ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

JAN. 19

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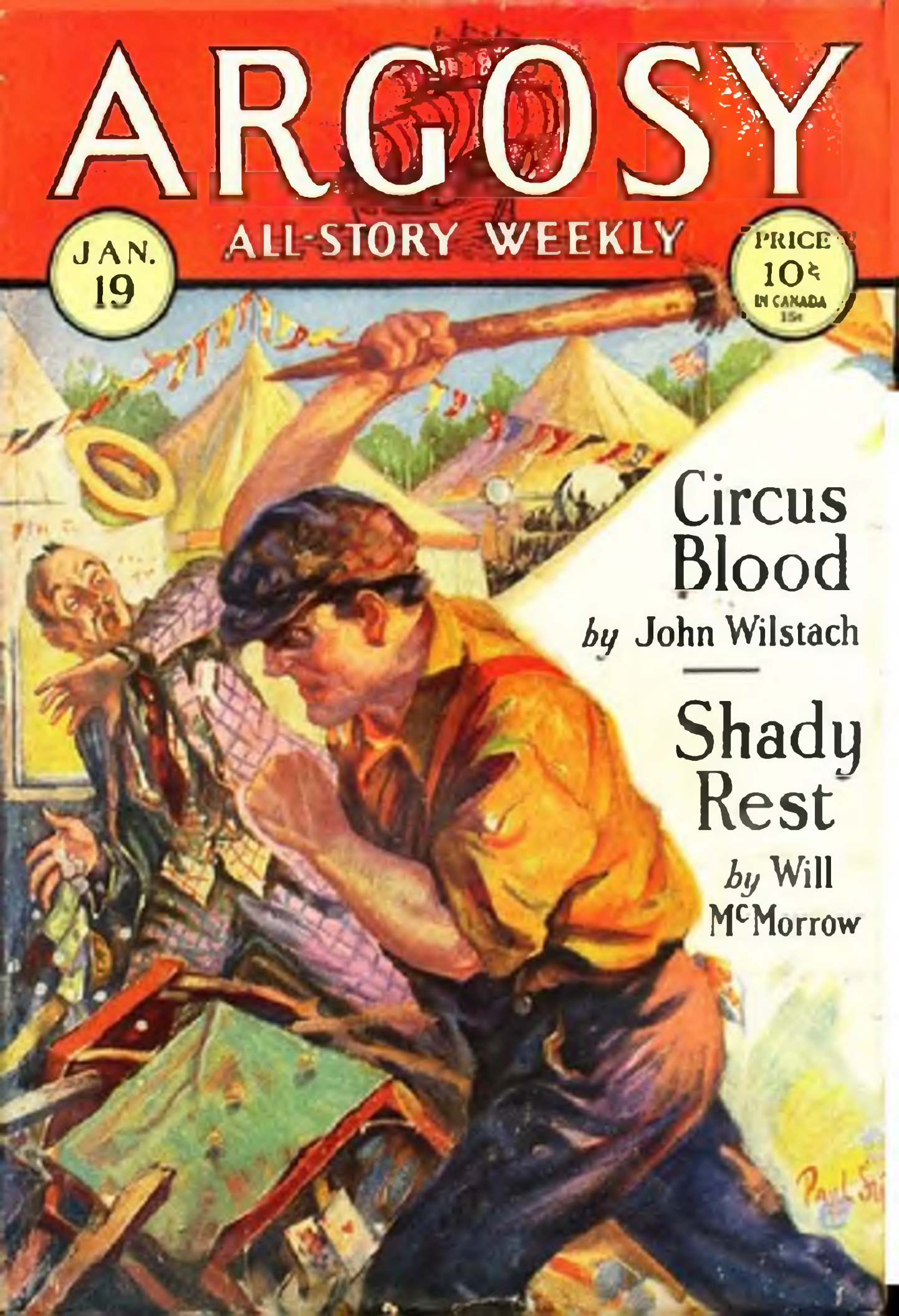

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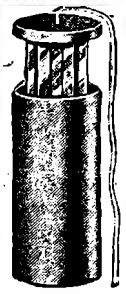

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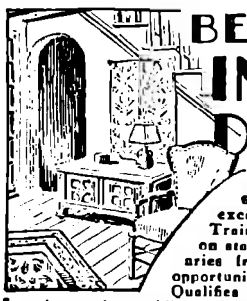

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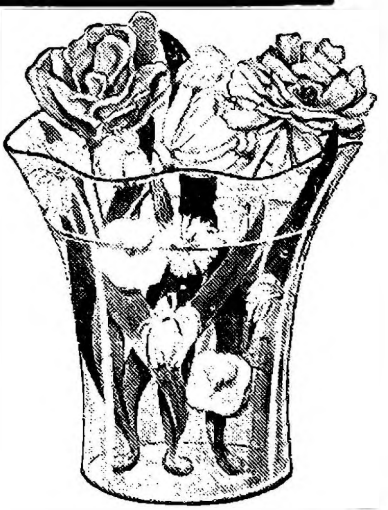

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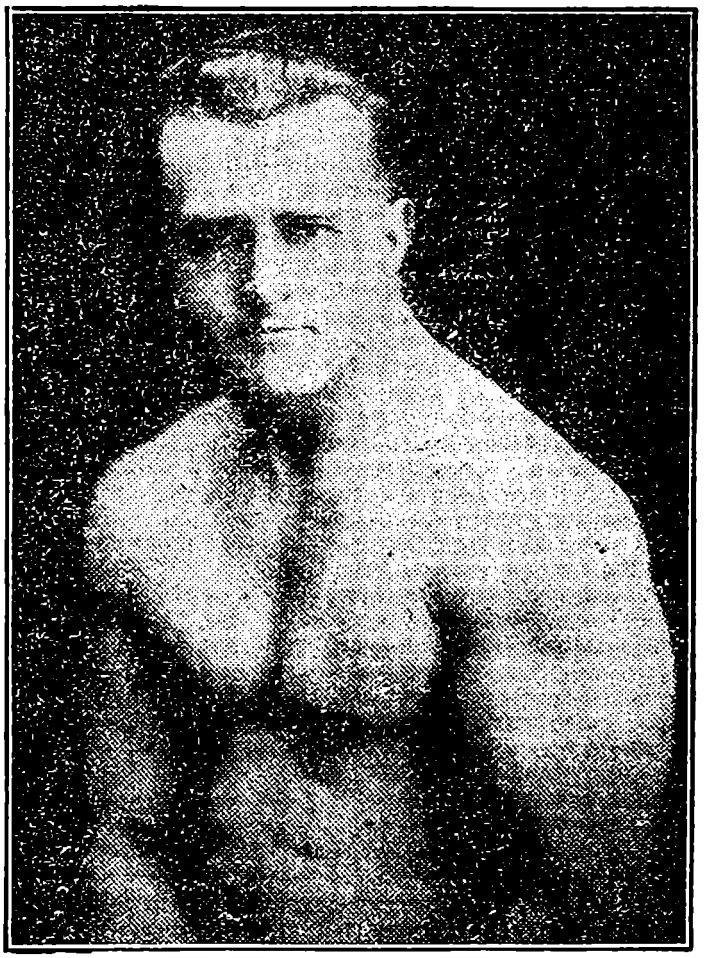

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 200 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 19, 1929 NUMBER 6

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C.2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
PUBLISHED WEEKLY AND COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

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

Entered as second-class matter November 23, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

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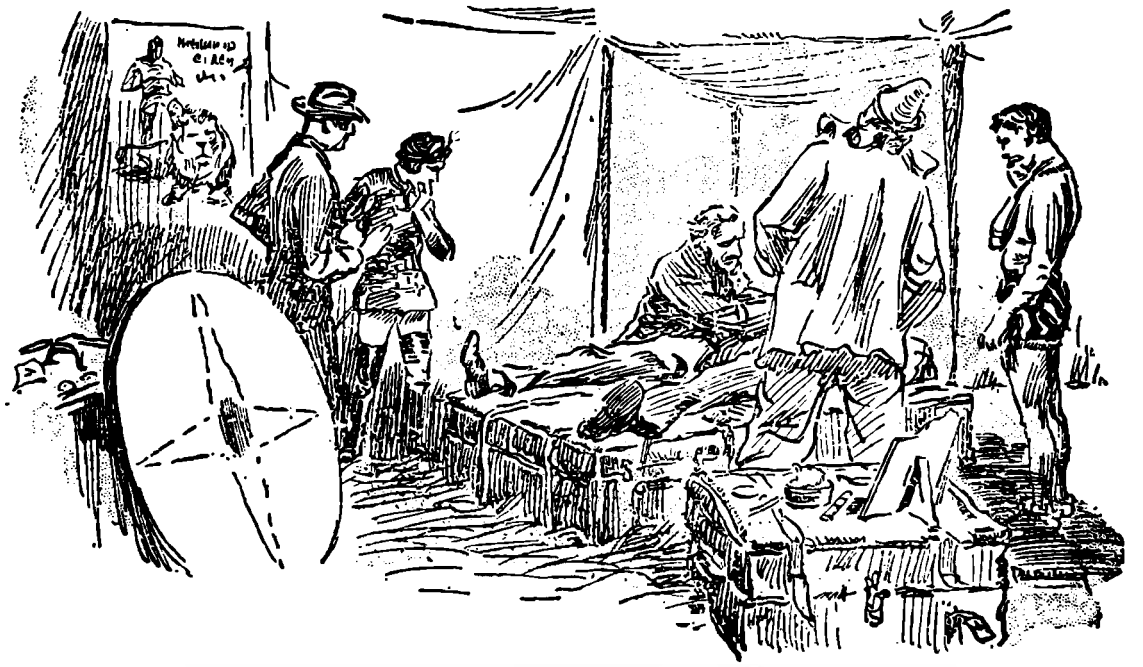
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 200 SATURDAY, JANUARY 19, 1929 NUMBER 6



"This man has been wounded twice," the doctor said gravely

Circus Blood

The Greater Hammond Circus was going to the dogs—and to the crooks in charge—till Hammond blood came to the rescue

By JOHN WILSTACH

Author of "The Outlaw Trail," "Too Much Punishment," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

ON THE LOT.

A SHRILL whistle announced the arrival of the first section of the Greater Hammond Circus into River Junction. The long line of yellow and red cars slowed down with the pressure of brakes, the crunching of wheels, and the rattling of coupling pins. Finally a violent jar brought them to a standstill.

The occupants of the sleepers at the end of the train were rudely aroused. Discipline had a severe test. Kerr Haines, the general manager of the

outfit, was bounced from his lower berth into the aisle, where he sprawled awkwardly, a spectacle in striped pyjamas earnestly trying to do the accident justice with inadequate cuss words. Members of the business staff and performers thrust their heads out from behind green curtains and quickly withdrew them.

There were no outward signs of amusement. It wasn't wise, or even safe, to laugh at Haines. That individual picked himself up and retired behind the curtains of his berth. He emerged shortly, carrying a toilet kit, fully dressed except for his collar. His eyes slate gray and face blue black from a day's growth of beard, his expression was far from pleasant as he strode back to the washroom.

Bart Jones, the official fixer and squeal squarer, was there before him, dousing his head in a bowl. He was thin and lanky and his countenance habitually wore both a hostile and suspicious look.

"Hello, Haines," he growled. "How are you this morning? Have an eye-opener?"

"No, I never start the day that way. Go slow on that stuff."

The other lifted a face dripping with water, the eyes red rimmed and hard.

"Say, pardner, don't get personal with me," he retorted. "I'll treat you like a big mogul in public, never fear. I haven't trouped twenty years for nothing. But when we're alone, I'll act my age. We need each other, don't forget."

"Stow that, and don't be so touchy," replied Haines more mildly. "You know I got rules about likker being on the show."

"Don't worry about my carrying mine." Jones lowered his voice. "I reached Baldwin on the long distance before we pulled out of Greenly last night. He's been putting out queries, and says the chiefs of police of these burgs on our route will let things ride wide open, with reasonable hand greasing."

"Good. Then we're just waiting on the old man. Old Hammond's half blind, crippled with rheumatism, and has a cough nasty enough to carry most men halfway to Arizona. But we can't have a strong show while he is with us."

"No," agreed the fixer regretfully, "but he may go out like a torch. Maybe that new doc he picked up yesterday in Greenly can persuade him to go home. Benny Davis's bunch of sure thing workers is waiting in Chi, ready for the word to catch the rattler."

"Hand-picked bunch of carnival grifters, eh?"

Jones nodded. The conversation was abruptly terminated as several performers sauntered into the room to wash up. Haines shaved quickly, put on his collar and tie, and left the car. As he alighted at the station platform he noticed throngs of idle onlookers, and hastily erected snack-stands

Brownie, the circus mail carrier, passed him with a nod on his way to the post office. He followed at a brisk pace. Walking to the lot, rain or shine, was one of his methods of keeping fit.

A pen and ink map, sent back by Baldwin, the contractor, who arranged the license, always showed the location of the show grounds.

Stepping springily and with the easy carriage of an athlete, Haines did not look his two hundred pounds or forty-five years. A soft felt hat was pulled down over hair black and plentiful. The crow's-feet at the corners of the eyes were common to men abroad in all kinds of weather.

The mouth was strong, firm and ruthless. He did not look capable of petty actions or minor wrongdoing, nor was he. More determined than most men, he had decided, at whatever cost, to further his single-track ambition—to acquire control of the Greater Hammond Circus. The position of

general manager merely whetted his desire.

THE show had left winter quarters at Kerry, New York, on the 1st of April. It was now the 15th. The owner, Al Hammond, for all his sixty-six years, was, as ever, personally in charge, but he was no longer the human threat of the outfit. Physical disability had aged him incredibly since last autumn. He had led a hard life, sparing himself as little as he had others; and the strain had finally told on him. A collapse might be expected any time.

At the last stand Haines had insisted upon taking on a doctor; the show had a vet, good enough for sprains or torn ligaments, but that was as far as he went for humans; his job was to care for the more valuable ring stock.

Awaiting the day when the boss must return to Kerry, Haines and Jones, in cahoots with Baldwin, the advance agent, plotted to change the circus from a "square" outfit to a "gyp" show. Baldwin was to fix local police heads so that it would be safe to operate games of chance, and Jones had wired to Chicago to line up a mob of dips, con men, leather pullers, and no-chance gamblers, all thrown out of work by stranded carnivals unable to contract profitable dates.

Although carnivals had left behind them such a stench that they could no longer return to towns once played, circuses in past years had invariably cleaned up. Hammond's had a reputation of the best.

Haines figured on big money before the end of the season, if the boss was once away. The owner might not have long to live. He had no near relatives in Kerry or elsewhere. The circus would be sold by the estate, giving Haines an inside opportunity to buy.

Crooks and gamblers paid high for various privileges with an important show. The general manager would receive the lion's share. Baldwin and Jones were necessary, but rough stuff couldn't be pulled on the public without his knowledge and consent.

Haines reached the circus lot outside River Junction in a pleasant state of mind.

The boss canvasman, Drummond, had already finished laying out the positions of various tents, using a measure and little painted stakes. He pointed to the positions, and Haines nodded his approval.

The money wagon, first off the train, was already in position. The treasurer, Ned Thorne, opened the front window and lowered a wooden shelf over which tickets would be sold. Hay, feed, loads of meat and provisions were being dumped near the spot picked for the cook tent. All this —ordered fresh by the twenty-four-hour man—would be paid for in cash. And the advertising managers of local newspapers arose early to collect for display space from the circus. The inside of the red wagon, a moving bank, was never without its guard and arsenal.

Thorne nodded to his superior. He was an old-time ticket-seller, dealing straight now, though even Hammond couldn't object to his keeping the money of walk-aways—folks who strode away, in the excitement of the moment, without reaching for their change.

"Keep your fingers limber, Thorne," grinned Haines. "You may have to pay me for the short-change privilege some day."

The ticket-seller started arranging money and tickets, and did not smile. He spoke out of the corner of his mouth coldly:

"Any time you give me permission to hold up the line, get a phony dick to keep 'em moving so fast they stuff the change in their pocket without counting, and let that band over at the kid show keep playing the 'Hurry Up Tune'—why, I reckon, we can talk cold turkey."

"All right," drawled Haines. "It may not be long now."

"And I'll want a couple of gorillas to stamp on the squawks," finished Thorne.

The general manager nodded, adding that department to his potential revenue.

Chain and stake wagons hove in sight. First the cook tent was erected. A gang of razorbacks soon had the ground around the position bristling with stakes. As the canvas went up, the traveling kitchens were unloaded. Cooks started getting breakfast, while the harness and blacksmith tents sprang from the ground; then the menagerie, kid show, and wardrobe and dressing-room tents were rising like magic.

The big top was left to the last. Teams of horses, trained to their work, pulled the high center poles into place. The canvas, carried in sections, was unrolled and laced together while flat on the earth. Then the great reach of canvas billowed upward and was attached to the side poles, all twelve feet high, and equally spaced around the curved outer edge.

Now stable, water tank, cook tent, and blacksmith wagons poured in lines on the lot, and the boss canvasman's first assistant, Turner, acted as traffic cop, giving curt directions and creating order out of chaos.

Haines watched the first of the gilded tableaux wagons lumbering into view. The second section of the train must be in, comprising the menagerie, the ring stock, the seat and stringer wagons, all appliances for performers, their baggage, and a majority of the kinkers themselves. And the last car of all would be Al Hammond's private coach. The owner always rode at the end in order to be in personal charge in case of any accident or breakdown ahead.

The general manager wondered how the old man felt this morning. Posing as one deeply interested in the welfare of the owner, he had promised Dr. Dudley an extra fee if he could persuade his patient to leave the show and return to winter quarters. With everything set it was tough to have Hammond holding up the procession.

CHAPTER II.

EVERYTHING SET.

HAINES need not have worried about Dr. Dudley, who had decided on his advice without any betrayal of a professional conscience. Just now he awaited his patient, looking out of the window of the private car and drumming on the breakfast table with his fingers.

In the compartment Al Hammond's colored body-servant, Tom, helped him dress. Finally the old man faltered out, fumbling in his coat pocket for his spectacles. The circus owner was the wreck of his former self; his large frame was crippled with rheumatism, and he coughed hoarsely, at times, racking his chest.

"Good morning, doctor; I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

The voice had a weak quaver in it.

"Don't worry about me. What kind of a night did you pass?"

"Well, it passed slowly," said Hammond, seating himself with a grimace. "Tom, bring on the coffee; I'm chilly."

The servant brought in breakfast on a tray, and the two men ate in silence, the invalid merely pecking at his food.

"Mr. Hammond," began Dr. Dudley finally, "I have come to a decision. It is a trifle irregular, perhaps, but I am going to tell you the truth."

"About the condition of my health, you mean?"

"Yes, just that. There's no reason beating about the bush—not with a man like you."

"Shoot your piece, doctor. I've stood blowdowns in my time—seen my

big top go up in flames without flinching."

"I'm going to be brutally frank, sir. You must return home at once and give your system perfect rest—or you won't live through the summer, my friend."

"You mean I won't finish the season?"

"Not half the season. Your constitution is run down. Aside from rheumatism you have incipient throat and lung trouble. You need constant care and attention."

"I can buy that," murmured Hammond gruffly.

"Yes. But back home, haven't you any loved ones?"

The patient shook his head.

