a court action against you, we thought it only fair to bring the matter to your attention so that, if you wished, the affair might be discussed out of court. May we suggest to you that either you or your attorney get in touch with Mr. Remington, of this firm, not later than Thursday of this week?

Yours very truly,
REMINGTON & TALMAGE.

The first thing Thursday morning a telephone call was put through into Remington's office. Miss Keyes told him that it was from Canfield & Victor, and Remington's eyes twinkled, for Canfield & Victor had long been attorneys for the Traders Bank.

As the connection was made, a voice said: "This is Victor—Richard A. Victor. I am the attorney for John Garretson. I want to see you about a letter he has just had from you."

"Yes," Remington replied. "I know all about that matter. When do you want to come over here?"

"Come over there? I want you to come over here, and I want you to come just as fast as you know how."

"Oh, yes? Good-by." Remington hung up the receiver.

Then he turned back to his desk. An hour passed, and again Victor was on the wire.

"Is that you, Remington?" he asked.

"Yes, this is Remington."

"I thought you were coming over to my office."

"Where did you get that idea? I never said that I was coming. If you want to talk about that matter, I shall be in my office until twelve o'clock. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver again, and then went to the outer office.

"Miss Keyes," he said, "if Mr. Victor calls up again, I am too busy to talk to him on the telephone. Please tell him so."

Twice in the course of the morning, Remington had the satisfaction of hearing Miss Keyes say over the telephone: "I am sorry, Mr. Victor, but he says he is too busy to talk with you on the telephone."

At a quarter of twelve, Richard Victor came into the outer office.

"I want to see Remington," he grunted. "Tell him Richard Victor is here to see him."

Miss Keyes went into Remington's office,

" Mr. Remington," she said, " Mr. Victor is outside and wants to see you."

" Ask him to wait for a few minutes, and then I 'll see him. Meanwhile ask Mr. Talmage to come in here."

The girl went out, and a minute or two later Talmage came into Remington's room.

" Holy smoke, Tom, who's the cheerful old bear outside?"

" That, Tal, is Garretson's attorney, Richard A. Victor."

" Say, he seems stirred up."

" Does he?" Remington smiled a little to himself.

Then he stepped to the door and said: " Come in, Mr. Victor."

And as Victor came in, he added: " I am Thomas Remington, and this is my partner, Mr. Talmage."

There was an obvious failure on the part of Victor to offer a hand to either partner. But Remington added as suavely as possible: " Be seated, please, Mr. Victor."

" No," Victor snapped, " I won't be seated. What the hell do you mean by writing a blackmailing letter like this to my client, John Garretson, on behalf of a blackmailing woman?"

Remington got up out of his seat, walked over to the door, opened it, turned to Victor and then said: " Good day, Mr. Victor."

Victor looked at him, gulped a moment, and sat down.

" I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I am afraid I lost my temper."

" You have gone too far, Mr. Victor," Remington said, " for us to try to negotiate. No man can accuse us or a client of ours of blackmail and then expect to have us go on negotiating. You might as well get out, for we refuse to have anything more to say to you."

Victor got up and started toward the door. As he passed out he growled: " All right, if you'd rather fight, let's fight."

As he disappeared, Remington said to his partner: " Well, Tal, now we've got to get our papers out in a hurry. I want Garretson served before he gets back from lunch. That remark of his attorney is going to cost him just ten thousand dollars. Come, let's get busy."

By one o'clock the summons and complaint in a breach of promise action were typewritten and in the hands of the best process server in New York for service upon the banker. At two o'clock the process server was back in the office and reported that Garretson had been served. While Remington was still talking to the process server, Miss Keyes tapped on his door and asked if the embargo was still on Victor for telephone calls. Remington told her it was.

He chuckled as he heard her say over the telephone: " I am sorry, Mr. Victor, but he will not speak to you."

In less than fifteen minutes Victor's senior partner, Canfield, was announced as calling on Remington.

" Ask him to come in, Miss Keyes," Remington replied to the announcement.

Miss Keyes opened the door and said: " Mr. Canfield."

Canfield introduced himself, and then Remington called Talmage in and introduced him.

" I have here," Canfield began, " a summons and complaint in an action brought by you on behalf of your client Mildred Long against John Garretson. What does your client want?"

" She asks for thirty-five thousand dollars damages."

" I know that. I have read the papers. Now, what does she want, and what will she take?"

" The complaint states that her damages come to thirty-five thousand dollars. That is the sum she wants, and that is the sum she will take."

" That is ridiculous, Mr. Remington. No jury would ever give her that amount."

" We are quite willing to take our chances on a jury. I just want you to read a statement she has given us of the facts in this situation. I have it here on my desk."