"My show is my family, my all. This circus has been in charge of some one bearing my name ever since I was a boy; three generations of Hammonds. I'm the third. There is no one trained to take my place. I have a nephew, but—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I thank you, doctor," he said. "The truth hurts, but it is best to get things straight. If you say I can't last out the season, you know. I'll go back to Kerry and put all my affairs in order."

The old man passed his hand over his eyes.

"I must make arrangements," he continued, as if to himself. "If there isn't to be a Hammond in command of this show when I pass on, I'll see that it is disbanded. I'll suffer no chance of the great name being dragged in the dust by others—who'll think of it only as a trade-mark, a money-making come-on. We've put our heart's blood into building up the reputation of this circus, we Hammonds, and the show will stop with the last of the line."

"I admire your spirit, Mr. Hammond," said the physician, "and I don't want to alarm you needlessly. But getting things under way was too much for you. Your constitution demands relaxation."

"All right, I'll take my medicine. The show can go on—without me."

He spoke to his servant. "Tom, run out to the lot and summon Mr. Haines. And stop on your way back at the station and find the best afternoon connection back to Kerry."

The man departed, pleasure in his loyal eyes. Man and boy he had been with his master for twenty years, and knew he could no longer hold up under the railroading with supervising two shows daily.

Tom found the general manager lounging under the marquee, just as all was ready for the street parade. In the golden sunlight the performers were assembling in colorful costumes, some to mount horses, others to ascend menagerie or tableaux wagons.

"Mr. Haines," said Tom, standing at attention, "the big boss wants to see you."

"Yes? Then I'll be down directly. How is Mr. Hammond this morning?"

"The doctor, he done persuade my master to go back home and rest. Says other way he won't be with us at all, not much longer."

Haines turned his head to avoid showing the glitter of triumph in his eyes. "Say I'm on my way," he commanded.

The servant departed, and Haines's eyes sought out Jones, whom he found near the ticket wagon settling a dispute with local citizens over uncontracted billboard locations.

He drew the fixer to one side.

"Everything is jake," he exclaimed in an undertone. "The old man's been persuaded to go home. Get Baldwin on the phone and tell him to strut his stuff. And get contact with that Chi mob and tell 'em to come on. They can be going slow till we get the O K to loosen up. Jones, if we play our cards right, we can rake in plenty; and this show'll be ours almost for the asking."

Ours? Haines meant his; but he believed in being diplomatic.

CHAPTER III.

FOR THE HONOR OF THE NAME.

UPON the general manager's arrival at the private car, Al Hammond signed the necessary papers for Haines to carry on in his absence, in case anything unusual arose demanding supreme authority. He informed his general manager that he was going home for a rest, but he might be back any time.

No words except those on business were exchanged between the two men. The owner had always ruled with a hand of iron, the interest of the show always being held above any personal motive. In returning to Kerry he felt he was leaving the circus without a proper captain, one whose name must be Hammond; but there was no help for it.

Three days afterward, old Hammond's attorney, Martin Berrel, was dispatched on a mission to Syracuse. He had been ordered to persuade young Jack Hammond to accompany him back to Kerry to interview his uncle. All the information the lawyer had was that his client's one remaining blood relative had been last heard of in that city, working on a newspaper. Berrel arrived at his destination at night, and early the next morning verified the clew. Young Jack Hammond was a reporter on the *Evening Star*.

The young man had awakened that morning quite unaware he was slated to have an unusual day. But he was slipped the hot box when he arrived for work at eight bells. He might have known there was something in the wind when the city editor smiled sympathetically at him across his desk.

"Orders to drop three leg-men from the staff, Hammond. I'm using the ax on bachelors who can stand the gaff. Brown, Attley and you will be among the missing on Saturday," he concluded.

"So you've decided a bachelor can starve more painlessly than a married man?" breezily asked Jack.

"Something like that. However, you get an extra week coming, because you'd have had a vacation if kept on."

"Thanks, I'll take it anyway. What's on the books for to-day?"

The reporter got his assignment, and stuffed a few sheets of copy paper into his pocket. As he hustled out of the city room a copy boy caught him by the arm.

"Gent to see you."

The lad pointed to Mr. Berrel, who waited outside the swinging rail.

"I'm just starting on an assignment. If you're not a book agent you can break me the news in the elevator," snapped Jack, as he started on his way.

"Very important," said the gentleman of the law. "This is news I've brought over two hundred miles."

"If you can afford a taxi, you can sing the sweet music in my ears as we make the rounds of the hotels," returned the reporter cheerfully.

They stepped smartly into the elevator.

"What's up that can mean anything to me except a new job?" Jack queried.

"I'm your uncle's lawyer."

"Is he dead?"

"No—but not in the best of health, and that is serious, at his age. He wants to see you on a matter of great concern to him, and perhaps to you. Can you return with me to Kerry at once?"

Jack beckoned to a taxi driver and told him to take them to a certain hotel.

"That depends," he replied. "This job holds until Saturday—two more days. Then I get the gate. Usual spring clean-up. Will uncle stand for the two days' loss to me, and expenses?"

"Yes," returned the lawyer. "I'll assume responsibility for that."

"Fine. The old boy always seemed

hard-boiled to me. Never cared for anything but his danged old circus."

"That's just it," affirmed the lawyer, with a ring of conviction. "But remember that it's a valuable property, and he wants some one bearing the family name in the saddle. Get me?"

"The first time."

"And you're the only one left."

"I'll bite," grinned the reporter, "but I don't know anything about the sawdust and spangles game. However, I'm spending my life taking a chance—have very little else to spend, in fact—so I'm with you."

"I FEEL you won't regret it, my boy," Berrel sank back in the car with a satisfied smile.

"You mean that bringing me back, as Exhibit A, makes your trip successful?" said the other. "Keep your hokum for a jury; I deal in that line myself."

The taxi drew up before the hotel. The reporter leaped out of the cab.

"Wait here till I take a look for a visiting rum sleuth."

"If you don't mind I'll go back to my rooms. Meet you there at—"

"Four o'clock and get a time-table. Guess I can arrange for the newspaper to do without me for the next couple of days. It is doing that little thing voluntarily for the rest of its existence."

He chuckled and breezed through the swinging doors.

At five o'clock Jack Hammond accompanied the lawyer to the station. The paper hadn't murmured at being without his aid for the two remaining days of the week; obligingly they agreed—and the two days would be held out of the pay check that would be forwarded to him.

On the trip to Kerry, Jack was unusually silent. Four years as a newspaper reporter had left him with little reverence, but he had always stood a bit in awe of Uncle Hammond. His father and brother had never agreed, possibly because the former had turned from a showman's career and gone into journalistic work. This Al had taken as evidence of family treachery.

Jack's folks had moved away from Kerry fifteen years before and he hadn't been back since then. Why, he had been a kid in short trousers at the time. As the express thundered along he wondered what was wanted of him. If the lawyer knew he wouldn't tell. The conductor called out their station a little after eleven o'clock.

"Your uncle will be awake, doctor or no doctor," said the attorney.

"Then let's get this over with," said Jack.

He called a jitney and they were driven to the northern outskirts of town. On the border of a vast plain, with a barnlike building here and there, Al Hammond had built a bungalow, combining an office and living quarters. When the two men descended from the car, and the driver was told to wait, lights were still shining from the windows.

Jack hung back a little, which was strange, he thought, for he was perfectly accustomed to being a professional nuisance.

BERREL knocked on the door. Tom opened it, and they followed him down a short hallway to a vast room with an open ceiling and rough crossbeams over their heads. Al Hammond was seated before an open fire, in a well worn dressing gown.

"Don't get up," said Berrel hastily.

"I wasn't intending to do so," growled the old circus man.

He turned to regard his nephew from under lowered eyebrows.

"I see you brought the young whelp with you," was his admission of that young man's presence.

"Yes, I persuaded him," said the lawyer, with a bit of pride in the voice.

"Sit down, the both of you. The doctor says I mustn't excite myself. But I thought you might be along to-

night, and I couldn't go to bed anyway, till the show is loaded."

He laughed a bit, then turned his chair so he could gaze directly at Jack.

"I suppose you wonder why I've sent for you, youngster."

"Yes," returned the other with uncommon diffidence. The old man robbed him of all his flippancy.

"Well, there was never much love lost between your father and me, but you're a Hammond, young-un, and soon you'll be the last of the line." He raised his hand against any protest. "You don't know the circus business, nephew?"

Jack shook his head.

"Maybe you may not understand," Al went on, "but a circus property is only as valuable as its name. At an auction, the entire effects, tents, equipment, cars and all, wouldn't bring any considerable sum. It is the trade-mark, built after years of sweat and strife, that has worth. And I've sworn that when I get my cue to pass out, the Hammond Circus will fold up, too, unless a Hammond worthy of the tradition continues in charge."

Al Hammond leaned forward in his seat, the light from the fire bringing out the deep, sunken lines in his brave old face. He gazed earnestly into Jack's boyish features, noted the skeptical eyes, and the brown hair now being pushed back by a nervous hand.

"I've made my will, my boy, and my lawyer here is named as executor. But I think I may live out the test that I have prepared for you."

"Test?" repeated Jack wonderingly.

"Yes, just that. I assume you'd care to be my heir?"

"Why, I never thought about it."

"Well, my proposition seems a simple one. Join the Hammond circus, somehow, some way, and stay with the outfit for the season. No one must know your real name or what you are. Prove that you have the makings of a showman and are worthy of the name, and I'll put you in charge of the show, the outfit to be yours at my death. That won't be very far off," he said grimly. "If I die in the meantime, Berrel here will be the judge."

This was coming a little fast, even for a reporter.

"You ask me to join on under an assumed name, and if I make good I'll be given the job of running the show, and eventually own it?"

Al nodded.

"But how'll you know what I'm doing?"

"I have a capable pair of eyes and ears on the lot in my absence."

"Stool pigeon?"

"I call him friend."

"You propose a gamble," said Jack, slowly, "but you must have another motive than that of wishing to have a Hammond bossing the show."

"That I have, but it goes hand in hand with the same wish. I feel sure that my general manager, as well as others, would like nothing better than to take the show away from me. Only a Hammond would have the interest at heart to buck and stop them. Boy, this has been a clean show for twenty years; I have kept it such—but now I am on the side-lines. You're the only one I have left to take my place."

His voice faltered a little, and he looked ashamed at exhibiting a trace of sentiment.

"Hell, take a chance, nephew," he said roughly.

"I will!" exclaimed Jack promptly, more stirred than he wished to admit. And his lips, usually curved in a disillusioned smile, met in a hard line.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OBJECT OF SUSPICION.

THERE was silence for a moment, the abashed reaction from a display of feeling. Al Hammond dropped his hands wearily into his lap, but there was a new glitter of confidence in his eyes.

"It's up to you, boy. I have no instructions. Ned Tully, the show detective, is in my confidence, and so is Mrs. Morton, the matron, a substitute mother for the women. You can tell Ned you're working in my interest; but if you are forced to desperate action to save my show, go to her and to her only, and confess who you are. She'll point a way out."

He smiled wanly. "Women are the best keepers of secrets, no matter what you may hear to the contrary. And she is safe from any possible reprisal. Here's the route, and Mr. Berrel here will give you a couple of hundred dollars."

Jack pocketed the cardboard route sheet and arose.

The old man pointed to an old show bill framed on the wall, yellowing at the edges. The date was 1872, the year circuses first abandoned the roads and took to the rails.

"Ever since then, we've been in charge, and you're a Hammond," he said simply. "I can rest quieter now. The show has been loaded and is pulling out for Boydtown. I can hear the rumble of the wheels and the whining from the menagerie cages in the night. You may start at the bottom, son, but remember a place at the top is yours if you display the courage to get there."

WHEN Jack Hammond alighted from the train at Boydtown, at four o'clock the following afternoon, the street leading from the station was deserted. Everybody must be out at the circus grounds. He hadn't shaved for two days; nor had he seen his uncle again after that midnight interview. The lawyer had taken him to the hotel and before he left town staked him to the extent of two hundred dollars.

The growth of stubbly beard was a disguise in that it made him look a bit rough and seedy. His first move was to drop into a second-hand clothing shop near the freight yard, where he discarded his shirt and felt hat, and substituted a flannel one and a black cap. A trifle neater, perhaps, than most roustabouts, but he had with this change rubbed off the gentleman. He could apply for any kind of work and appear to need it.

A few identifying papers he had destroyed. In his pocket he had found another reporter's police and fire card, which he had borrowed one day to cover a three-alarm fire, and never returned. Jack Smith could get another. It might come in handy, and as he had to have a name he'd keep that, too, for the time being.

How he'd attach himself to the circus Jack hadn't the slightest notion. Aside from the fact that it meant so much more to him personally, this was like a difficult newspaper assignment, and assignments were never worked out on any routine basis. One had to take advantage of opportunity, push the foot inside just as the door is about to be slammed.

He had no trouble finding his way to the circus lot. Idlers told the way. An unexpected thrill went through him as he passed a line of wagons, yellow and red, blazoned with his name in golden letters; and then the tented world burst on his eyes.

The midway was almost deserted. The crowd was inside. In front of the kid show, where freaks were pictured on large banners, a ballyhoo man was lecturing to a small group. Under the marquee of the big top stood several men with an air of authority, stationed about ticket boxes. Among them were Kerr Haines and Bart Jones, unknown as yet to the newcomer.

Jack wandered past the vast stretch of canvas, hearing the spirited blare of the wind jammers, passed the cook tent, from which issued appetizing odors, and paused at the blacksmith shop. A man in overalls stood in front of the tent flap, rubbing black scrap in his hands, and then stuffing it into a corncob pipe. His face bore a pleasant

expression, as if at peace with things in general.

"Hello, cap," said the drifter, "can you give me a little information?"

"Sure, a little," answered the fellow with a laugh.

"Things are quiet in my line—dead, you might say. I'd like to get moving. Do you know of any one needing a handy man?"

"Used to hard work?"

"Middling—paperhanger by trade." Jack smiled inwardly. They couldn't catch him up on that.

"Well, stranger, all I knows is that sunners are always picking up and leaving. They join on to bum their way home, and then leave us flat. Might ask the boss canvasman."

"Where might he be found?"

"Ask for Drummond at the cook tent. His buddy is the head steward."

"Thanks," said Jack, and retraced his steps.

He located Drummond, who returned his greeting without enthusiasm, and listened quietly to the plea to be taken on, then eyed the applicant up and down. The latter was no dub physically, having played left half on Syracuse's varsity team; unlike many athletes he hadn't taken on weight after leaving in his junior year because of his father's death.

"Drifter, eh?" queried Drummond.

"I need three squares a day," said Jack simply.

"Married?"

"No."

"Booze fighter?"

"No."

"Then why do you want to pull freight?"

"I can't make a living here."

"Will you ditch us when we near a big city?"

"I'll stick."

"Humph. I don't need a stake driver so bad, but Clarke wants one of my men to double in brass."

"What's that?"

"Oh, hold some job and also play in the orchestry. Means doin' two men's work. Clarke's asking for one of my huskies to act as usher helping seat the unreserved. My boys shy at a uniform, and at anything but heavy manual, which they signs on for. What's your name?"

"Jack Smith. It all sounds O. K. to me."

"All right. Fifty a month and found. One month's pay held out till the end of the season."

"How come?"

"So it 'll cost you something if you quit."

Jack grinned at this persuading clause.

"SEE Clarke before the night show," Drummond ordered. "Afterward I'll put you on a gang tearing down and loading the big top. Come inside and I'll get you a table slip for grub. There's a couple of empty berths in my sleeper, car sixty-six, second section. Get aboard before we pull out."

The new hand registered this rapid-fire information, and left the chuck tent with a card with table and seat number written on it.

"You'll find Clarke dividing up his ushers at seven thirty, in front of the main entrance. He's got a cap with captain on it and a mustache like a trained walrus."

Jack thanked the boss canvasman.

"That face seems familiar," Drummond murmured to himself. "Has a little of the bearing of a dick of some sort. But what do I care, my hands is clean! Clarke 'll stop badgering me for a helper now."

If Drummond's thoughts had stopped there, it might have augured better for the ex-reporter's entry into the circus sphere. But a boss canvasman has lots of time between pitching, striking, and taking down. Not at all in cahoots with Bart Jones, he was yet friendly with him. Heads of departments met on common grounds. He

happened to pass the fixer not five minutes later, in company with Ned Tully, the circus detective.

"You fellows got a murderer or the likes working on the show?" he drawled, intent on a bit of harmless, idle gossip.

"No," said Tully, "how come the question?"

"I recent took on a bird as roustabout and usher for Clarke who's mebbe escaping from justice—or working for it."

"Yeah?" put in Jones. "How do you figure that way?"

Drummond chuckled. "I guess I should be in the dick business an' wearing a badge. This feller says he is a worker, but his hands is soft and white. He wears a cap, jaunty, but his hair's marked over the ears by an iron kelly. How come, huh?"

He laughed, but neither Jones nor Tully joined him. The latter had troubles of his own, and the former wanted no honest detective around the rest of this season; but if the bird was a crook, he would let him alone, or even use him.

The chance remark had planted suspicion of Jack Hammond in the fixer's mind at the very outset. Jones decided to keep an eye on the newcomer; it would be like the owner to keep a slant on things in his absence, and yet not trust anybody with the outfit. The old man was away for good, he thought, but even in his absence he was dangerous while alive.

"Now take a slant at this bird, Tully," Jones said lightly. "You certainly ought to be able to spot a fellow sleuth."

Tully smiled. A slim, dark man, he had sparkling black eyes like buttons, utterly expressionless.

"I'll give him the one, two inspection. But we ain't harboring any criminals, not yet. Drummond was only kidding."

"Sure, I know that, but anybody queer gets my goat." Jones gazed intently at Tully. "Has Haines spoke to you?"

"You mean 'bout a few games and general larceny on the trick?"

"Yep; no harm done, you know, merely sucker baiting."

Tully's face was grim.

"During Hammond's absence I take my orders from Haines. What he says goes with me."

"Don't worry, old-timer, you'll get yours."

"I ain't worryin' none," said Tully cryptically.

The other left him to join Haines at the main entrance. They exchanged a meaning glance and withdrew to one side.

"The mob will be on to-morrow," said Jones, "and Baldwin has sent me a list of towns safe to work, after a shake-down by the police chiefs."

"Fine," murmured the general manager. "You figured privilege prices?"

"Yes, here's the list; comes to about two grand a week."

Haines whistled. "Not bad, not bad at all."

Then he was told of the questionable character Drummond had signed on. And they went into conference about finding exactly who the stranger might be. If strong-arm methods had to be used, that would be all right, too.

MEANTIME, quite oblivious of being a suspect, Jack strolled about, taking in the scents, sounds and sights of the circus. After the show let out he joined a hard-faced crew of razorbacks hastening toward the cook tent. He took his assigned seat and enjoyed a substantial meal. At seven o'clock he waited before the entrance to the big top until a small squad of men straggled to one side, all wearing blue, gold-braided uniform coats and hats. Then the man with the walrus mustache appeared, and the recruit stepped forward.

"Mr. Drummond told me to report for work as usher."

"Good," said Clarke, "I'm short-handed. I guess I got a coat and hat to fit you inside. You'll seat the unreserved section. Only one rule: fill the highest rows first—make 'em climb up."

"Yes, sir, I think I understand," replied Jack.

As he followed the head usher inside he was unaware of the keen scrutiny of Jones and Haines.

"There's something phony about that bird," said the latter. "He's no rum-dum, and he speaks like an educated man. For fifty a month? Don't make me laugh, my lip's cracked."

"I won't."

"Better send him to the cleaners tonight. You got the men."

"I'll say so, and they're no talkers. I know enough to keep 'em that way."

The two confederates exchanged close-lipped smiles. Haines was like a steel trap, and Jones had the restrained manner of a restive panther.

While they talked Jack had been given a coat much too big for him, which he slipped on over his own. The peaked hat fitted. He soon caught onto the trick of directing the holders of blue stubs toward the top seats, when they swarmed in over the sawdust hippodrome track. It was evident, with no definite aisles, that the section must be filled from the upper planks down. Indeed, he became so interested directing the grown folks and helping swing up the children, that he was surprised when only a few more people could be squeezed into the black mass of humanity, and the show was on.

Crouched on one knee Jack watched the performance for a time, but he had seen others of a similar nature, and only followed one act that held his attention thrillingly. A big round cage was the stamping ground of a dozen tigers, and into their midst walked a slim, attractive girl, heralded by the ringmaster as Miss Bonivita, the peer of the animal trainers. She made the snarling beasts go through their paces in a fearless manner that commanded admiration.

"That girl—er—Miss Bonivita is sure great," he announced to a uniformed usher beside him.

"She sure is," chirped back the other, "but that Bonivita stuff is all apple pie. She is Mary Tully, daughter of the show flattie."

"Is that right?" said Jack.

"Yea, bo, with this outfit everybody works, including father."

Jack's eyes were held fascinated as the supple lass, armed only with a riding crop, made the fierce jungle cats do her bidding.

Before the show was quite finished every usher received fifty tickets to sell for the concert, the price one quarter, the smallest part of a dollar. Few of the audience, however, wished to stay. After returning most of the tickets and the loose change for those he had sold, Jack joined the other ushers, leaving his coat and hat at the men's dressing room at the right of the canvas connection.

Then he went on a still hunt for the boss canvasman. In his inexperience he was surprised to see that the menagerie, cook, harness and blacksmith tents were already torn down and taken away. Drummond assigned Jack to a working gang of six men. He helped load wagons with appliances and apparatus already used by the performers, and as the crowds faded away he aided in lowering away the kid top by the light of naphtha torches. Now the only one left was the big top. Workmen were tugging at ropes and stakes. Then the sidewalls were peeled off and the mammoth white ceiling came tumbling down like a monstrous parachute. The gang to which the newcomer belonged unlaced sections of canvas, rolled them up, and loaded them on wagons, amid a scene of bewildering but ordered activity.

Nothing was left behind except sawdust, papers, old straw, and the marks of the rings. Different gangs loaded

center and side poles, planks, seats, and platform supports; Jack found himself a minor cog in a frictionless machine.

WHEN the lot was a deserted waste he hitched on one of the last wagons proceeding toward the railroad tracks. His muscles were tired from the unaccustomed exercise, and his eyes and nose were full of dust.

"I want to find car sixty-six," he told the teamster.

"Oh, that's down near the end of the train. You can't miss it, brother."

Down on the siding wagons were being drawn up an inclined plane by block and tackle onto the flat cars. Iron plates bridged the space between cars, making one continuous platform.

Any other time Jack would have liked to watch the loading, which he had read somewhere had been copied by the army, but to-night he was played out, and his eyelids were heavy. He walked down the long line of yellow and red cars, looking for the sleeper marked sixty-six that would mean a place to flop.

Blinds of windows were drawn and the moon was behind a cloud.

The cars being always in the same position, any one familiar with their layout would have no difficulty in reaching a desired one, but Jack crunched along without finding the sleeper he sought.

Suddenly a white light was thrust into his face, and he blinked blindly.

"Are you Jack Smith?" asked a gruff voice.

He made out several bulky forms.

"Yes, what of it? I'm looking for car No. 66."

He heard shuffling feet and a cold metal was pressed against the back of his neck.

"Put 'em up, Smith."

Quickly he elevated his hands. He was an odd one, he thought, to be picked on by holdups.

The man behind Jack fanned him for a weapon. Then the fellow with the flash light started to search his pockets. He collected a route sheet, a time-table, the police and fire card, and a cheap watch. A handkerchief pulled across the face under the eyes effectively disguised the holdup man. The victim had been standing docilely enough, half stunned by the suddenness of it all. Then the thug's heavy fingers fumbled for his right trouser pocket. The cold barrel of the gat was no longer pressed to his neck. He had given in so weakly and tamely. But in that pocket was his entire stake, the two hundred dollars the lawyer had given him.

At the thought of being stripped clean without a struggle, his blood began to boil.

Without thought of consequence he sidestepped and lashed out with his right.

His fist caught the searcher off balance right on the side of the jaw and he dropped. Jack crouched and whirled, lunging to tackle the fellow behind him around the legs. But his arms met nothing.

As he strove to keep from stumbling forward, two plunging bodies crashed over him, and he felt the impact; that instant he was the center of a swinging, kicking swirl of arms and legs. He tried to barrel-roll sidewise, as in a football scrimmage, and he might have succeeded if the man he'd knocked down, bearing the flash light, hadn't scrambled from the ground. The white circle from the torch stabbed the darkness, and found him.

Just then his other two assailants found they were fighting one another. As Jack turned to flee an arm swinging a black object made a half circle and the butt of a heavy Colt descended on his head, and he slumped to the ground. There was a search and the withdrawal of the two hundred dollars.

The thugs swung the limp figure to the next car, No. 66, and threw it to the platform, where it sagged, legs over the steps.

"Guess he's all right," growled one, "we didn't get no orders to club that bimbo."

"Aw, shut your trap," snapped the bearer of the flash light, "my jaw'll be sore for a week. That feller started gentle, but he came to life like a bag of wild cats."

CHAPTER V.

HAINES'S MISTAKE.

LUCKILY for the unconscious victim, Drummond, the boss of the canvasmen, found him on the platform a few minutes before the section pulled out. Otherwise he might have been jostled off the car.

First an inspection was made to see if it was just another drunk. No, then perhaps he'd fallen off a wagon? Anyway, too late to investigate. Drummond called an assistant and they trundled Jack in to an empty lower berth with the laconic remark: "He'll keep till morning."

Sure enough, when day came Jack found himself sprawled in a most uncomfortable position, pain pounding in the back of his head. He tenderly felt a prominent bump. Drummond was looking down at him with a grin of amusement.

"What happened, youngster?"

"Something hit me."

The statement was a bald one.

"I guessed that, when I discovered you senseless on the platform. Fall off a wagon or something?"

Jack hesitated. Then he reached into his trousers pocket. Of course the two hundred dollars was gone.

"Guess I was mistaken for some guy with money," he explained slowly. "Three tough birds held me up, and when I objected they let me have it."

"Funny picking on one of my men, they never have any money, 'less one beats a crap game. Seeing you're hurt I'll let you off the early shift this morning."

"Thanks. I'm lucky my skull isn't smashed in."

"Guess so—though here's the show dick if you want to tell your story. Hey, Tully, here's a new man who was sloughed pretty."

Tully paused in his walk down the aisle. Briefly Jack told him of the hold-up, keeping back the loss of the money. The detective listened intently.

"All your papers gone?"

"Yes, but nothing of any value."

"Any to identify you?"

The victim grinned. "A reporter's police and fire card."

"Made out in your name?"

"Er, yes—Jack Smith."

Tully noticed the pause.

"You had better come clean with me. I don't mind telling you," he said, "that you're under suspicion. A white-collar lad, with soft hands and an educated accent doesn't join on as a roustabout without causing talk. Some one interested thinks you're either a dick or a criminal, and wants to know which."

"I'm neither," replied Jack.

"You say that. That police and fire line permit makes it still doubtful."

Jack sat up in the berth. The sleeper was deserted, all hands having left for hauling.

"Al Hammond said I could trust you. Confidentially, I'm here in his interest," he told the detective.

Tully whistled. "Does the old man realize this is going to be a 'strong' outfit, with a mob of con men, crooks and carnival grifters paying protection?"

"I don't think so. He does believe Haines wants control of the property."

"Humph. I take it you're new to this game. How did he think you could fit in without comment?"

"I don't know," said the other.

"Well, I'm faithful to the boss, and glad to find what, if not who you are. Watch your step. If Haines or Bart Jones think you're an under cover man—"

He snapped his fingers. "A stake pole will break a skull like an egg."

"Don't worry about me," said Jack, heaving himself out of the berth.

"I won't," Tully told him dryly. "I'll have enough trouble doing that little thing about myself. I won't see this circus go to the dogs without a struggle. And I may stand in need of some assistance myself."

HE passed on to the washroom. But if Jack thought that an aching head and the loss of money and papers was to end the episode he was mistaken. When he had finished a hasty breakfast in the cook tent, on the lot, a messenger bent over his shoulder.

"Mr. Haines wants to see you at the main entrance."

Jack nodded, and took a last gulp of coffee.

He found a heavy-set man walking up and down under the marquee, pacing the space as if it was the deck of a ship. He brought up short as the youngster approached.

"Come under the railing," he ordered in a voice vibrant with energy.

As Jack obeyed, the general manager suddenly snapped a card from a vest pocket and passed it to him.

"This pasteboard was found on the siding, by car No. 66. Is your name Jack Smith?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then kindly explain this card."

"That's a reporter's O K to pass him through police or fire lines."

"Yes, I surmised that. There's a little explanation coming why a roustabout has it in his possession."

"Why, I worked on a sheet," said Jack.

"Fired?"

The tone was silky, but the slate gray eyes bored into his as if to demand the truth.

"That's my affair."

"And why have you joined this organization for a mere fifty a month? I suppose that, also, is your affair?"

Jack nodded, his mouth drawn in a firm line.

"What if I fire you for being a suspicious character?"

"That's up to you—I'll keep on moving just the same."

"Want to get away from where you were, cover ground, eh?" Haines relaxed a bit. "A man's past is his own. I'm not curious, if he's not a meddler; then he will find I'll make the place too hot to hold him. Did you lose any money?"

The younger man hesitated. Then he said: "Yes, two century notes."

To his surprise Haines pulled a roll of bills out of his pocket, and detached those he had lost, and handed them to him.

"Here's your money. I have a secret service of my own and recovered it."

"I never expected to see that dough again."

"Well, you'll be treated fine if you're regular. If any one asks you, tell him I know what goes on around this circus. I run things in my own way."

He dismissed Jack curtly, and the latter turned away filled with wonder and a certain admiration. For some reason, unknown to him, Haines had certainly been behind the holdup, and what was more, that iron-nerved individual didn't care a whoop whether he knew it or not.

The general manager's conclusion would have pleased Jack had he known it. He had been put down as a bad one, with a past he was eager to run away from; one who might be used in the future did the occasion warrant.

CHAPTER VI.

AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

EARLY that morning Bart Jones had satisfactory interviews with the mayor and chief of police of Brewsterton. For a consideration the show would be allowed to run games of chance and generally wide open.

This was possible because, like most other one-day stands, Brewsterton was not chosen for its size, but for topographical position and drawing power twenty-five miles around in the country. This surrounding territory had been heavily heralded and billed. The majority of the customers were from out of town.

Those who squawked would be given the argument that the circus was trying hard to drive off the crooks, dips, and gamblers who trailed it without consent. It could be said, truthfully, too, that the local force couldn't cope with a tough gang of cannons if called upon to do so. Weakness and cupidity combined to make the fixer's task an easy one, and not greatly expensive. Baldwin, the contractor, had put out feelers and paved the way.

That afternoon the lid was off and the approaches and midway of the Greater Hammond Circus were infested with as precious a collection of pickpockets and their stalls as ever lifted a poke or leather. They worked in teams, sometimes with great originality. One stall was an Italian peddler, selling toy balloons; when in the midst of a throng he accidentally released a couple, so people would look upward, and give his dip confederate a fine opportunity to work.

A big, important man with leather lungs passed along saying: "Beware of the pickpockets. See that your watch and pocketbook are safe."

The visitors, in feeling for their valuables, "located" them for the pickpockets. The stall's duty was to bump and jostle against a prospect in the crowd, so that the latter's hat was thrown off or he had to lift both hands to settle it on straight. In the position of either stooping or raising his arms he was in an excellent position to have his pockets "reefed."

In prominent positions on both sides of the midway, grifters had put up folding tables. On these they placed games of chance, behind a space where a cloth was spread with numbered squares, on which the public was invited to places its wagers.

The most popular come-ons were the spindle and the wheel of fortune. As the games were for cash, instead of prizes, the equipment was simple yet effective. Shills, working for the sure-thing gamblers, seemed to be winning and there was a rowdy-dowdy excitement in the air that made people lose their caution. The public was being beguiled by the most ancient of bunco tricks that had fleeced their grandfathers in the days of old grafting shows; here it all came to life again for a new generation.

No wonder Benny Davis's Chicago mob could afford to pay Haines three grand a week for privileges and protection.

Meantime Jack Hammond was under the big top, seating the customers, in ignorance of the change that might have added apoplexy to Al Hammond's other ailments. While the old man's circus was reverting to a gyp outfit his nephew was crouching in the sawdust, all eyes on Miss Bonivita and her trained tigers. And he wasn't paying much attention to the great cats. It was for him a brief, happy interval of ignorance of conditions, before being entangled in a net of crookedness that would stop at nothing to gain its end.

NED TULLY, the show detective, had for years fought vice and graft whenever they raised their sinister heads about the Greater Hammond Circus. With a batch of husky sledge-hammer workers at his call, he had made it physically uncomfortable for any bunco steerer, or dip who ventured on the lot. The birds of prey left with angry, ruffled wings, but they knew better than to attempt to return.

Arrests had not been made; manhandling had been sufficient. It had been a common joke among the business staff that Tully had the toes of his shoes reënforced with steel plates for

the purpose of kicking without breaking a toe.

Now his hands were tied, though they itched to enter the fray, doubled into swinging fists. Kerr Haines, the general manager, had told him sternly to "lay off" the carnival grifters. It would cost him his job to interfere with the unbeatable games of chance, and the racket of the industrious dips.

Ned Tully's whole life was tied up in the show. He had been with it since a boy; the sweetheart he had married was a performer, and now his daughter Mary was a featured animal trainer. Even, however, if he and Mary both lost out, he had no idea of going back on his loyalty to old man Hammond. He realized that Kerr Haines and Bart Jones counted on the old man's absence, and his dying any day now, to get theirs while the getting was good. He knew, too, that the former's ambition was to gain control of the show, and that he could surely get backing to purchase it at a public or private sale.

The detective knew that an undercover espionage was operated by Haines. Personally Tully did not even trust Brownie, the circus postman, who delivered mail from the local post office several times a day, and took the letters of the employees to town morning and late afternoon in a leather bag.

Whether Al Hammond was a sick man or not, Tully felt that he should be informed of what was going on without his knowledge.

Watching Bart Jones, the fixer, he saw that gentleman was having his hands full trying to quiet complaints. No police from town were in sight. They had unquestionably been ordered by their chief to make themselves scarce.

Tully had hardly given a thought to the young man who claimed he had come on in Al Hammond's interest, and got slugged the first night. The owner must be getting feeble-minded. Nowhere, possibly, could a person not true to type make himself more conspicuous than around people who had grown up on the lot in a peculiar little world of their own. Still, the boy must have convinced Haines that he wasn't a spy or fly-cop, or he certainly would have made a quick exit.

As the afternoon waned Tully realized more and more that his own position was one in name only.

He was attracted by activity at the ticket wagon. An enraged citizen was slapping a thousand-dollar attachment on the show, for damage done his property by drunken billposters. Edging near, Tully was amazed to find that Kerr Haines intended to post a cash bond of twice the amount, to fight the case when it came up in the county court. This was counter to all circus principles. From early days shows always settled, rather than resort to law. That was what a fixer and squarer was for; even when an outfit was blameless, it had forked over to leave a clean sheet behind. "Never leave unfinished business," had been a motto owners had sworn by.

Tully was disgruntled. The show would let out in half an hour. He did something unusual for him; without asking permission, or speaking to any one, he walked deliberately off the lot and down the dusty road toward Brewsterton. Graft and mismanagement could go farther, but it couldn't get much worse.

UNKNOWN to Tully the keen eyes of Bart Jones, the fixer, had watched his departure. Slipping to one side of the red wagon he called a couple of ferret-faced men.

"Follow that dick I pointed out to you. See what he's up to. If he telephones or talks to any one, be sure to be within hearing distance."

They scooted off, tailing Tully, within a safe distance, while he strolled toward town wrapped in his own thoughts. He went directly to the post office, purchased a sheet of paper and a stamped envelope, and crossing over to

a high counter composed a short, blunt, and clear letter to Al Hammond, telling exactly what was going on. He never noticed a slight, absorbed party addressing post cards two feet away. They both dipped pens in the same ink well. Nor was Tully aware that the other's slanting eyes glanced at the address he scrawled on the envelope:

MR. AL HAMMOND
Winter Quarters, Greater Hammond Circus
Kerry, N. Y.

After Tully had mailed the letter and left the building, the post card fan approached the stamp window.

"I'm sending some mail East to New York," he said. "What connection do you make out of here?"

"The sack is taken down at six thirty, gets into Albany at ten to-night, and the first fast mail train out of there. It 'll be delivered in the morning."

"Thanks," said the other, and the clerk never remembered that question as having any significance. So many people queried him during the day.

A story in the last edition of the Brewsterton *Star* was of local interest.

Tully was back on the lot and would never have seen the issue if a paper hadn't been discarded at the main gate. He picked up the sheet and glanced carelessly at the first page. A double column splash caught his eyes:

MAIL ROBBERY A MYSTERY

Motive of Crooks Unknown

A robbery of a consignment of mail from the Brewsterton post office occurred shortly after six thirty today and has Postmaster Squires puzzled, since there was nothing of value in the stolen sack.

Jake Redding's truck was making good time toward the railroad station when an automobile blocked his way. As he slowed down two men, masked, ran from the curb and covered Redding with revolvers. The sack of mail he carried was removed to the holdups' car. Redding was curtly ordered to keep on moving and not look back.

Until an investigation can be made the motive of the thieves is unknown. There were no registered letters or specie in the stolen sack. The local police force, under Chief Martin, is investigating the case.

Tully read the news story twice, and beads of perspiration started on his brow. Hastily he threw the newspaper away. With hands that trembled slightly he lighted a cigarette and took a deep inhale. So they had been watching him, and he had failed to take proper precautions. If they'd held up the mail in broad daylight to keep his letter from reaching Al Hammond, after they read it, what would be the fate reserved for a stool pigeon and squealer?

He shook his head hopelessly. From now on he would be under a relentless and persistent shadowing; not a move that he might make but would be watched. He knew what he would be wise to do—catch the first rattler out of town; but he couldn't desert the show when it needed him.

CHAPTER VII.

A TOUGH OUTFIT.

JACK HAMMOND heard the first rumors of grifters with the circus before he cast aside his usher's uniform that afternoon. The whisper had spread throughout the various departments, furtively passed along from man to man, under the breath, as something secret and shameful.

"Takin' advantage of the old man bein' laid on the shelf," a fellow usher had murmured to Jack. "They're getting away with murder, I hear, operatin' wide open."

Idling along the midway, Jack checked up on the sinister gossip, without difficulty.

A gambler behind a spindle layout was boldly asking gents to put their money down on one of twelve green-numbered squares.

"I pay twenty to one," he bellowed, "and this ain't a gaffed game. Bet your dollar and watch the arrow spin.