He shuffled the papers around for a minute or so, and then having located the statement, he handed it to Canfield.

" There it is. Just read that, please."

Canfield took the statement and read it through carefully. As he finished he murmured to himself: " The damn fool."

Then he turned to Remington and asked: "The summons and complaint haven't been filed yet?"

"No. I was planning to send them up to the county clerk's office to-morrow morning."

"You are sure your client won't take anything less than thirty-five thousand dollars?"

"I am absolutely certain of it."

"If we pay the money, what do we get?"

"I'll discontinue the action without costs and get you a general release from our client."

"But how do you know she won't start it again?"

"The general release will be a good defense to any subsequent action, won't it?"

"That's all right, but with a woman like—"

"Mr. Canfield, stop right there. Your partner made the mistake this morning of referring to blackmail. We put him out of the office, and I tell you frankly that the same thing will happen to you if you try anything of the same kind. There is no blackmail here. This firm, even if it is not as large as yours, is absolutely all right. As a matter of fact, I doubt very much whether we would represent the defendant in this action under any circumstances."

"I beg your pardon. May I use your telephone a moment, Mr. Remington?"

"Certainly. Do you wish us to go out so that you can talk without interruption?"

"No, that won't be necessary."

In a moment or two he was connected with Garretson, who was apparently awaiting him at his office.

"John," he said into the telephone, "this is Harlan. They won't take a penny less than thirty-five thousand dollars."

He stopped talking then and listened for a few minutes. Then he began again: "No, there isn't any use. They won't take a penny less than that. If you don't pay up, the papers will go on record to-morrow morning, and every newspaper in New York will have the story." There was a short pause, and then he finished: "All right, John. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver and turned to the partners.

"You win," he said. "When can you get me the general release?"

"Suppose you prepare it yourself; then you will be perfectly satisfied. I shall telephone Miss Long to come down here the first thing in the morning, and if you will send the check over here with the release about ten to-morrow, I shall have the release executed by her and will sign the discontinuance myself and deliver them in exchange for the check."

"All right. It will be over here by ten in the morning. I assume that my firm's check will be acceptable to you. To whose order should it be drawn?"

"Certainly your check will be all right. Just draw it to the order of Mildred Long."

Then he went out, and as he left, Remington told Miss Keyes to call Miss Long up and ask her to drop in at the office next morning.

At ten o'clock the next morning there were two outsiders in the office of Remington & Talmage. In the outer office sat one of the junior partners of Canfield & Victor, the biggest law firm in the financial district, holding in his hand a check for thirty-five thousand dollars, while inside Remington's office Miss Mildred Long was going over the situation with the two partners.

"Miss Long," Remington said, "I believe that we have arranged a settlement of your claim against Mr. Garretson on a basis which will be perfectly agreeable to you."

"Good heavens, you haven't got my fifteen thousand already, have you?"

"No; but the young man outside holds in his hand a check for thirty-five thousand dollars, of which twenty-one thousand will belong to you if you will sign a release of all your claims against John Garretson."

"Thirty-five thousand dollars, twenty-one thousand dollars! I thought we were going to get only twenty-five thousand."

"Well, Mr. Talmage and I thought that you would not object if we charged him an extra ten thousand for being such a piker and making you work. You don't object, do you?"

" Object? Look out that I don't kiss both of you for it."

" Talmage," Remington remarked, " we will have to look out for this young lady. She may be dangerous, as Mr. Victor seemed to imply."

Then he turned to Miss Long. " Just read that, please. If it is satisfactory, you can sign it there on the last line, and I'll take your acknowledgment, and we'll go and get the thirty-five thousand dollars."

She finished reading it, and said: " Now, I've read it through, what the dickens does it all mean—' remise, release and forever quitclaim,' and all that bunk?"

" That means, Miss Long, that you solemnly give up any and all claims you ever had against Mr. Garretson."

" Oh, is that all? Give me the pen."

She signed the document while the partners looked on in shocked silence.

" You didn't believe all that bunk I told you, did you?" she asked.

" Well," replied Remington, " we didn't think it made much difference whether or not it was true."

They then took the documents out to the young man waiting in the outer office and exchanged them for the check. As he left the office they both returned to Miss Long in Remington's office.

" How do you want your twenty-one thousand dollars, Miss Long?" Remington asked.

" Suppose you give me three thousand dollars in cash. There is going to be some spending from 835 Universal Avenue today. And give me a check for the rest."

Remington drew two checks on their account at the Traders Bank, one for three thousand dollars payable to bearer, and the other for eighteen thousand dollars payable to Mildred Long. As he finished, his partner said to him: " Tom, won't you step into my office for a minute? I'm sure Miss Long will excuse us."