My hands is above the table, brothers. I start the arrow and it can wreck and ruin me."

He displayed a handful of bills, folded sidewise, between his fingers.

"I only keep two numbers for myself. Name 'em somebody."

He accepted those called from the throng.

The table was covered with green cloth, held firm with tacks about the sides. From the rear of the board to the center a hole admitted a thin rod, a tack on both ends. The operator spun the arrow, waited until it slowed down, and then pressed the tack at his end with his thumb, keeping his fingers in plain view. The arrow was stopped, just as it pointed to one of his numbers, with seeming naturalness.

Once every so often a stall in his employ was allowed to win and the gambler paid with a flourish.

Jack passed along to the wheel of chance. Players were covering the numbers on the lay-down with coins. The operator whirled the wheel. The indicator at the top bounced back as each nail went by. Round and round sped the wheel, the indicator finally coming to rest in a low-paying section of one of the eight numbers. By a foot spring connected with the indicator the grifter could hold it firm and stop it where the fewest bets had been laid.

So, though Jack didn't realize it, the public was being fleeced right before their eyes, and made to like it.

"The house can't win all the time," was the invitation. "A dollar won't hurt you and it can't break me. Let the wheel decide."

Jack watched long enough to see that the percentage was too strongly in the gamblers' favor for anything but crooked game, though he did not know how they were made "sure" by secret contrivances.

His heart sank as he thought of his uncle, and how powerless he was to stop all this. He had been sent on in the hope that blood would tell, and that he might prove worthy of the family name. The reward was great, but how was he to earn it? No doubt old Al had figured Kerr Haines would scheme to get the show under his control, but Jack bet he never expected a gang of gyp experts would be allowed to infest the grounds. How could the combination be broken up? Appeal to the police of a small town? He smiled grimly, knowing that would not have any effect.

He had no urge to acquaint his uncle with conditions. First he himself would make a do-or-die effort to overcome the crooks. One big difficulty was that the employees of a circus comprised a semi-military organization. As part roustabout, part usher, he was in no position to get near the center of operations. Indeed, he was like a private in a regiment, without knowledge of the schemes of the high command.

There was one thing he could do: feel out his fellow workers, and become a secret agitator. Perhaps he might find a useful dissatisfaction among the rank and file, always called on first for loyalty in the past when the circus was attacked by rowdies and the rally cry of "Hey, Rube" rent the air. Laboring crews were accustomed and proud of a clean show, run in an honest way.

To Jack's surprise, he had learned there was a rigid rule preventing canvasmen and razorbacks from even speaking to the women performers. Thus had vanished his half-formed hope of meeting that irresistible slip of a girl, Mary Tully, whose superb control of the tigers so won his admiration. They were poles apart. It was strange to him to feel the bars of this caste system. As a reporter his business had been to step in where angels feared to tread, and make himself quite at home.

During the evening performance, and the striking and loading of the big top, he was delighted to find an undercurrent of disapproval and resentment at the show's being brought to the level

of one of the despised carnivals, contemptuously known as "gypsy camps."

In their own way the canvasmen, roustabouts and hostlers, many of whom had been with the trick for years, working odd jobs in the winter and returning in the spring, had been proud of being connected with a square-shooting circus. They'd looked up to the owner as an old-timer, on whom nothing could be put over. Now he was away, sick and worn out, so it was said; and a light-fingered mob was allowed to smirch the "rep" he had built up.

JACK could note the difference in the way the men went about their work. There was a sullenness and slowing down of the usual snap. If only some way could be found to weld that resentment together and use it as a weapon! The idea thrilled him. As a newcomer he couldn't speak out of his turn, too much, but at least he could find who were the natural leaders and one by one sound them out.

So interested did he become in this new angle that he didn't notice the passage of time. He finally rode down to the railroad tracks on one of the last wagons to leave the grounds. The first section had pulled out at midnight, the second, on schedule, an hour afterward.

There was a kind of tenseness and surliness about the men in the sleeper. It was due to their uncertainty of who was now the big boss. Old Al Hammond had been one regular boss. Now they were slaving for the benefit of a lot of dirty thieves, and those in power were being "slipped" by them. These last were unnamed, but everybody knew that Kerr Haines and his man Friday, Bart Jones, were the leaders indicated.

The section left Brewsterton and Jack was under the covers, sleeping soundly. He was awakened by a shake of his shoulder. Dimly he made out a form seated on the edge of his berth. The intruder had slipped the green curtains open and crept between them.

"Take it easy, kid, I'm a friend."

Jack recognized the muffled voice of Tully.

"Hello, what's up?"

"Thought we'd have a quiet chat. I wrote to the boss to-day. Told him of the graft being allowed, and Bart Jones putting up a two-thousand-dollar cash bond to fight an attachment. Wrote and mailed the letter at the post office. Didn't trust our mail man."

"Why did you do that?" exclaimed Jack, raising himself on his elbow. "We're here to fight the old man's battles."

"Sure, and I'm sorry I mailed that letter, more reasons than one. But Al Hammond will never receive it."

The listener sat up in the berth.

"The mail truck was robbed on the way to the station, and the stolen sack must have contained my letter."

"Then some one knew you were mailing it."

"I must have been followed and watched. I'm glad it didn't go, only I'm not of any value any longer now they know I'm against them. I can't throw up my job. For one thing, my daughter Mary has her heart in her act, and I wouldn't leave her alone. Fact is, though, I wouldn't be surprised if that gang tried to bump me off."

"Are they as bad as that?"

"Cicero gangsters are nice boys compared to these carnival rats. I wondered if you had any plan?"

Jack hesitated. "All we can count on is the loyalty of the men."

"Unsuspected, you may fight this damned thing where I'm worse than useless," said Tully. "If they do get me, try to help Mary to carry on—and trust Mrs. Morton. I've kept my troubles from both of them. Glad I talked to you, boy. Good night."

Jack buttoned the curtains behind him.

The next two days he suffered all the torment of impotence. He had to listen to the low-voiced gossip: things were getting rougher; several fights had taken place. Natives had been

thrown off the lot when they complained too loudly of being swindled; one, after being blackjacked, had to be taken to the hospital for treatment. Bart Jones had four toughs always at his beck and call and did not hesitate to use them. Haines was dragging the show's good name in the mud, leaving a stench behind in each town played. The show could not return to them the following year; with such an unsavory reputation a license would never be granted.

The situation was intolerable. Jack felt his uncle's confidence in him a bitter mockery; he was unfit, powerless to take the offensive, tied hand and foot by the very insignificance of the job into which he had wedged his way. Only one thing was at hand for him to do; he used every opportunity to stir unrest and discontent.

A week passed and Jack saw no chance to come into the open and fight. He was waiting, desperately, for a break. And it came on a Monday town. Sunday, with no play date, had been used for a long jump into a neighboring State. As he dressed in the sleeper he received a curt order from Drummond to report to Kerr Haines on his arrival at the lot before joining the working crew.

Had he talked too much in his effort to stir the men to rebellion? Did this mean he was going to be fired? No, hardly that, for Haines could more easily have given him the gate by passing the word to Drummond.

NEAR the ticket wagon Jack found a changed Kerr Haines, pacing feverishly, with bloodshot eyes and a lowering expression.

"So you received my message, Smith," he said quickly, and, not waiting for an answer: "Are you far enough away from home to come out of hiding?"

"I don't understand," faltered Jack.

He tried to look composed.

"Then I'll speak plainer. You joined the circus as a means of get-away. You're not used to hard labor, with your regular racket being a reporter."

"I'm not complaining."

"Well, I need you. The press agent back with the show blew on me Saturday. He couldn't quiet newspaper squawks and got tired of my razzing, I guess. Why wire for another man when you're under salary?"

His tone quick-changed.

"The fact is, Smith," he went on, "my show is overrun with gamblers, and the newspapers are giving us bad publicity. I drive the pests off, but they come back, and I can't secure cooperation from the local police. I believe a rival circus is trying to spoil our eastern bookings, but that isn't your end of it. Will you take over the press duties?"

And as Jack seemed to hesitate, he went on: "They'll not be difficult: checking up ads placed by the man ahead; leaving a parade story with the evening papers; seeing that the editors get the contracted number of tickets. Principally jollying the fellows who cover the show—keeping 'em *inside*. And if you have to, spend a bit on entertainment getting them off the lot soon as the show lets out."

Jack agreed and Haines took him over to the ticket wagon, where details were gone into more fully.

"I'll start you at seventy-five a week," Haines told him finally, "till I see you're producing, then you can expect a raise."

"I think we understand each other," said Jack, curtly, as he left for town.

Doubtless the other press agent had left because conditions had sickened him. Haines had picked on Jack, thinking him a renegade newspaper man not above anything dirty. That stuff about an opposition show wishing grafters on his outfit wasn't expected to be swallowed, nor the claim that Haines couldn't get rid of the

vermin. However, this would give Jack a chance in the open, where he could see what was going on and get a chance to strike.

Accomplishing his duties downtown, Jack purchased a white shirt and collar and tie. It was a relief, somehow, in the washroom of a hotel, to discard the flannel one. Back on the circus grounds, in time for dinner, he noticed some of the men peering curiously at the stiff collar, but he only grinned. He left the cook tent with a feeling of freedom. He could go anywhere, any time, now, and not be out of bounds.

That afternoon Jack had no trouble piloting the men who covered the circus into the big top, and, after the performance, chatting with them till they were safely off the grounds.

He did not see Tully till evening, when he found him standing moodily in front of the rope stretched across the main entrance.

"Another attachment this afternoon, for destroyed property—and another big cash bond to cover lifting it," he growled. "This is the third in a little more than a week. That fellow's lawyer—"

Tully smashed a fist in his open palm.

"I have it, Smith," he said quickly. "I'll see you after the show to-night; a new trick or I've lost my cunning—I must look into it."

He started down the midway at a brisk pace. Jack did not see him again till the music inside the big top was playing the cue for the Grand Entry.

"I'm going to make my rounds anyway," Tully remarked, "though it's only an empty gesture. I have news for you later on."

Part of the detective's duty was to patrol the grounds about the various tents for petty thieves, who dived under them to get away with show property.

Tully disappeared around the curve of the big top. Suddenly a shot rang out, the clear report sounding above the din and shuffle of the ballyhoo band. Then another shot, coming from the direction the detective had taken. Jack sprinted over the bumpy ground, was almost tripped by stake ropes, but kept on, the way dimly lighted from the radiance within the tent. No one else had noticed or heeded. He ran on and on, seeing nobody, and nearly fell over a body doubled up in a depression in the earth. It was Tully, right enough, and a dribble of blood came oozing from his lips as Jack bent over him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HEY, RUBE!"

WHEN lifted to a sitting position, Tully made a terrific effort to speak.

"They were laying for me—and got me," he gasped. "I know too much. Smith—those attachments—are fakes—to tie up a lot of circus money in cash bonds—to be recovered later. I recognized the lawyer to-day—the same man—in each town!"

His eyelids fluttered.

"Take me to Mary," he mumbled, so low that Jack hardly heard, and then he fainted.

Jack slung the unconscious man over his shoulder. The dressing rooms were directly around a curve ahead. Jack carried Tully to the entrance, pushed through the waving flaps, and stumbled into two ring-stock grooms.

"Help me take this man to the women's dressing room. May be dying."

At Jack's words they jumped to assist.

Without ceremony they pushed their way into a long, narrow, brilliantly illuminated tent. A few performers, using trunks as makeup tables, were putting last touches to their toilets.

"Mary Tully here?" asked Jack, his eyes dazed by the swift change of light.

A girl in costume darted forward.

"Your father's been shot," Jack blurted out, "and asked to be taken to you."

Several trunks were hastily cleared, and Tully was placed on them.

"I'll run into the ring and ask for a doctor, Miss Tully," said Jack to the anguished girl. "I'm your father's friend."

"Go—go quickly," she pleaded.

Jack raced from the dressing room, down the connection and into the big top. Several attachés tried to stop him, but he brushed them aside, running to the central platform on the other side of the second of three rings. He jumped up on the wooden frame work.

"Is there a doctor in the audience?" he trumpeted with both hands. "A man's badly hurt."

A gray-haired gentleman, carrying a small portmanteau, pushed his way through the arriving crowd.

"I will gladly give my services," he said. "I drove here from an accident case and have my kit with me."

"This way," said Jack, and rushed the physician to the wounded man. Never before had he possessed the habit of command, but it was coming to him naturally. Women thronged about the trunks, joined together, on which Tully lay. They pushed through, and an elderly woman, with some authority, made an open space.

Mary Tully was kneeling in the sawdust, clutching her father's hand, begging him to speak to her. But she became silent as the medico made an examination, cutting open Tully's shirt, matted with blood.

"This man has been wounded twice in the right side, thank goodness," he announced. "The bullets must be probed for immediately. The patient must be rushed to the hospital without delay."

"May we carry him to your car, doctor?" begged Jack.

"Two of you make a seat for him with crossed arms. We mustn't lose a minute."

Jack and a groom lifted Tully into position, another groom held him from the back, as he would have swayed forward.

"You'll be back?" whimpered Mary, clinging tearfully to Jack's shoulder, "and let me know? If I could only go with him—but I mustn't miss my act—the show must go on."

"Don't worry, poor girl, I'll be right back," he said, forcing a smile.

Could this sobbing girl be the one who bullied the tigers?

She stepped to one side, drying her eyes.

"The show must go on," she said to herself.

"Yes," reflected Jack sternly and with decision, "but it's not going on like this! Uncle's orders be damned. I'm going to mop up the plague spots, by God, and if the show has to learn I'm a Hammond, they'll remember it for some time, no matter if that's the last seen of me!"

AT the hospital Tully's wounds were probed and the bullets removed. They were nickel-tipped, and the patient was in no immediate danger if complications did not set in. But he had lost a lot of blood, and a transfusion was deemed necessary. Jack offered himself, and after an examination a pint of fluid was taken from him. To his surprise, he suffered no special sensation of weakness.

An orderly drove him back to the circus lot.

Scorning to report to any one save Mary Tully, he went directly to the dressing room.

The old lady who had helped press back the curious performers met him at the entrance.

"Miss Tully's act is on," she explained. "I hope—"

"Yes, there's a chance," said Jack, "the bullets reached no vital spot. But Tully is mighty weak."

"That must be expected. Can you tell me how he was shot? You can trust me," she said, earnestly, "I'm Mrs. Morton, the wardrobe mistress."

"Mrs. Morton!" he said joyfully. "Why, I've heard lots about you, that you're a regular mother to those who have none. Uncle said you could help me, and that I might make myself known to you. I'm Jack Hammond," he added, in a whisper.

The old lady smiled. "I knew you were of that stock. You've a striking resemblance to your uncle—thirty-odd years ago."

She drew him inside the deserted tent and they talked openly.

"You know what's going on?" Jack asked in a low tone.

"Yes, indeed; but not how Mr. Tully was shot."

"He was making the rounds, that's all I know. When I followed the report and found him the gunman had made his escape. To think—"

"Thinking won't help," she said fiercely, and then startlingly: "What are you going to do about it?"

"I?" exclaimed Jack. "I'm going to shoot the works. Arouse the canvasmen and sweep out the grifters—and Haines and Jones. It's counter to uncle's orders, and no doubt will be my last appearance in authority; but I'm going to tell the world I'm Jack Hammond, sent on to take over the show!"

The matron's eyes shone.

"When'll you start?"

"To-night on the sleeper. Enough of the men are in the second section."

"Good! I'll spread word by the women; they'll believe and obey me, and the men will do what they say. Many of their husbands are in the working gangs."

"Thanks, Mrs. Morton. I aim to time the smash just as the afternoon gets under way."

"All right, trust me—and you'll be surprised how they'll pay attention to an old lady."

"Your spirit isn't old," Jack said with admiration.

"My life has been spent with this show," she said simply. "It means everything to me, and to the girls and women, that it be kept clean."

Just then Mary Tully fluttered in, the brave smile still on her lips with which she had greeted the plaudits of the audience.

"Tell me, tell me—" she faltered, as she saw Jack.

"Your father is all right," he told her, reassuringly. "He's resting easy, and in no danger; a little weak perhaps from loss of blood."

"Does—does he need a blood transfusion?" she asked quickly.

His eyes dropped, as he meant to keep the details of that to himself.

"Why, yes, but he had one; a volunteer gladly offered himself."

"Yes," she said softly, "and I bet I know who that volunteer was."

He flushed hotly. The girl was looking deep into his eyes and their warmth thrilled him.

"If ever I can do anything to repay you," she began, in a husky voice.

"Be yourself, my dear," broke in Mrs. Morton. "This young man is glad to help. And his is the best circus blood in the country—he's Jack Hammond, Mary, but it is a secret for awhile yet."

"A pretty open secret, after to-night," said Jack ruefully.

He grasped the girl's outstretched hand, and was reluctant to let her soft warm palm leave his. Just then Kerr Haines burst into the tent and the two young people separated in some confusion.

"WHAT'S this, Smith, I hear about Tully being plugged and rushed to the hospital?" he stormed.

"That is true," replied Jack, "I took him there."

"Why wasn't I notified?"

"There was no time."

"Time enough for you to run into the arena and let out a yell for a doctor."

"Oh, so you were told that? Well, there had to be quick action, or Tully would have bled to death. One of the grifters shot him."

"Indeed, you'd think from your tone I was responsible." His slate gray eyes bored into Jack's. "Hereafter remember who's running this show."

"I will!" exclaimed the other, with a strange smile.

"And men aren't allowed to come in here."

Mrs. Morton stood up to him. "This gentleman was telling Mary Tully about her father's condition. I need no one, Mr. Haines, to tell me about the conduct of my charges. *My* end of the circus is above reproach."

Haines rushed out, swearing under his breath.

Jack turned to Mary. "Miss Tully, I've made arrangements at the hospital that you receive a daily wire about your father's progress. I gave them my route sheet. I guess I won't need one, after to-morrow." He divined what she was going to say. "No, you can't see him to-night. After the operation he was given a hypo and cannot be disturbed."

"You think of everything. How can I thank you?" said the girl. "And you will come back each day, too?" She looked abashed at her own forwardness, and added hastily: "Mrs. Morton is a perfect chaperon."

"I'll know a lot more after to-morrow," said Jack, "and in any case I promise you, Miss Tully, that you won't get rid of me very easily."

Their eyes met, and behind the words flashed the understanding that either comes naturally or never.

When the second section pulled out that night, Jack first interviewed Drummond, the boss canvasman, and put his cards on the table.

"There must be a show-down, Mr. Drummond," he concluded. "This circus is going to the dickens, its rep ruined along the route; and the money wagon's being milked by phony attachments, framed by Haines to tie up cash he can get back later on. This must not continue. I'm Jack Hammond. My uncle sent me on, unknown, to see if I would make good. I can't stay in the dark as he wanted. I'm going to assume control and drive out these grifters, and Haines and Jones at the head of them."

"On what authority?"

"That of being Jack Hammond, the last of a great circus line. Will you take my orders—or must I appeal directly to the men?"

Jack half arose from his seat.

Drummond swore luridly. "Don't get so hasty, boy. I have enough put by," he said. "I'm not going to stay with a grafting show after all these years; my wife is against it for one."

"Then I needn't talk to the men?"

"No, they'll take orders from me. They're sore and disgruntled anyway and on edge for a fight. What are your plans?"

Jack told him and he chuckled. "I'll get a picked crew in readiness and start the good old battle cry."

"I'll be responsible," young Hammond said grimly. "After it is over I'll take the blame, if blame there is."

They shook hands on it, and Jack experienced a great relief. He had nerved himself to the point of an appeal to the workers, but so long as they'd be told what it was all about, he was glad to get out of anything like a speech.

He dropped off to sleep thinking of the morrow, and visualizing that look of thanks in Mary Tully's eyes, wondering ardently if it might be kindled into something warmer.

THE next morning, after pulling into Huntville, Jack went through his routine work at the newspapers, and then hurried back to the lot on the outskirts of town.

The throngs started to stream into the midway. The gambling games came to life as if by magic, and the dips started to ply their trade. Groups of canvasmen were loitering here and there, but that was nothing unusual at that time of day.

Suddenly, from somewhere, Drummond bellowed at the top of his voice:

"Hey, Rube!"

In the old days this had been the rallying cry to repel a mob attacking circus folks; now it was the call for the show people to rid their outfit of human scum.

From all sides the canvasmen converged, five score of them or more, some armed with stout clubs, others carrying teamsters' whips with loaded butts.

"Down with the grifters and the dips," somebody yelled, and they charged in ragged lines toward where the gamblers had their stand.

Shrill shouts rang out, and confusion reigned as the tables were crashed and the apparatus was trampled in the dirt. The grifters tried to defend themselves.

Several of them drew weapons, but these were snatched from them. The canvasmen had gone mad with the lust to punish and continued to strike and batter faces that no longer bore much resemblance to those of men. The gamblers were literally pummeled and bludgeoned off the lot, staggering blindly with outstretched hands away from that terrible beating.

"Hunt down the pickpockets!" went up the cry.

Certain furtive-eyed gentry started to run, and so marked themselves as hares for the hounds. When they were caught, frantic with fear and terror, they were smashed unmercifully by the canvasmen, who considered it a cruel fun to club their means of livelihood, the soft flexible fingers of their trade. The public had turned on them many times, but this was the first time they had suffered the rage of show people.

Jack and Drummond made a beeline through the throng, followed by two of the boss canvasmen's husky assistants, to round up Kerr Haines and Bart Jones.

But during the assault on the grifters they had made themselves scarce and slipped away.

A thorough and minute search was made of the big top and the smaller tents, but neither hide nor hair could be found of the general manager and the circus fixer.

"We have the lot cleared of that carnival mob, but I don't like this quick get-away of Haines and Jones," said Jack. "They're not the kind to give in so easily."

"No," said Drummond, "I bet one of 'em has a trump card up his sleeve, and is gettin' ready to play it."

The roustabouts, meantime, scattered about the grounds. Some of them bore bruises from the conflict, but all wore satisfied expressions. It had been a fine clean-up, to their way of thinking.

JACK felt a suspicious quality in the lull that made him restless. He couldn't imagine Kerr Haines making this exit simply to escape. In perhaps twenty minutes the answer was made evident. A group of strangers, in compact, almost military form could be seen advancing toward the midway. Several of them wore uniforms and carried long clubs. Behind them, bringing up the rear, came Haines and Jones.

"I'll be hanged," exclaimed Jack, "if they haven't had the outrageous nerve to call the local police to their aid!"

"Do you think they know we're behind the battle?" queried Drummond.

"It's too soon to tell. We'll show a brave front and stand our ground."

There was really nothing else to do. Chatting, they loitered in front of the

marquee. As the bunched men drew level with the ticket wagon, Haines stepped forward.

"You there, Drummond," he stormed, "how did your men get out of hand and start rough-housing?"

"Well, sir," returned the boss canvasman, deliberately, "some of my boys were cheated in dice games by these grifters, cleaned out, in fact, and they must have decided on revenge. They wouldn't have stopped, once they had their tempers worked up, even if I'd ordered 'em. You know, Mr. Haines, the roustabouts ain't used to a crooked show." He looked levelly at the manager.

"I'll teach them to mind their own damned business, or I'll have the law on them," roared Haines. "There's nothing but harmless games played on this lot. Hereafter I shall have sufficient police protection in each town. I shall lock up your scalawags if they start anything. Why, this sort of thing is an outrage!"

"It is," said Drummond briefly, but his tone didn't indicate that he exactly agreed with his boss.

Haines turned to his press agent.

"Beat it to town," he ordered, "and see that no story breaks in the evening papers about this rumpus. We're good advertisers and should get consideration. I want no publicity about this trouble. I don't want the public scared away from the lot."

He whispered to the officer in command, and the latter posted men on different stationary posts.

Jack lingered for an instant, hating to see himself beaten. As he turned to go he heard Haines's bullying voice giving orders:

"Remember, jug the trouble makers quick as they come along. And if they're my men, call me and I shall fire them immediately."

As Jack started to leave the grounds it hurt him to think that, though the show was now cleared of grifters, their absence was only temporary. They'd be slowly streaming back by the afternoon performance, ready to ply their trade under the "protection" Haines paid for. Jack's coup had failed!

CHAPTER IX.

A SURPRISE.

JACK realized, as he slowly and drearily walked toward town, that he had been unduly optimistic. It had seemed a grand stroke to clean out the grifters at one fell swoop, but with the police behind them the victory had been all too temporary.

Brute force wouldn't do; craft must be brought into play.

At the *Evening Star* he had no difficulty in persuading the city editor to pay no attention to any rumor of disturbance on the circus grounds.

"A few drunken roustabouts ran amuck, but everything will be normal by playtime. The public will be quite safe. We're getting police protection." He said this last a bit sarcastically.

"So long as nobody was murdered I'll kill any comment on the row," the city editor said. "By the way, since you're the show press agent, stop in downstairs. There's been a little misunderstanding. Ask for Mr. Thomas."

Jack did as requested.

"You from the circus?" said an excited individual. "Then you'll do as well as anybody else."

"What's wrong?"

"I was paid, from your money wagon, for distributing heralds in our papers delivered on the R. F. D. routes. But come with me to the post office. There's been the devil to pay; if I weren't well known in this man's town I would be in jail right now cooling my heels. I was paid with a money order, and it's N. G."

The man grabbed Jack by the arm, and paid no attention to his plea that he didn't know anything about the affair. At the post office, Mr. Thomas and he were immediately ushered into

the private office of the postmaster. That gentleman was on the telephone as they entered.

"Yes, you'll have a man on from headquarters this afternoon, eh?" he was saying. "Good enough, this may be a definite clew."

He turned on a swivel chair and regarded his visitors.

"This is the press agent of the circus," said Mr. Thomas feverishly.

"Humph," said the postmaster, "I don't know whether I want to talk to him or not."

"I understand Mr. Thomas was tendered a bad money order in payment for some special work distributing heralds," put in Jack.

"Yes," testily, "but I told Mr. Thomas to keep his mouth shut!"

"But, Mr. Merritt," the advertising man protested, "you know I had to explain back at the office."

"I told you the newspaper would lose nothing."

The postmaster reluctantly turned to the circus man. "That money order bears the serial number of a book of money orders that was stolen, not long since, in a neighboring city," he explained.

A great light dawned on Jack. "Was Brewsterton the name of the town where the money orders were taken?" he gasped.

"Yes—but how do you know that? I have a great mind to hold you here to be questioned by the special investigator to whom I just telephoned."

"I'll be delighted to be here to meet him. I am sure we can get together for our mutual advantage. Can I make an appointment to see him here?"

"Certainly. Drop back at five o'clock."

"Fine. And let's have some secrecy," said Jack, looking at Mr. Thomas.

Merritt turned on the newspaper worker. "You keep a locked tongue on this interview, or I shall make it hot for you."

"There won't be a chirp out of me," the other promised.

JACK thoughtfully made his way back to the circus grounds, highly elated by several developments. For one thing, he had not been suspected of being a leader of the fight; then, too, he saw a possibility of getting the government behind him in his private war.

He notified Haines that the story was killed in the one evening newspaper.

During the afternoon performance he had to suffer the humiliation of seeing some of the grifters back on the lot. Several were absent, injured, and many of the tables and apparatus had been broken; but in a couple of days, Jack knew, conditions would be as bad as ever. It was hard to beat crookedness, he thought, when it has local officialdom on its side.

At five o'clock Jack was at the post office. A tall, slim man was closeted with Mr. Merritt, and was introduced as Mr. Logan, a special operative of the Post Office Department.

"What is this Mr. Merritt tells me—you knew where those money orders were stolen?"

"I had a reason to mention Brewsterton." Jack explained his suspicions about Tully's letter and its connection with the mail robbery."

"You may be right. At least it gives me something to work on," said Logan, after listening closely to Jack's explanation. "How do you happen to be interested? You seem to be straightforward and honest."

In confidence Jack then explained the circus situation to Logan, relating all he knew about Haines and Jones, and the Benny Davis who had been pointed out to him as representing the mob of grifters.

Logan then asked for the route.

"Well, Hammond," he said, "I expect to have some more operatives on hand to-morrow, in case of trouble."

"Good. I think if I can get in touch with you I may be able to turn a trick. I assume you will keep up with the show."

"Certainly."

"Then, what do you say if we make an engagement to meet every day at five o'clock at the local post office? I think I have a scheme that will bring home the bacon. It's worth trying, at any rate," said Jack desperately.

CHAPTER X.

JACK HAMMOND'S SCHEME.

THAT night on the sleeper Jack Hammond put the matter up to Drummond.

"One way or another," Jack said, "I'm going to beat those crooks tomorrow, or we'll stop the show!"

"What do you mean?"

"If I fail, order your canvasmen on a strike; make them refuse to load the wagons and the cars. Leave the tents and the equipment on the lot. I'll confess everything to Uncle Hammond—tell him I'm an utter failure, let him know what's going on, and have him send on an experienced and honest general manager to carry on. I'll take all the responsibility. If a couple of dates are lost, it can't be helped. Better that than going on like this."

"All right," declared Drummond. "You're the doctor. My men won't move a stake-pole if I tell them not to do so. You've a plan?"

"Yes—a wild one, but it may work. It's my last card—and if I lose I'll step out of the game."

"I'm with you to the finish, kid."

"Thanks," said Jack. He'd grown very fond of the gruff, loyal boss canvasman.

THE duties of a circus press agent were such that it was easy for Jack to get away before the afternoon performance was out. He walked a roundabout route to the post office of Carmenville. There he found Logan and four assistants, and outlined his plot.

"Have your men on the lot, waiting, and arrest Benny Davis before the evening performance starts," he said. "Pinch me, after a messenger boy arrives from the telegraph office with a message. Take us to the hotel—have several rooms engaged—and give me ten minutes with Benny, with witnesses present. Make the arrests as quietly as possible; of course I shall come along like a lamb."

Logan nodded. "On what are you particularly depending?"

"One thing only; all these grifters think I'm a crook, too, and a crook hates to be made the fall guy. We can count on Benny Davis knowing everything that's been pulled off with this outfit."

Then Jack asked Logan to stroll with him to the telegraph office, for a few minutes, and the latter assented.

All that day Jack found that waiting, with success or failure in the balance, was very trying to the nerves. By nighttime his were frayed and on edge.

The daily telegram regarding Tully's condition had generally arrived about eight o'clock. To-night it was eight thirty before a uniformed boy slipped toward the main entrance. Jack accepted the wire and signed for it. At the same moment, as he slipped the envelope into his pocket, one of Logan's men tapped him on the shoulder.

"Come along with me," the operative growled.

"All right," replied Jack. "Have they taken Benny Davis yet?"

"Yes, half an hour ago."

They walked in silence to the one hotel Carmenville boasted.

"Upstairs, in a suite to the back," murmured the operative.

They entered two connecting rooms; at the end of the second Benny Davis, the little mob leader, sat handcuffed to Logan.

"Get in there," said Jack's captor roughly, "and cut out your back-talk or I'll clout you one."

"Aw, let up on me," snarled Jack, and shambled in.

He pulled an envelope out of his pocket, and tore open the contents. For a moment he gazed, as if bewildered, at the yellow sheet.

"Oh, my God, Benny, they've pinned it on you!" Jack burst out. "Here's the daily wire on Ned Tully's condition."

He thrust it toward the gangster.

"What's that got to do with me?" muttered Davis, turning in his seat.

Jack read the message aloud:

"Ned Tully sinking fast and not expected to live the night. Declares he recognized the man who shot him. Benny Davis named. Swears Davis was mixed up in the Brewsterton mail robbery. Tully's evidence duly witnessed.
"DR. BRUCE BRADLEY."

"That leaves you holding the bag, Benny," Jack declared. I'm glad I wasn't in on the mail robbery or the killing!"

"I'm being framed," screamed Davis. "Tully has me all wrong. I didn't fire the shot that winged him—and I was on the lot when that mail wagon was looted, I swear it."

"Tell that at your trial," said Logan sternly.

Jack turned appealingly to Logan.

"Listen, mister, this Davis isn't a bad scout, they tell me. Why don't you give him a chance to turn State's evidence?"

"Why should we?" sneered Logan indifferently. "We got him holding the bag. What if he does squeal—he doesn't know much, does he?"

"I KNOW enough," said the mob leader eagerly. "If talking will do me any good, I'll spill anything I got."

"You'll get a lot of consideration, Davis, if you tell a straight story, and can prove it," Jack urged in a low tone. "The State will use you as a witness, and you know what that means. I've promised to tell all I know about Haines and Jones, so I can be sitting pretty, and don't you forget it. We're dealing with Federal dicks now, fella. You can't buy your way out of *this* jam!"

Jack saw that his words were sinking in.

"All right, damn it, I'll come clean," muttered Benny.

Deliberately he told how Ned Tully had been shot through orders of Haines; one of his men, Len Morty, had done the job. Morty and another crook, named Pete Rose, had pulled off the robbery of the mail sack, all under orders from the general manager. The money orders were in the ticket wagon; so far they'd gone slow, as far as he knew, in passing them out. They should have been destroyed, but Haines was greedy. The confession was taken down and signed by Davis. He was left at the hotel with a guard.

Jack was hustled out and Logan and three men followed.

"I have to congratulate you, Mr. Hammond," said Logan.

With a smile Jack pulled another envelope out of another pocket. "Open that," he said, "and read it to me."

The detective obeyed:

"Tully recovering nicely. Sitting up to-day. Entirely out of danger. His discharge from the hospital a matter of two or three weeks.
"DR. BRUCE BRADLEY."

"That is the *real* wire I received. I fixed up that phony at the Western Union this afternoon," Jack explained, "when you got me permission to use their typewriter. I borrowed an envelope after you left."

OUT on the circus lot Kerr Haines and Bart Jones were arrested, along with the two grifters Benny Davis had named in his confession. The money order book was found in the money wagon.

"I want to have the pleasure of telling you," Jack told Haines cheerfully, no longer able to restrain his triumph, "that I'm young Hammond, and that with you crooks jailed, and the others cleaned out, this will be an on-the-level show to-morrow."

A weight seemed lifted from his mind, and his spirit soared as he watched the men being led away. This was his little hour of success, and he went back to break the news to Mary Tully and Mrs. Morton, with the joyful addition that Ned Tully would soon be back with them.

"We'll see more of each other now, Mary," he whispered to her, "and though I know it may be late I'm going to telephone Uncle Hammond what I have done. Maybe I'll have to get hired again as a roustabout."

But he was smiling as he made his way to town, and waited impatiently until he got the owner of the show on long distance.

First he inquired about the old gentleman's health.

"Oh, fair, fair," the voice quavered over the line. "But why the call, after I'm in bed? The season has hardly begun."

"I know it, uncle, but there have been big doings, and I thought you ought to be told."

He briefly related how the crooks had been outwitted. "But I failed to live up to your test, uncle," he admitted. "I had to confess that I was a Hammond."

There was a chuckle on the other end of the connection.

"You did just what I'd have done under the circumstances—use my own judgment instead of obeying a sick and absent *partner*. Think you can stay in the saddle?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack, "though I'll need your lawyer here for a bit to trace and set aside those phony attachments Haines plastered on the show. Why, uncle, I feel as if I'd been born and brought up in the sawdust. And another thing, if the girl's willing, I'm going to marry a performer."

"Has she circus blood?"

"The best."

"Well, everything is in your hands, my boy; you've made good by saving my show. *Our* show, I mean! Wire me when I may send congratulations to the lucky girl."

And Jack did!

THE END

How Fortune Island Got Its Name

WHEN Morgan was chased by a French frigate he sought refuge on an uninhabited island and buried the loot from several rich merchantmen on the beach. Leaving several negroes to guard the treasure he sailed away and never returned to claim it.

So the island was called Fortune Island. It lies about one hundred and ten miles northeast of Cuba, is nine miles long, but only half a mile wide at the widest part. The present inhabitants are descendants of the slaves left on the island by Morgan, very poor and superstitious, subsisting on fish and wild fruit, and huddled together in squalid huts built of driftwood and thatched with palm leaves. Some are beehive huts, exactly like those of a Congo village.

The legend of Morgan's treasure has been handed down, and on the rare occasions when a steamer or warship stops to take on water from the ice-cold springs, a half naked black man may be seen digging in the sand, probably in obedience to a dream or other sign. *Minna Irving.*

He raised the heavy end of his bat, loaded with lead

Chin-Straps

Never was a crookeder piece of work pulled on a race-track than the stunt Hod Campbell, starter's assistant, tried—but Johnny Luttrel and his horse were game clean through

By PHILIP COLE

JOHNNY LUTTREL, apprentice jockey, waited for his boss, Garry Blake, in the lobby of a Louisville hotel. Garry, trainer for the newly-established Hickory Stable, was upstairs in Mr. Minot's room trying to talk Mr. Minot, owner of Hickory Stable, into letting him buy Scarlet Tanager.

Johnny, looking around over the crowd of horsemen in the lobby, caught the eye of Hod Campbell. Hod Campbell was a starter's assistant, and a rough one. He came over.

"Step around the corner a minute; you look thirsty," he said to Johnny.

Johnny looked toward the elevators.

"I can't be gone long," he returned uneasily; "I'm waiting for Mr. Blake."

"We'll come right back."

Johnny got up and went around the corner to a soft-drink place on Walnut Street with Hod. Johnny didn't like the place. It was largely frequented by tipsters whose screaming placards, pasted over with lists of names of previous winners with red crayon ovals around most of them, advertising the alleged good luck of the tipsters' customers, overflowed to the sidewalk.

It didn't do an honest apprentice boy any good to be seen hanging around

in a place like that. But Hod was a starter's assistant. A jockey can't let himself get on the bad side of a man who has the privilege of yanking horses around by their chin-straps at the barrier. A horse might so easily get held a fraction of a second too long if a starter's assistant took a dislike to a boy.

They took their glasses and went up three steps and sat down in a secluded corner near the telephone booths.

"Little deal on in the fourth race to-morrow," said Hod after making sure no one was close enough to hear.

Johnny didn't say anything.

Hod grinned slyly and went on: "There's a horse don't no one look to see do much that all the boys are all set to help. No matter which one it is. Only thing's this: You lay back with that Golden Gate geldin' I see your name's up to ride for Blake; an' don't get in nobody's way, see?

"An' seein' as the fellers behind this deal is generous, you'll draw down the winnin's of a fifty-dollar bet on this outsider that's goin' to win— Oh, how'd do, Baldwin?"

With a wink at Johnny, Hod got hastily to his feet to enter into an overcordial conversation with the sportily turned-out Baldwin. Baldwin kept a popular news-stand near by and was a great patron of the races. There was a great deal of back-slapping. Some friends of Baldwin's joined them and there were boisterous introductions. Johnny was extremely uncomfortable. At last he touched Hod Campbell's arm.