" Certainly," the young lady replied, " I'll excuse you if you'll leave that check with me so that I won't think it is all a dream. But you needn't go out of the room to talk. With that check in front of me I'm deaf, dumb and blind to everything else."

The partners, however, bowed and went into Talmage's room. As soon as the door was closed behind them, Talmage asked: " Tom, do you think it wise to put these checks through the Traders Bank, where John Garretson can scrutinize them?"

" I don't know why not," Remington answered. " We haven't anything to hide."

" But won't he find out that we got a fourteen thousand dollar fee?"

" What do we care if he does, Tal? The whole transaction is perfectly clean and aboveboard. A forty per cent contingent fee in such a case isn't so large as to be unconscionable. I think even Garretson will agree that the efficiency we showed in the collection would entitle us to a substantial payment."

" I don't know, though."

" You're wrong this time, Tal. The checks must be put through the Traders Bank this time. I don't contemplate that this transaction will ever be investigated, but it might be. Suppose we put the money through another bank. How could we explain why we had not put it through our regular account? Some one would be sure to whisper something about ' guilty consciences.' No, as I see it, this transaction, more than any other, must be put through Garretson's bank. Then, if it's investigated, they'll say, ' I guess there was nothing wrong with that, or they'd never have put it through that bank.' "

" You're right, Tom. We'll put the checks through as you have drawn them."

They returned then to Remington's room, and the three of them went across the street to the Traders Bank. The check for thirty-five thousand dollars was deposited, and then Miss Long cashed her check for three thousand dollars and had the check for eighteen thousand certified.

Remington shook hands with the girl at the door of the bank. " Good-by," Miss Long," he said.

" Good-by, Mr. Remington," she said. " I'm not going to forget how you treated me. I often know of girls who want to make use of good respectable lawyers *like you and Mr. Talmage,* and you'll probably hear from me again." She turned to Talmage and said: " Good-by, Mr. Talmage."

Origin of Sport

CRAPS

By W. O. McGEEHAN

THE origin of the great indoor pastime of craps is more or less shrouded in mystery. Because of its popularity in the South it was at first supposed that the game originated somewhere on the dark continent. The term African Golf as applied to craps appeared to indicate that it was one of the primitive pastimes of the natives of Africa.

This seems to be disproved by the fact that the Stanley Expedition did not come upon a single tribe in Africa which even knew the rudiments of the game of craps. Ivory there was in abundance, yet these primitive people lacked the ingenuity to fashion it into cubes and place the spots on them.

According to a hitherto unpublished manuscript it seems that the game was developed in Athens. The manuscript also gives some further insight into the domestic infelicities of the noted philosopher Socrates and his wife Xantippe. It is well known that Xantippe used to hurl things at her husband, including antique Greek rolling pins, bronze flatirons and some classic Grecian pottery.

It seems that one day after Xantippe had shied all the household effects at the philosopher, Socrates continued to make those philosophical cracks which had been rousing her ire. No lady who calls herself a lady can listen to a philosopher for any length of time without expressing herself. Being married to a philosopher is enough to develop a temper in any woman. However, this is not vindication of a lady who appears to have been given the worst of it, but a scientific work upon the pastime of craps.

THE FIRST LOADED DICE.

Casting her eye about for something else to hurl at her husband in a justifiable attempt to shut off the flow of his philosophy, Xantippe began to pry bricks from the wall. It is an architectural fact that the bricks in the home of Socrates were cube shaped. The bricklayers of the period, being careful workmen, used to mark their bricks in order that they should be laid with considerable exactness. Instead of nume-

rals, for their greater ease they marked them with spots up to six, the Grecian cube, like other cubes, having exactly six sides.

Boiling over with wrath at a particularly philosophical crack made by her spouse, Xantippe seized a brick in each hand and hurled the pair at her husband. Instead of running to the nearest café for refuge as an unphilosophical husband might have done, Socrates peered down at the bricks. He noted that one brick read three while the other read two. This in the modern language of craps is called Phœbe dice.

For some moments Socrates pondered and stroked his beard. Then he picked up the bricks and handed them back to his wife. "Would you be so kind, my dear," he said, "as to throw these bricks again and see what number they will make?"

Noting his apparent imperturbability the lady hurled them with greater vehemence than before. This time both bricks bounced from the head of the philosopher and he was slightly stunned. For a moment he saw nothing but stars. Then he peered once more at the cubes. This time they read five and three.

"I'll bet you a new fillet you can't get five before you get seven," he said.

The lady accepted the challenge as any lady would, and she began to hurl the bricks with greater vehemence than ever. Finally Socrates, who scrutinized them carefully every time they fell, burst into a shout of: "Craps! It is my turn with the bricks."