"Got to get back to the hotel, Mr. Campbell," he said. "Garry Blake'll be waiting. Glad to have seen you."

"Well, so long! See you to-morrow!" Campbell winked again so the others couldn't see.

Johnny tried to act as though he hadn't seen that wink, either, and got away hastily.

He didn't say anything to Garry Blake about what Campbell had said to him. Fixed races weren't common in Kentucky. Probably this plant would fall through, like most of them.

On the way out to the boarding house where Johnny lived with Garry Blake, Garry was full of his interview with the stable owner.

"He's still holding back," said Garry. "I reckon he's waiting to make sure I can give him the kind of a run he wants for his money before he puts any more jack into new horses. We'll have to make a big showing with what we've got before he'll loosen up. Well, we ought to show him a win to-morrow with old Golden Gate. That'll please him."

Johnny didn't say anything. Trainers liked a boy who let them do whatever talking was done around a racing stable. So Johnny had trained himself not to be talkative. Garry didn't expect any answer usually, anyway.

WHEN the horses milled at the barrier before the start of the fourth race the following afternoon, it was apparent to Johnny that there was a deal on, sure enough. It was a seven-and-a-half-furlong selling race and the start was from the second gate up the chute, a long way from the stands. Nobody could see much of what was going on but the jockeys and the starter himself high above them on his platform with the trigger in his hand behind him.

Hod Campbell, keeping his eye on the starter to see that his actions weren't under particular observation, was keeping a wide space open for the horse he was holding by the chin-strap.

The chin-strap is a double loop of strong bridle leather buckled through the big rings of the racing snaffle-bit. Its purpose is to assist in keeping the bit lying evenly in the right place in the racer's mouth, and as it swings loosely under the horse's lower lip, it is also a convenient thing by which to hold the horse.

The horse was Snickersnee, racing

under a stable name that covered the ownership of a Chicago book-maker.

Pretty raw work, thought Johnny, watching Hod Campbell out of the corner of his eye, to try to put that old beetle over. Why, his odds must be nearly a hundred to one!

A nervous little black mare next to Snickersnee on the inside was giving Hod the excuse he wanted for a lot of vicious whip-work which the heavy stock-whip starter's assistants are allowed to use.

Hod was taking advantage of the little mare's wild prancing and of a disposition to crowd shown occasionally by the horse outside of Snickersnee, to ply the cruel sting lash first one side and then the other, so that Snickersnee stood alone in a clear space wide enough for four horses to stand in.

Johnny sat quietly on good old Golden Gate, patting the sleek bright chestnut on the neck to reassure him as Hod's whip cracked repeatedly. Johnny was glad to be in number two post-position between Atkinson, the favorite, and Pompeian Red, another horse well up in the betting. All three horses next to the inside rail were standing quietly. The fussy little black mare caught the starter's eye.

"Kick that mare up to the tape!" he bellowed at the sweating jockey. "I'm goin' to let 'em go whether you're there or not. Last chance!"

Suddenly Hod Campbell had left Snickersnee where he stood in his well-cleared space and jumped in front of the other horses to seize Golden Gate's chin-strap.

"Leave him alone; he's all right!" implored Johnny.

"Don't forget!" Hod hissed back at him.

Johnny raised his whip to have it ready for the leap away from the barrier. He could feel it coming.

Snap-swish-clank—the tape sprang up. Jockeys leaning far forward, tense, maddened with the excitement of the start, yelled at their mounts and each other, plying their whips like mad, spurring and kicking like demons.

"Come *up*, you yeller-belly! Hi-yi-yi! Out o' my way, guy! Cross in front o' me, will yah?"

Wildly pounding hoofs, dust, yells, whips, more dust, confusion. Horses and boys fighting blindly for a good position.

Suddenly the dust cleared in front of Johnny. Hod had given Golden Gate a heavy yank to the side just as the tape went up, but he'd let go just in time to leap aside from the path of Pompeian Red; and Golden Gate had recovered his balance and got away. He was five lengths back of the leaders; but he was away now, lying in a pretty favorable position.

THE race streamed out of the chute where it came into the main oval. Atkinson, the favorite, a powerful gray stallion was leading; hugging the rail. Running strongly at the flank of the gray came Pompeian Red, his boy still going with the whip, forcing the early pace. It looked as if he might pass Atkinson in another furlong.

Close behind the two leaders ran Prairie Dog, a bay horse with a short round barrel. From behind he looked more like a Morgan than a thoroughbred racer, and he was going strong, holding his place close up on the heels of the two favorites.

Three lengths behind ran Golden Gate. The big red gelding was running easily with plenty in hand. Johnny settled lightly on his withers and rated him carefully as he was. That gang in front were forcing things too much.

Atkinson was a sprinter, Johnny knew. That Pompeian Red horse, forcing him, would run the heart out of the favorite before he'd gone five furlongs. Prairie Dog couldn't go this distance within a second and a half of Golden Gate. The three leaders would begin coming back to him pretty soon,

Johnny was sure, without his increasing his own pace a particle.

Johnny was right. By the time the leaders had reached the turn at the far end of the long back-stretch Atkinson's bolt was shot. Johnny could see him wringing his tail and tossing his head. He was through; burned up by the early pace.

He dropped back, and Pompeian Red took the rail in front. Prairie Dog, swinging sharply to avoid the conquered favorite, began to overhaul the flying Pompeian Red in the lead.

Now the two that were out in front were fighting it out on the turn. It was a good show those two boys were putting up. They were giving the customers what looked like a race, all right. But they were coming back to Golden Gate.

Johnny let out one of his wraps cautiously. Golden Gate accepted the additional freedom and lengthened his stride. He leaped on by the quitting gray stallion and commenced overhauling the leaders.

Up to this point Johnny hadn't looked back to see what the others were doing. Now he heard the beat of flying hoofs coming up on him from the rear. Johnny ducked his head and looked past his right arm.

The challenging horse was Snickersnee—the horse Hod Campbell wanted to win. The race was supposed to be a set-up for Snickersnee! The set-up horse was making his bid for the lead now.

Johnny let out the other wrap. Golden Gate shook his head a trifle; then surged into the bit at the new rein-length. Golden Gate was feeling his oats to-day. Garry Blake had got the courageous old horse into wonderful condition!

They were coming to the last turn now—the turn at the head of the home stretch. Johnny could see the boys on the two horses in front looking back, giving their horses the right rein, swinging them wide on the turn to leave an alley for the set-up horse to come through.

Johnny set his teeth and swung Golden Gate into the hole they left. Golden Gate saw the hole, too. With five caribou leaps he corked it up tight.

The boy on Snickersnee yelled from behind with a wild note in his high screech.

"Let me through 'fore I kill you! I'm coming through! On the rail! Out o' my way, Luttrel, damn you! I'm coming through!"

"Try and come through," muttered Johnny into the plaits of Golden Gate's mane.

Golden Gate was leaping ahead of Pompeian Red and Prairie Dog. Johnny caught a fleeting glimpse of the thunderstruck faces of the two boys as he flew past them. Behind him—farther behind him now—he heard the boy on Snickersnee raging and cursing, and could hear the crack of his whip descending on Snickersnee's flank with furious rapidity.

Johnny grinned to himself. The straightway ahead of him was clear. The roar of the stands came to him louder and louder. Golden Gate was galloping home. Johnny turned his head and grinned at the insane stands as Golden Gate crossed under the wire two lengths ahead of the set-up horse.

JOHNNY had brought in another winner for Garry Blake and Hickory Stable. Let Hod Campbell rage! Johnny 'd ridden a clean race—fair to his mount, his trainer and his owner.

But Hod Campbell was in a position to do more than rage. The chief starter climbed the stairs to the glass-inclosed judges' stand. Johnny was summoned.

"One week on the ground for you, Luttrel, for interfering with a starter's assistant at the barrier," snapped the officiating steward.

"Honest to God, Mr. Brice, I didn't—"

"That 'll do! Mr. Campbell reports to the starter you threatened him with your whip," the dapper little Mr. Brice rapped out crisply. "You boys have got to cut out this hitting starters' assistants with your bats. I warn you now—if you come up for this again I'll make an example of you; you'll go down for the rest of the season. Watch yourself!"

Johnny's heart was bitter. Here were the fruits of loyalty and clean riding! Set down for a week! Right near the start of the season, too. Other boys would be getting reputations, getting solid with trainers and owners, getting commended in the newspapers for good rides while he was retired from the game and lost chance after chance.

And all on account of the dirty tactics of Hod Campbell! In his heart Johnny hated Hod Campbell with a furious hatred.

But what could a jock do against a track official, even a subordinate like Hod Campbell? Just nothing. Campbell had all the advantage. The stewards always backed up the starter, who was a good man. He had to be. Campbell was putting something over on the starter all right.

But the starter would have to see something wrong with his own eyes before he'd be wise to Campbell. A starter couldn't listen to a jock complaining about one of his assistants. Complaints like that were made all the time by boys that were too green or too hot-headed to see how futile they were. All boys thought the assistants gave their horses the worst of it. That would continue as long as races were started by the tape barrier system.

"What did the stewards have you up for?" inquired Garry Blake when Johnny, head down, got back to the stables.

"I'm set down for a week."

"What for? I didn't see you bump anybody."

"For 'threatening Mr. Campbell with a bat,'" replied Johnny bitterly.

"Well, did you?"

"No."

"Well, what was it?"

"Here's the way it was, Mr. Blake: Some crowd had the race framed for Snickersnee, and Campbell was in on it. He tried to get to me last night. He thought he had me lined up, I reckon; and when I won with Golden Gate he put up that squawk to break me, that's all."

"Uh-huh!" said the trainer. "I thought that race looked sort o' funny. Horses ran kind o' wide on the turn, didn't they?"

"They left a hole you could drive a Ford through."

"Well, you grabbed it, Johnny. That was a good ride you gave Golden Gate. The boss is tickled to death with this win. Never mind the week on the ground. That won't do you any harm. See here, Johnny"—Garry stepped into the tack room, motioned Johnny after him and shut the door—"I'm figuring on turning this Betty Brown filly of ours loose in the Beechwood Stake a week from to-morrow.

"Until yesterday I thought that cough had pulled her down too much to let her go in the Stake; but I've changed my mind now. I'm sure she's O K. That work-out you gave her yesterday morning was better than you thought it was."

"I KNEW she was going good, Mr. Blake."

"Going good? I'll say she was going good! She was flying. She's five pounds better than she's ever been. She can win this Beechwood Stake, Johnny, with some luck and a rousing ride—that's how good she is."

"Gosh, Mr. Blake! Do you think so?" Johnny's eyes shot sparks. "You going to let me ride her?"

"Yes, I'm going to let you ride her. But now listen to me, Johnny!" Garry Blake was very earnest. He was usually an extremely close-mouthed young man with mighty little to say to his

hands or anybody else; but now he was laying down the law to Johnny.

"Get this now! Keep away from Hod Campbell. Don't have any words with him at all. Keep clear away from him. And keep this under your hat; understand? This filly can win the Beechwood Stake, with luck. But you and I and Mr. Minot are the only ones that know it—except maybe old Joe, and he's one nigger that's lost his tongue. We're keeping this under cover to keep the price sweet for Mr. Minot.

"If I can win this Stake," Garry went on very earnestly, "Mr. Minot 'll go the limit on this stable and let me go out and get together a real string to go with the good ones we've got already. A big win is what he's waiting for. He wants me to prove I've got the stuff, like all these new owners do, by winning races right off the bat.

"Now, Johnny, this Scarlet Tanager colt can be bought; worth the money right now and he's sure a real prospect for the Derby next spring. Mr. Minot 'll let me add that colt to Hickory Stable if I can manage to win the Beechwood."

They galloped Betty Brown mornings before daybreak while it was still too dark for the rail birds to clock her even if any had been at the track so early. The filly was rounding into form.

Saturday morning when they came out on the track where the night mist still hung low, Garry on his wise little gray saddle mare rode over to Johnny, where he crouched on Betty Brown's withers. The filly stood looking up and down the track snuffing the dewy air and pricking her crisp little ears.

"Let her break from the three-quarter pole and do a mile, Johnny. Rate her along behind Eddie on Golden Gate for five furlongs and then turn her loose."

The two boys jogged for half a mile and broke at the three-quarter pole. Johnny rated Betty Brown back of Golden Gate; counting the posts. At five furlongs he slipped the wraps. The filly took one wild jump and came up even with old Golden Gate. The big red gelding, hating to be passed, gave her a gallant race. But Betty Brown passed him in a furlong and tore off the rest of the mile like a whirlwind.

"All right," said Garry, snapping his stop-watch shut as he met them at the gate. "She'll do. Put her away." His normal poker face was wreathed in a broad grin.

In the intervening four days before Wednesday, the day of the Beechwood, Betty Brown was coddled and given nothing more strenuous than light exercise-gallops. Mr. Minot came out to the Downs one morning to see her work.

"She's a nice filly, isn't she, Garry?" he said when he saw Betty Brown do her morning gallop.

"Yes, sir, she's a right decent filly, Mr. Minot," said Garry.

"Win the Beechwood with her and you can have a blank check to go buy that Derby colt you've been talking to me about."

"She'll do her best."

THE Beechwood Stake was the fifth race on Wednesday afternoon. Betty Brown had drawn No. 11 post position, far on the outside away from the starter's platform. Not so good, thought Johnny. If Hod Campbell still had it in for him, and no doubt he did, he'd have the best chance in the world to pull almost anything.

Johnny held the filly back as the colts approached the tape; keeping as much of the big field as possible between him and the assistant starters. He hoped to avoid Hod Campbell's eye. He hung back as long as he could, only bringing Betty Brown up on the line at the last possible moment just as the starter looked as if he might yell at him for lagging back.

The nervous young horses, most of them lacking track experience, milled

around ceaselessly; backing, changing position. Two or three real bad actors in the bunch were raising Cain and keeping all the others stirred up. One of these reared wildly and a boy fell off. The moan from the stands came from a long distance. The start was away up at the far end of the long chute.

The red-coated man on the piebald lead-pony caught the unruly thoroughbred and brought it back. The boy mounted again.

Now a silly little mare had got herself turned around with her hind quarters next to the tape. She was still backing. Then she felt the tape against her rump and lashed out at it like lightning. The tape broke. The line of horses surged forward raggedly; stopped, and backed again.

One of the starter's assistants ran to the machine to recover the tape that, recoiling like a rubber band, was lying in folds next to the rail. It was Hod Campbell. Johnny lowered his head so that the visor of his jockey cap would hide his face. But Campbell looked up and saw him. An evil grin pulled his lips away from his snaggle teeth.

"So it's you, is it, Johnny Luttrel?" Campbell laughed as he stood there untangling the tape. "Guess you need some help with that filly, don't you? Be back in a minute!"

Campbell hurried to the middle of the track in front of the shifting line of plunging thoroughbreds and handed his end of the tape to the man from the other side. As the other man knotted the two ends together, Campbell ran back to Betty Brown. He made a grab at the filly's chin-strap with a hand as big as a picnic ham.

"Leave this filly alone! She's standing steady!" Johnny cried.

"Alone hell! What do you mean crowding the inside horse? Come over here, you!" Campbell roughly yanked Betty Brown over to the right. The little mare, surprised at such handling, protested by trying to snatch her dainty head away from the man's rough grasp.

"Try to pull away from me, will yer?" gritted Campbell. He started to shove one end of the stout strap with which assistant starters hold onto refractory horses through Betty Brown's chin-strap.

"Please don't put the strap on her, Mr. Campbell," implored Johnny. "She'll stand quiet!"

"Yah! She'll stand all right. She'll be still standing when the rest o' these horses are a furlong down the chute, too, you little whelp!" Campbell was twisting a big knot in one end of the strap, keeping it down where nobody but Johnny could see it.

THE boy looked at him with his eyes wide with anger mixed with terror as the meaning of this knot became clear to him.

Ordinarily, the instant the gate went up, an assistant starter holding a horse in place with one of these straps, retained his grasp on one end while he let go of the other so that as the horse leaped away, the free end of the leather slipped through the horse's chin-strap, leaving it in the starter's hand.

But this big, loose-looking knot which Campbell was putting into one end of his strap in such a way as to make it look like an accidental tangle, meant that he intended, when the gate went up and Betty Brown made her jump to get away, to hold the free end of the strap so that the knot at the other end would catch in the chin-strap of her bridle.

That would give her, Johnny knew, a jerk sudden and strong enough to throw the little filly clean out of her stride—perhaps bring her down. Johnny had seen it happen. The fleet little mare would get a wrench that would cost her any chance she had of getting away in front.

But that wasn't all. She might easily lose her rider, too. That would cost her the race to say nothing of the

fact that the thundering smother of the start is a bad place for a boy to be rolling on the track.

On top of that, Campbell would have to hold Betty Brown long enough to reach forward to grab the knot end to pull the strap clear finally. He wouldn't dare leave it dangling from Betty Brown's bridle where the knot might, from the pulling, look tight enough to convict the assistant starter of intent.

What could Johnny do? His mind was a whirling chaos of conflicting impulses. He looked for witnesses; but the other boys near him were busy with their own troubles as the excited horses twisted about. Could he call out to the starter himself on the platform and make a protest? No good to try that. Campbell would have his strap out and smooth before anybody but Johnny could see it.

There was only one thing that had a chance to work. That was for Johnny to make Campbell let go the strap entirely as the gate went up.

But for that purpose he had no means but his whip. And the steward had warned him that if he was brought up before him again for using his whip he'd get set down for the rest of the season. Johnny couldn't afford to get set down. He had his reputation yet to make. Another penalty right now would finish him as a jockey.

But there was Garry Blake—depending on him. Garry was the only trainer who'd ever given Johnny a chance to show what he could do in a big stake-race. He couldn't run out on Garry Blake even if it cost him his standing with the Jockey Club. And he couldn't fail the honest little mare under him.

Johnny had, in their early morning workouts, conceived a great affection as well as admiration for Betty Brown. She was a great little mare. He couldn't let her get licked—and Garry Blake, too—because of the hatred of a big bum like Hod Campbell for a jockey who rode clean.

Johnny grasped his jockey-bat by the light end, holding it over on the near side of Betty Brown's slender neck, where Campbell couldn't see it; shoved his feet tight into the stirrups, leaned down low and gritted his teeth, watched the starter out of the corner of his eye. He listened to the starter's voice as he exhorted and threatened—trying to catch the slight rise in its pitch that would telegraph his intention to press the trigger the next instant.

Now the squirming mass of horses was straightening itself out. Only one horse—Brown Jug, the favorite—was a step back from the tape. Johnny saw his boy kick at him; saw the starter tense almost imperceptibly as the horse moved forward—

WHIRR-R-R—CLANG! The tape swished up. Johnny set his heels tight against Betty Brown's straining sides as the little mare leaped ahead with the others. Then her head slewed around. That strap!

Johnny set his teeth. He raised the heavy end of his bat, loaded with lead, and brought it down with all his strength on the outstretched wrist of Hod Campbell, who let out a howl of anguish, and the filly was free.

Free, but still stumbling, fighting to regain her stride; left—hopelessly left—at the post with the long strap dangling from her bridle and whipping about as she swayed and plunged, struggling to get going.

Johnny thought she'd fall. He tried desperately to lift her head to help her. Two more steps she took as she plunged forward looking as though she'd go down.

But she didn't quite go down. One moment she'd been practically on her knees. But now she was up, getting her stride. Poor little Betty Brown. It was hopeless. She'd never catch them.

Stunned by the sharpest grief he'd ever felt, Johnny clung to the filly's withers and helped her all he could.

Hod Campbell had got him. What would Garry Blake say? How would Mr. Minot feel about it? A boy who got left at the post could bring up every alibi in the world, but nobody ever believed him. The boy had gone to sleep, that's all.

Gone to sleep! Johnny snapped out of it. He was mighty near going to sleep right now. But Betty Brown wasn't going to sleep! Betty Brown was a thoroughbred with a heart bigger than the heart of a Percheron and an abysmal distaste for running behind other horses.

Betty Brown was very busy. She was coming up on the tail-enders. As Johnny roused himself from his despair the game little filly flashed past two laboring competitors as though they were standing still. And they weren't out of the chute yet!

Johnny stuck his chin forward and looked the race over. It was pretty well strung out now. There had been twelve starters. Betty Brown had passed two; so now she was running tenth. She was tearing down the middle of the track. She went by a huddle of horses fighting for the rail as they emerged from the chute. Four in that lot. Only five ahead of her now!

But she mustn't be allowed to run like that at this stage of the race! She'd run her heart out before she'd gone three-quarters! She was very much in the race now, but it was high time for Johnny to use his head and help her. If he gave her a smart ride she might land in the money yet!

Johnny took up a couple of wraps and gradually took her back, rating Betty Brown behind a big black colt that was running paired with another horse as if the two were harnessed in a span, three lengths behind the leading three.

"Take it easy, girl, take it easy," Johnny soothed her. The little mare heard him; cocked a dainty ear back toward Johnny's voice. Johnny was in the pilot house now. Betty Brown liked Johnny. She knew she could depend on him to let her out at the right time. He always had, in their morning runs. Johnny had always seen that she finished ahead of Golden Gate, her big red stable competitor.

So she settled down and ran smoothly, not fighting for her head any more. Hod Campbell's heavy leather strap swung, snapping, under her neck. She disregarded it.

THE furlong posts, like giant barber poles, went flying by one by one as the race streamed down the long back stretch. All the boys were attending to their own mounts, rating them; just trying to hold them safe in their positions. It wasn't time yet to make their tries for better ones. Wait for the turn!

The turn was flying toward them. Johnny, holding Betty Brown out on the middle of the track, could see the three leading horses changing position. The jockey on the third horse had gone to the bat and was swinging his mount around the other two, making his bid early. Johnny gave all his attention to holding Betty Brown where she was. The filly wanted to cut in to take the rail on the turn. She mustn't do that yet.

They pounded around the turn, the jockeys leaning far in to the left to counteract the strong centrifugal force that was pulling them wide. The flying horses, too, leaned in at a sharp angle.

Then they straightened out on the short end of the track, all the jockeys with their heads up hurriedly estimating the chances of getting through on the last turn. The flying pair just in front of Betty Brown had gained on the three leaders now. Betty Brown tried to shake her head. She was getting impatient.

Johnny let out a wrap. "All right, girl; go to it! Pass these two now and we'll fight the other three down the home stretch!" he muttered.

Betty Brown gathered her hind legs under her and surged ahead. She had a clear space to the right of the right-hand horse of the pair that was by her left shoulder. Now she was coming up on them! Now her head was opposite the saddle of the horse on her left. Still she sprinted until Johnny was even with the other boy.

"Come on, baby!" he called to the gallant little mare under him.

The little mare was coming on. As they hit the last turn she passed the defeated pair and flew after the three in front.

All three of the leading horses were trying for the rail. Now they were all abreast, crowding and fighting. Johnny heard the jockeys yelling at each other for room above the drumming of hoofs. Betty Brown, true to her training, leaned in toward the rail. That would bring her behind the leading three horses, but would save her many a foot of ground on the turn.

Now they'd swept around the last turn. The straightaway opened out ahead.

"Betty Brown!" Johnny called to the fleet filly. Her right ear snapped back. "Now's your time, baby! Take 'em!"

Johnny let out his last wrap and lay low on her neck. No need of the whip. Betty Brown had heard him and felt the strain on the bit released until the iron had just a good feel in her mouth. A little pull to the right. Betty Brown swerved smoothly and straightened out just back of the right flank of the third horse from the rail.

"All right, girl! Now we're set! Take 'em! You can do it!" The little mare was flying now, low to the ground like a jack rabbit. She was creeping up on the three in front.

Then suddenly she stumbled and swerved wildly. She tossed her head and shook it violently so that the reins were almost snatched from Johnny's hands and the wicked rawhide starter's strap slapped her neck. Johnny caught her. What had happened to her? A hole in the track? No; Johnny saw that the boy just in front of them, farther away now, was bareheaded. His cap had flown off and hit Betty Brown in the face. God! What a break after she'd come up from behind like that!

BUT Betty Brown wasn't whipped yet. Betty Brown was a thoroughbred. The tougher the breaks against her, the more her mettle responded to the challenge. Let those horses in front beat her? Betty Brown reckoned not! She'd only made one bobble after all. Now she flew after them again like a shot out of a gun.

"Oh, you baby doll! Come on, baby!" sang out Johnny. "They're coming back to you! Never mind the strap! Carry it home where everybody can see it! You'll get 'em yet! Come on, Betty Brown!"

Now Johnny heard the roar of the stands. They'd seen the game little mare coming up from behind after being left flat-footed at the post. It sounded as if the whole world wanted her to win.

"Come on, Betty Brown—Betty Brown — Betty Brown!" came the surging roar.

The three leaders were still abreast, their boys whipping and screaming like maniacs. Now there were only a few short yards to the wire. The other three were close to the inside rail still. Betty Brown was out in the middle alone, where the blown-off cap had caused her to swerve at the head of the stretch.

But she was coming. Without whip or spur she was coming. Johnny was hand-riding her, praying to her, lifting her along.

Down the track she flew. Johnny couldn't turn his head to look at the other three horses. He could only look forward toward the wire.

The stands were a bedlam. Next to the rail, men were screaming and

jumping up and down with arms outstretched. Women's voices shrieked. Johnny saw hats flying in the air. On flew Betty Brown.

They must be almost under the wire now. Johnny gave the filly her head. Her nose, with the starter's swinging, whipping strap dangling from it, was a long way ahead of her body. Still farther she thrust it out as she leaped like a forest deer toward the wire.

They flew past the judges' stand. The race—the Beechwood Stake—was run. Had Betty Brown placed? Johnny didn't know. As he gently pulled the filly into a lope Johnny saw the other three horses abreast of him. Two of the boys were calling to each other and shaking their heads. They didn't know how it had come out, either. The hard-faced boy next to the rail yelled out that he was the winner.

They loped around the first turn. Betty Brown eased down to a walk and turned, then started to lope back toward the stands, Johnny balancing in the stirrups.

As they came in sight of the judges' stand, old Joe, the head groom, ran out on the track. Old Joe was jumping up and down with feet widespread, waving Betty Brown's blue-and-yellow blanket. Betty Brown trotted toward him.

"You win! You win! Betty Brown wins!" yelled old Joe. "White-boy, that there wuz de fanciest win I ever see at Churchill Downs; an' I seen a many a one!" He snatched the long, knotted leather from Betty Brown's chin-strap and waved it high in the air. "Starter-assistant strap!" he yelled to the grooms around him. "Wait till the stewards sees that knot! They'll be one starter's assistant out of a job!"

Johnny rode Betty Brown into the charmed circle reserved for winners in front of the judges' stand, saluted the judges with his whip, and slid down into the arms of Garry Blake. "Son, that was marvelous!" he said, gripping Johnny's hand.

When Johnny came down from the scales and walked back toward the jockey room, Mr. Minot was talking to Garry near the fence and beckoned Johnny over.

The owner laid his hand on Johnny's shoulder.

"We'll have to get this boy under a good contract and keep him with Hickory Stable, eh, Garry? We'll need him to have the leg up on Scarlet Tanager in the Derby next spring!"

THE END.

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Castles

WHEN all your castles have crumbled down,
And all of your plans seem in vain,
Why should you despair—the stones are still there,
Why not build them over again?

The stones that you lift will strengthen
Your hopes as you place them, so try
To start right away, keep building each day,
But this time don't build them so high.

Earle Liederman

"Lie down!" shouted Bob as he jumped ashore

Shady Rest

Shady Rest, they called the village—but Bob Stuart was to find small rest in that eccentric and secretly seething little settlement in the Berkshires

By *WILL McMORROW*

Author of "Madman's Buff," "Man o' Dreams," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HEIR TO A VILLAGE.

"SO I own a town—is that it?"

"That's it." The attorney, for all his heavy professional manner, was no older than Bob Stuart and answered grin for grin. "You've got the keys to the city—or whatever it is. I never saw the place, though your uncle's will was probated through this office, I think. If this is authentic," he tapped the sheet of paper lying on the desk between them, "it will supersede that other will of three years ago."

Stuart ground his cigarette out. "It's authentic all right. I found it among some papers Uncle Josh had stowed away. I inherited his town property, you know, the bulk of his estate. I'm like you—I never even saw this country place of his. I believe he left it to his housekeeper in that first will."

Cooper nodded. "Woman named Barnaby; some elderly spinster that was related to your uncle, if I remember. But it must have been a sizable place if she turned it into an incorporated village. You never contested that part of the will?"

"Lord, no! He left me plenty." Stuart's clear tan tinged with red underneath as he recalled the manner in which his inheritance had taken wings, but he forbore to mention that sequel. "I suppose, even at this late date, I could claim the place. It seems kind of a shame to put the old lady out of a home, though."

"She could give you a battle in court"—Cooper leaned back in his chair comfortably—"but you could establish your rights easily enough. Even though she has held the property under

the former will for three years it is rightfully yours. I'll handle the thing for you if you wish."

Stuart frowned thoughtfully. Young Cooper had been in Stuart's class at college, which was the reason he had consulted the attorney immediately on finding that will, for lawyers to Stuart meant lawsuits and he could not afford that luxury now. He had emerged from a hectic and losing battle with Wall Street, with his sole assets a thousand dollars and a partly developed sense of caution. He meant to view this unexpected windfall from all angles before tackling it low.

"Of course," the lawyer added, "there's no saying what has happened to the place in this Barnaby person's hands. She has odd notions. One of the older men in the office handled her business. If you'll drop in, say, next week, when he gets back from his vacation, he can tell you more about it. All I know is that Josh Stuart's place consisted of a few hundred acres of practically valueless land in the Berkshire foothills, with an ugly lump of a stone castle he built there. It may be worth a lot and it may be worth less than the tax liens. I understand the name of the village is Shady Rest—about the name a woman would pick. But it's all yours, according to this."

Cooper sighed enviously. Some fellows had all the luck. Here was a bird of twenty-seven or so with good looks and a wad of money and now he falls heir to a whole town, such as it was. Didn't seem to be getting much of a kick out of it either.

"You may find it a liability," Cooper added with a lawyer's cautiousness. "Of course there's a certain pleasure in riding along a street and thinking you own it."

"I've been accused of that attitude occasionally," Stuart laughed as he picked up the typewritten sheet, "in traffic arguments. I never expected it to come true. Uncle Josh must have willed it to his housekeeper and then changed his mind."

"It was his privilege," Cooper remarked, "though it's too bad you didn't find that will three years ago."

Stuart thought of the fate of his

other inheritance. "No—maybe it's just as well I didn't."

He stood up, shoved the paper inside his wallet and reached for his beribboned straw. "I think I'll take a run there and look it over before I start putting the lady out."

"If I were you," the lawyer cautioned, "I'd put that will away in a safe-deposit box or leave it here. There's no copy anywhere on file and if you lost it—"

"Don't worry. I'll hold on to it. I want to read it over again on the way. See you later."

Cooper watched the tall figure shoulder through the door, and shook his head, his legal mind shocked at the careless way rich young men had with valuable documents.

"Still, I suppose," he confided to his horn-rimmed glasses, "it doesn't mean much to him with all his money."

IF he could have seen the subsequent actions of the "rich" young man, it is quite possible that opinion might have suffered a shock, as far as Bob Stuart's financial rating was concerned.

His first stop was at his bank, and the bookkeeper behind the brass-wired wicket did not keep him waiting long.

"Seventy-three dollars and twenty-nine cents, Mr. Stuart."

Bob whistled a low, sad note. He hadn't realized how fast that last thousand had been spent. He made out a check to himself, drew out the meager balance and crossed the crowded sidewalk to his car, an expensive, glittering and gas-devouring roadster meant to give utmost comfort both to the driver and the roadside gas stations.

Bob had bought it when he was flush the year before, and it was the last of his real and personal property. He hadn't felt it necessary to confess to Cooper that the will had been found when Bob was packing up to vacate his foreclosed house.

He seated himself behind the wheel and considered this expensive means of transportation. At thirty cents a mile and with the Berkshires some sixty miles away!

A panhandler who had been working the noonday crowds sighted the roadster and assailed Bob. "A dime, mister. I ain't had a bite to eat, so help—"

Bob's muscular paw gripped the outstretched hand. "Neither have I. I'll tell you what I'll do. You turn out your pockets and I'll empty mine before witnesses. I'll swap you my roll for yours. How about it?"

"Leggo. That ain't fair." The man wriggled free and hurried away.

Bob grinningly eased the big car into Broadway traffic, drove north to Fifty-Seventh Street and turned west. He stopped at the showroom where he had bought the machine, and was instantly recognized by the alert dealer.

"Ah! Mr. Stuart. I expected you back. The new eight is on the floor—chromium nickel, all equipment; cigar lighter, searchlight, trunk, and everything. You want to know what we'll allow you on this, I suppose. We'll take that up later. I've got great news for you. Do you know how cheaply you can buy that new roadster job for to-day? They've reduced prices. Guess!"

Bob shook his head. "I'm a bum guesser."

"You can have that," the dealer's voice dropped almost to a whisper, "allowing for your old car, for three thousand dollars—a ridiculous sum for a man in your position."

"It is," Bob agreed soberly, "a ridiculous sum. I'm not buying or trading. I want to sell my car and buy a cheap little bus to go up the country in. A flivver will do, and I'm not particular what it looks like."

It took Bob five minutes to convince the automobile man that Bob was in earnest, that he was broke and needed the money.

"Of course we can't dispose of your car immediately," the man said finally,

"but you can leave it here; we'll show it. Meanwhile, if you only want something to knock around in the hills, there is an old car—terrible lot of junk—but if you insist—"

"Lead it out."

The car that appeared presently was small and disreputable. It needed a new top, a complete set of tires and a new windshield. Once it had been blue, as was evident from the patches where the paint had not peeled off. The only thing serviceable about it were the license plates. It throbbed noisily in a blue haze from the exhaust.

"How much?" Bob shouted above the racket. The dealer had turned away as if pained by the sight of that wreck. He waved his hand.

"It's a gift, Mr. Stuart. I'll make out a bill of sale for nothing if you'll promise to take it away immediately. I hope you haven't got far to go."

"Shady Rest," Bob explained, "up in the Berkshires."

"Shady Rest? Never heard of it. What is it?"

Bob hesitated a moment before replying:

"Oh, just a town I own up there. I'm not very busy these days, so I thought I'd run up and look it over. I'll have to find out where it is, though. It isn't on the maps."

"Say," the auto dealer asked his partner awhile later, "did you notice anything queer about that young Stuart, the fellow that took that iron foundry away?"

"Seems like a nice enough lad," the partner grunted. "If that boiler lasts more than a mile it 'll surprise me. Most of the bolts is loose."

"Got nothing on him. He has a few loose himself or I miss my guess. He says he owns a town up-State somewhere, but he can't find it. I've seen all kinds of bugs in my time, but this is the first—"

"What town does he think he owns?"

"Darned if I remember. I think he said Syracuse. That oughtn't to be hard to find, if he don't change his mind and pick out another one on the way."

CHAPTER II.

"YOU ARE NOW ENTERING—"

BOB climbed out of the car at the bottom of a long hill, and surveyed the flat tire without enthusiasm. In fifty odd miles of country road he had been compelled to stop for various reasons—twice to tinker with an engine that had given up the struggle, once to change a shoe, and again to investigate a bumping noise from the rear, a noise that proved to be one of the fenders, which had fallen on top of a wheel. It was shortly after that, ten miles farther on, that Bob, getting out again to see what made that funny noise under the hood, had been let down rather suddenly when the running board gave way, and bumped his head smartly on the door handle. The running board, with running comments from Bob, had followed the fender into the discard.

Bob examined the latest damage and lit a consoling cigarette. It wasn't possible to change the tire, and he wouldn't have done it anyway. He was just about fed up with this particular car.

He climbed aboard again carefully, for fear something else should break and started a slow, bumping journey along the winding State road. Shady Rest shouldn't be far off now. This was the main road, and he had already traveled most of the sixty miles Cooper had mentioned.

Rounding every curve, he kept his eyes open for signs, even while his imagination galloped forward faster than the automotive atrocity could travel—visualizing this place that he had inherited so unexpectedly, visualizing from a photograph he had once seen, this estate that chance and the whim of an old recluse had kept from its proper owner while some one else enjoyed it.

A queer bird, Uncle Josh! Not particularly fond of society, even that of his own relatives. Paying no attention to his poorer brother, Bob's father. Living here like an ancient baron in a stone castle, and dying to let his nephew play ducks and drakes with a fortune. Then, after willing the place to this housekeeper, changing his mind and having another will drawn up, sealed and attested. It was forgotten until Bob, selling off the furniture, turned it up.

Bob looked at the wooded hills that disclosed here and there an occasional farmhouse or summer hotel. A retired countryside enough in spite of being within shouting distance of Greater New York.

A shining sedan overtook him, slowed up and stopped. Bob stopped his car, too, which was a much less difficult matter than starting it.

The occupant of the sedan swung the door open and slid from behind the wheel. He was a tall, rangy individual, with a heavy jaw, a slit of a mouth, and eyebrows so highly arched over pale blue eyes as to give him an expression of constant, intense watchfulness. He seemed to take in everything in sight, including Bob and his ramshackle vehicle without moving the colorless eyes from Bob's face.

"I picked this up"—he held out a battered tail lamp—"on the road. You seem to be losing your car by pieces on the way."

"Thanks," Bob tossed the lamp into the rear seat. "It isn't much of a car, that's a fact."

The tall man flicked a glance at the peeling paint. "Kind of broke out in a rash, isn't it? Looks like a case of poison ivy to me. Done anything for it?"

"No." Bob was not ordinarily sensitive to kidding, but he'd had a trying day's work since he checked out of his New York hotel and hit this buggy trail. "It 'll get me where I want to go all right."

"Where's that? There ain't any towns in the next few miles except Shady Rest, and that ain't much of a place."

"Maybe I'll stop there," Bob offered casually. "Sounds like a cool place on a day like this."

"Yeah?" The pale blue eyes shifted over Bob investigatingly. "Selling somethin' or just touring?"

Bob shook his head. He hadn't intended to keep his movements secret, but this tall stranger seemed too inquisitive. "It's what the doctor ordered. I'm looking for a nice, quiet country boarding house to rest up in. Thanks for the tip."

"Say!" the lanky one seemed irritated, more so than then the occasion warranted. "I didn't recommend Shady Rest. In fact, if you ask me—"

"I'm not asking you," Bob interrupted, smilingly.