XANTIPPE MAKES A PASS.

This sounded fair enough, and Xantippe yielded the bricks to her spouse, who threw an eight, and after a few more passes, got the eight again.

SOCRATES GETTING THE IDEA OF THE GALLOPING DOMINOES.

From then on Socrates and his wife played the game called "Craps," because of the remark which involuntarily escaped Socrates when Xantippe shot the first seven.

Socrates invited his neighbors to join in the pastime, and they soon got playing for small stakes. Some of the Athenians began to complain of the weight of the bricks and the first step toward making the game more universally popular came when dice were cut down to nearly the modern size and fashioned from bone. After this development the dice were commonly known as "The Bones" and the sport was frequently referred to as "rattling the bones."

While the game was being played by Socrates and his neighbors it was a clean sport. It is even recorded that Aristides, who was president of the state of Athens at the time, used to dally with a pair of ivory cubes to pass away the time between the solution of problems of statecraft. Frequently affairs which could not have been settled otherwise were agreed upon after rolling the dice.

The little boys of Athens used to get callouses on their little bare knees as they knelt on the pavements and rolled their dice in childish glee. It is even said that the Greeks did not take the Persians on the field of battle as some historians would have it, but that instead they inveigled them into their camp and won all their armor with the craps dice. After that the Persians surrendered, and when they went to their homes they took samples of the craps dice with them.

The earliest records as to the corruption of the game show that the first man to load a pair of dice was a Phœnician jeweler who came to Athens to introduce a line of gold bricks. He also had a cloak and suit business at Tyre.

This crafty Phœnician introduced the pernicious dice into a friendly game, and in a few hours had Socrates reduced to going about in a barrel. Also he had the neighbor of Socrates, one Diogenes, reduced to living in a tub. You will recall that ever thereafter Diogenes carried a lantern with him looking for an honest pair of dice.

After Socrates had lost all that he possessed and was about to stake Xantippe on one throw of the cubes, he was summoned to go before Aristides to pass upon a problem of state. When he arrived at the palace he was invited to get into the game.

"Let me try these dice," said Socrates innocently, to which Aristides assented politely. Whereupon Socrates began to throw nothing but what the ancient Greeks called naturals and are so called even to this day. After Socrates had thrown seventeen passes, even Aristides, called the Just, began to marvel. Finally he picked up the dice and held them to the light of the lantern of Diogenes.

Aristides gave a cry of rage and split one of the dice open with his sword. A quantity of quicksilver ran out.

"Socrates has loaded the dice," cried Aristides.

For the offense of loading the dice in ancient Athens the penalty was death. The penalty should be the same to-day.

"Because Socrates was a good fellow when he had it he shall choose the manner of his death," said Aristides. The court felt that this was fair enough.

A philosopher to the last Socrates bowed assent.

"If I must die," he said. "I might as well die performing some service for mankind. Let me taste that last supply of sandal leg liquor the Phœnicians ran in."

A sample quart of the treacherous hootch was brought in. Socrates drained it to the last drop, muttered: "Shoot the piece!" and died on the spot.

A monument in the shape of two marble dice with the spots showing a "natural" was erected to his memory. This since was destroyed by vandals who invaded the ancient city of Athens.

This story of Socrates and the dice is disputed by Professor Pretzelbender of Heidelberg, who contends that the sport of shooting craps originated among the very early Teutonic tribes. The professor offered photographs of his own head to prove this theory. It will be noted that the head of the professor forms almost a perfect cube.

His theory is that the old Teutonic warriors would cut off the heads of their captives and keep them about the premises. One day a chief, being far gone in malt liquor, began to roll a couple of the heads along the floor of a spacious hall, and during this idle pastime he evolved the game of craps. This is a quaint theory and it may be that the Teutonic chief of the old days did play some form of craps with the heads of their enemies taken in war, but the rules of the game and the highest development of the sport came into being in Athens.

The game has become a universal one. It can be played anywhere. The only implements needed are the cubes, which have changed little if at all since the time when the impulsive Xantippe in her attempt to bean her spouse threw the first "Phœbe dice."

The author places no credence in the report that a pair of dice were found in the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amen. If such implements were found there it is highly probable that they were dropped by some of the American or African workmen who were engaged in the work of excavating.

If craps had been shot in ancient Egypt the pyramids would have been shaped as cubes. This is irrefutable.

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All druggists and departments sell Hinds Honey and Almond Cream in bottles, 50c and $1.00. Cold or Disappearing Cream, tubes, 25c. Jars, 60c. Traveler size, all creams, 10c each. We mail a sample Honey and Almond Cream for 2c, trial size, 6c. Cold or Disappearing sample, 2c, trial tube, 4c.

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