HE jammed the gears in place grindingly, and the little car bumped ahead on the asphalt road. The sedan overtook him and passed without stopping this time, and Bob rather regretted his abruptness. The man might have been only voicing a polite interest in Bob's welfare. At the same time it occurred to Bob that it might be advisable to enter this newfound kingdom of his, incognito. There was no telling what steps an unscrupulous person—if this Miss Barnaby proved to be that—might take to cash in on the property before Bob established his rightful claim.

He felt rather sorry for the woman, whoever she might be, who had been given something and was about to have it snatched away from her after three years because old Josh Stuart changed his mind before he died. Bob did not feel easy about that part of it. Perhaps he could make a settlement, after he looked the proposition over, so the elderly victim of circumstances would not be altogether destitute.

The broad highway, banked on

either side with the wooded slopes of big estates, was joined by another, narrower road that ran into it at right angles from a wide gateway. Both swung the car into the narrow road as his eyes caught the words "Shady Rest" on a huge, much-lettered sign that guarded the stone-columned entrance.

He stopped to read it, craning his neck out the side of the car:

You Are Now Entering The Village Of
SHADY REST

Speed limit five miles per hour
No unnecessary noise permitted
The poor and needy are welcome
The drunkard, the blasphemer, the cigarette-smoker must not enter here
Gates are closed at sunset and all day Sunday

Thank you

"Don't mention it." Bob flicked his cigarette into the shrubbery beside the road. "Seems to have a sort of religious atmosphere 'Poor and needy.' If there's anybody needier than myself, I'll make him a present of the place."

From where he sat outside the huge masonry gate posts, there was little to be seen of Shady Rest, except for the ten-foot stone wall that extended for several hundred yards in either direction, topped by the branches of tall trees. The heavy, ornamental-iron gates were swung back invitingly, showing the smooth concrete of the road winding off to the right, while the turreted outline of a sizable castle of gray stone loomed squat and ugly above the tops of elms in the middle distance.

"Gothic," Bob muttered, "and half a dozen other things. Uncle Josh had his architecture mixed, but he sure spent money. That wall alone cost him a small fortune."

The car moved explosively through the gateway, jarring along on the flat shoe that made the smooth level of the driveway seem full of holes and hummocks. But Bob was paying no particular attention to that. He was gazing around on all sides, trying to estimate the size of this estate that he had fallen heir to, and feeling very much like a feudal king coming into his own again.

He could see more of the place now. Just inside the entrance a two-story cottage of field stone—evidently the former gate-house of the estate—bore a sign "Community Store," and displayed groceries and clothing in its renovated windows. By its side was a new gas station with red gas pumps in front, and a row of a dozen or so stucco and shingle bungalows beyond that. On the left was the thick grove of oaks that Bob had seen over the wall; ahead of him was a glimpse of the castle, and off to the right in the distance another group of wooden buildings in a hollow.

A hundred yards beyond the gateway the road divided sweeping around to right and left of the tree-obscured main house. Neat and artistic signposts of blue and yellow stood at the fork, announcing "Kindliness Road" and "Charity Drive." Bob picked Kindliness Road, the one that led to the right, and chugged comfortably on his way.

WHERE the road dipped into the low land Bob took a look at the weather-beaten cottage and its neighboring shacks. Evidently, at one time, it had been the gardener's home and the outhouses. But it was just as evident that no gardening was being done. The furrowed fields behind it were green with weeds, the house itself neglected, here and there a window broken and stuffed with paper, a garbage heap in unsanitary proximity to the dwelling.

On the grass-plot in front, a man with his head shielded from the sun by a newspaper, slept undisturbed by the blatant jazz of a radio going full

blast. A pallid youth in a striped silk shirt and rakish Panama played solitaire on a rickety porch table, stopping his game to watch Bob out of sight.

"Looks more like a hoboes' rest than anything else to me," Bob frowned. "I'll shift 'em out of that when I get ready."

He passed another road that led upward through the trees to the gray castle, and came to the stone wall again that bordered the property. There was another gateway on this north side, but smaller. Another sign adorned the exit:

YOU ARE LEAVING SHADY REST

Bob did not finish reading it being too much occupied with maneuvering the car around a sharp turn that led back toward the entrance along Charity Drive. Besides, he wasn't leaving Shady Rest.

He followed the curve of the drive, skirting a lake of several acres, more woods, and came to a screeching stop as he applied the brakes.

It wasn't the lake that attracted his attention. Bob had seen lakes before. The particular attraction in this case was a girl in a red swimming suit and cap, who stood poised for a dive at the edge of a tiny float. It is an attitude that even the plainest of girls with any sort of figure can make effective, and this girl was distressingly pretty, with the lithe figure of a bathing-suit poster.

It seemed to Bob, at peace with a friendly world that was about to hand him a rich and thriving village, a situation requiring comment.

"Hold it!" he called genially.

Obviously, the proper retort from a girl in a red bathing suit, familiar with Broadway shows and smart magazines, should have been either "Don't be ridick" or "You're just the tripe," culled from the sayings of wise men and stored away against just such an occasion, and Bob was all set for the snappy come-back.

She lowered her arms, regarded both car and Bob with a certain amount of surprised interest in the depths of brown eyes, and pushed back a strand of wet blond hair that had escaped the confines of the cap.

"You've probably lost your way," she said patiently, extending a glistening arm in the direction of the gardener's cottage. "The home is over there—just behind those trees."

"Not for me," Bob grinned. "I saw it first. I'll wait until the exterminator has a look at it. I'll stick to the castle on the hill. Perhaps you can tell me where I can locate a certain party named Barn—"

Taken aback, he watched the widening circle where she had vanished in a decidedly workmanlike dive, and caught sight of the bathing cap break the smooth surface of the water. She struck out for the farther side of the lake, tanned arm flashing overhead in a graceful crawl.

"Darned unfriendly," Bob complained, starting the car. "Takes me for a subway masher or one of those bums over there."

The driveway swung back to the left and joined the main entrance road again at the fork. In the racket his four erratic cylinders were making, Bob did not hear the sedan approach until it was abreast of him, crowding him off to the side.

HE stopped with a jerk. The same lanky party that Bob had met on the State road appeared beside the car.

"What did I drop now?" Bob asked casually. "If you're waiting for the transmission to fall off it won't be long—"

"So you came here after all," the man rested one foot on the dilapidated running-board and chewed gum thoughtfully, his face close to Bob's. "I forgot to mention to you I run this dump. Town constable you can call me. Goin' along now, are you?"

"I don't know. I think maybe I'll stick around awhile longer. Kind of like the place."

The "town constable's" voice was unruffled and peaceable, one might even have said friendly. "You don't want to hang out here, feller. It ain't much of a place. Just keep on goin', now, out the gate and forget to come back. We don't want no drifters around!"

"What's the idea?" Bob asked resentfully. "Why shouldn't I—"

"No idea, feller," he chewed his gum with a slight and sidewise motion of the thin lips. "I'm just tellin' you what to do. On your way now."

"The hell I will!" Bob exploded. "I've got probably more right here than you have if it comes to that. Constable or no constable you'll have to show me—"

"What's the trouble, Jake?" A fleshy, unshaven party wearing flowered suspenders and no collar, showed up beside the car. He had sauntered over from the Community Store. At his elbow the gas station man, a smudge of grease adorning his otherwise unprepossessing countenance, glowered at Bob.

"Causin' unnecessary noise," Jake grated, "with this oil-can of his. I told him it was against the rules an' he won't move on. Some bum lookin' fer a chance to pinch somethin', I guess."

"Look here," Bob started to descend from his rickety perch. "You keep your remarks—"

"Catch hold!" Jake snapped quickly. "We'll shove his bus out after him."

The two others caught hold with an alacrity that bespoke practice. Bob swung at the fat man, missed and found himself the center and leader of a flying-wedge, his arms pinioned on either side and Jake bucking the line from the rear. They traveled fast with a patter of feet on the concrete road and out through the wide gateway on the run.

Bob no longer felt like a feudal lord entering into his principality. He felt very much like a young man being given the bum's rush with neatness and dispatch. As he flew through the entrance just before they let go to proceed under his own momentum, he caught sight of an inner sign he had not noticed before:

You Are Now Leaving
SHADY REST
A village of friendly folk.
Cultivate the kindly thought—

Bob had not a single kindly thought as he landed in the bushes beside the highroad.

CHAPTER III.

THE LADY OF THE LAKE.

HE was on his feet again instantly, his eyes blazing.

Jake stood back of the others, one hand shoved inside his coat, and he no longer chewed gum. His thin lips were a straight, colorless line. The man from the gas station grinned through the smudge of grease and then stepped back as Bob rose, the brown tweed of his suit well spattered with the whitish dust of the bushes.

The one nearest Bob, the fleshy gentleman from the Community Store, backed hastily before the enraged young man's rush, and ducked a swing, tripping over backward into the briers, where he wriggled ineffectually to free himself.

"What you waitin' for, Jake?" he snarled. "Give him the works before he gets a chance to pull a gun on me!"

Bob had no gun and if he had he wouldn't have used it. And in the frame of mind he was in, Jake's menacing attitude meant nothing. Bob took a step forward, as a new voice broke in hurriedly.

"Here! Here! What's all this, gentlemen?"

Bob turned toward the man who stood in the entrance—a dignified and

imposing figure in white flannels, who had rounded the stone pillar, and frowned reprovingly at the group. He had the heavily handsome features, the aquiline nose, the iron-gray hair, the smooth-shaven urbanity of well-fed and successful middle-life. He might easily have been a big business man, a statesman of the Henry Clay type, or an aisle-manager in a department store.

"What's this I hear about guns, gentlemen? Surely," his rich barytone flowed smoothly upon the troubled waters, "surely there is a grave mistake here somewhere. That is not the sort of thing for Shady Rest."

"Not our fault, chief," Jake said sullenly. "This guy was snoopin' around the works an' I run him off, that's all. Gave him the rush."

"You mean," the statesmanlike eyebrows bent bushily at Jake, "you, ah, ejected him forcibly."

"Have it your own way," Jake muttered. "Anyway," he raised his voice, "there's a rule here about guys kickin' up a racket."

"There is a rule, yes," the other bathed each one in turn in the warmth of his smile, a plump hand cutting off Jake's growling protest. "A golden rule. Need I say more, gentlemen? Suppose we permit this youth to identify himself. Let it not be said that one who came to Shady Rest, poor and needy, looking for succor— You smile, my friend?" This last directed, not without a certain menacing note, at the garage man.

"As far as identifying myself," Bob broke in, brushing the dust from his tweed suit, "I never heard it was required of every fellow that rides through a strange village, unless he's carrying a pack of burglar's tools. And your sign doesn't mention that visitors need passports."

"You are facetious," the big man smiled understandingly. "Provoked, perhaps, at the overzealous way in which our constable here performed the duty laid upon him."

"My name is Stuart," Bob interrupted the peroration shortly.

"Stuart—Stuart. Not related by any, ah, chance to—" his mellow voice softened reverently—"the Founder?"

"I don't know who the Founder was. But if you mean old Josh Stuart, he was my uncle."

"Indeed! I had heard there was a nephew." He frowned at the surly Jake and his two merry men. "There has been a grave error here, gentlemen. I think you owe Mr. Stuart an apology. I am sure he bears you no ill-will, realizing, as he does, the mistaken sense of duty that prompted your—ah—rather abrupt procedure. We will say no more about it."

Bob would have had considerably more to say—and do—about it, but he was not given the chance. His hand was inclosed in a warm, moist palm and the voice of the big man boomed cordially:

"A nephew of the Founder! Need we say how welcome you are to Shady Rest? I might remark that you resemble him greatly, sir."

HE released Bob's hand, but immediately locked elbows with the honored guest and escorted him back through the gateway, waving to Jake and his friends in a gesture of dismissal.

"You knew Uncle Josh?" Bob asked.

"Not exactly, er, in life," he breathed in Bob's ear. "Only from his photographs. A remarkable man, an earnest, upright type of American citizen. And I might add he left behind him a remarkable woman to carry out his charitable designs. You have come for a flying visit, perhaps?"

He slowed his pace a trifle and Bob sensed that he was being scrutinized closely enough, for all the other's garrulous hospitality.

"I have no definite plans," Bob informed him. "May I ask—"

"Who I am? I beg your pardon. I

should have introduced myself. Mortimer is the name. I am associated with Miss Barnaby in the, ah, enterprise. You might say I am in charge—subject to Miss Barnaby, of course. We are not exactly an incorporated village. That will come later, I hope. It is still a private community which allows us to close the road at night. Meanwhile some of the other property owners have done me the honor to make me mayor—a purely honorary title, sir. I am engaged, besides furthering the noble work of the Founder's heiress, in disposing of certain parcels of realty to, ah, an exclusive clientele at a financial profit."

Bob nodded. "In other words, you are selling lots."

"Bluntly," Mortimer conceded, "that covers it." It was apparent that under no circumstances would Mr. Mortimer willingly be blunt. "Here you see some of the homes we, ah, lease."

Bob looked again at the row of bungalows, evidently of the portable type, that he had passed before. They nestled among the trees and, except for a swarthy young man who lay in a hammock reading a pink tabloid newspaper, showed none of the usual signs of occupancy.

"They are not large families, you will notice," Mortimer went on. "We do not restrict against children, but it happens that way. Bachelors mainly; artists seeking quiet and seclusion, or business men on vacation. I suppose you are not contemplating buying?"

Bob shook his head. "Not exactly."

"A little too quiet," Mortimer smiled, "for an active young man. As a matter of fact, we are pretty well sold out for the present. Of course the poor—you have seen our home perhaps—are always with us. It was one of Mrs. Barnaby's objects to see that the poor and needy—the poor and—just a minute, my friend."

He strode over to the swarthy young man in the hammock, above whose sleek head a curl of smoke hovered. The rolling barytone rumbled a sentence or two and the occupant of the hammock flicked away a cigarette. Mortimer turned and marched back to Bob.

"Our friends," he waved both hands in graceful gesture, "forget our little regulations occasionally. We do not always insist on a strict interpretation, but in broad daylight—"

He left the rest to the imagination. Bob nodded. He was getting tired of this mellifluous Mr. Mortimer, and wanted to take a closer look at that mansion on the hill, have a talk with this eccentric spinster who was about to lose her heritage. But he didn't feel like taking Mortimer into his confidence just yet.

"Who started those rules anyway?" he inquired. "It's a cinch it wasn't Uncle Josh. If I remember rightly, he died of a smoker's heart himself, and he liked his liquor with the next one."

"He reformed, my dear fellow. The signs at the gate were Mrs. Barnby's idea—and an excellent one. They are useful in keeping out undesirables."

"They're not very useful in selling lots," Bob grunted. "A couple of 'For Sale' signs would do just as well. By the way, have you phone service here in the Community Store? I'd like to get in touch with this Barnaby lady."

"There are no phones here," Mortimer explained regretfully. "And Miss Barnaby is in New York. But if you are anxious to get back to town I will be glad to offer you the use of my car. I expect to run down to the city to-night."

"Thanks, I'm in no hurry. I'll get along all right. I'm awfully glad to have met you, Mr. Mortimer. See you again, I hope."

Bob made for his car, started the engine and turned it in the wide roadway, waving his hand as he passed the mayor of Shady Rest on the upgrade.

If Mr. Mortimer was shocked at the abrupt leave-taking he gave no sign of it.

THE car jolted along Kindliness Road after a fashion, but the hill that led to the stone castle was too much. Bob left the defeated wreck at the bottom and went ahead on foot.

The trees ended abruptly on the edge of the sloping green of a lawn, and Bob had a complete view of his new possession. However badly Josh Stuart's architectural knowledge had gone astray on him, he had succeeded in carrying out his idea in the main—the construction of a miniature feudal castle such as would have delighted the heart of a robber baron of the Middle Ages.

It was built in a square; at the corners were round towers about thirty feet in height and slitted with narrow windows, connected by blank walls twenty feet or so in height, and castellated at the top in traditional style. In the center of the inner court a more habitable tower showed, plainly intended to represent the ancient donjon-keep. The entrance to this was a wide gateway in the stone wall with a sliding portcullis of hand-wrought iron. To complete the picture, a moat a few yards wide had been dug all around the edifice, filled with water. It was a muddy and weed-grown ditch now. A drawbridge, complete with chains and windlass laid across it, but electric light wires, running from a pole in the rear to a corner tower, and a shiny roadster just inside the gateway, added two neat, modern touches to this medieval scene.

They were not the only anachronisms visible. There were others. One was a wicker *chaise-longue* with striped cushions on the lawn. The other was the girl in the red swimming suit, who sat in the chair with a bath towel about her shoulders and a shimmer of unbobbed blond hair spread out in the sunlight.

She closed the book she had been reading, holding her place with one finger, and watched Bob's approach with a slight frown puckering an otherwise smooth forehead.

"I'm afraid I'm trespassing," Bob began, conscious of having made an unfavorable impression at the lake-side. "But I didn't think there was any one here, and I wanted to look the place over. Quaint, isn't it?"

"Is it?" Neither tone nor words were encouraging. Bob reddened.

"I dropped down here—I mean I dropped in—dropped around on the—"

"We'll concede," she inspected a pink finger nail, "that you dropped."

"I understand Miss—or Mrs.—Barnaby isn't home right now. Perhaps you can tell me when she is expected back. There was a—a business matter I wanted to talk over with her. A rather important matter."

She flushed quickly. "I'm sorry I was rude. I thought you were one of those men from the home."

"Don't mention it," Bob grinned. "That car of mine is enough to scare any one off. I suppose you are one of the lady's house guests?"

"I am Miss Barnaby."

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING HONESTY.

BOB'S grin faded. "But I thought—they told me she was an elderly spinster."

"I suppose," she smiled, "I might be called a spinster. I've never been accused of being elderly. The Mrs. Barnaby to whom you refer was my mother."

"I see. Then your mother—" he caught himself in time. "Then you own this place."

She gazed beyond him over the tree-tops, and completed his thought. "Mother left it to me a year ago when she died. It was everything she had, and I have tried to keep it going, as you

see. Mr. Mortimer handles the business details. You said you had an important matter?"

Bob frowned uneasily. "Nothing—nothing pressing. More a visit of curiosity. By the way, wasn't Mrs. Barnaby connected with the estate here?"

"She kept house for him and managed the servants and the farm help, if that's what you mean."

"And," Bob pursued, "wasn't your mother related to him in some way?"

"Well, yes." The perfect brows heightened a shade. "She was his second cousin. May I inquire whether this is to be a signed interview or just a further expression of curiosity?"

"I was just wondering what that makes us," Bob explained. "Third cousins, I suppose. I'm his nephew, Bob Stuart."

"Heavens! Why didn't you say so in the first place?" she extended her hand, flashing a smile up at him that was the pleasantest thing Bob had seen in Shady Rest, as well as the most genuine. "Of course I know you now. You're the boy that mother used to tell me about—the boy that inherited so much money and was making ducks and drakes of it, whatever they are!"

"I don't know what I made of it," Bob laughed, rather wryly, "but I doubt if either ducks or drakes could get up that flying speed."

He seated himself on the smooth lawn, and, for a moment, they gazed at one another with the frank curiosity of youth, he conscious of the errand he had come on and the paper he carried, she aware of the fact that her hair was damp and her bathing suit faded, and she could not possibly be looking her best.

But even her second, third or fourth best was plenty for Bob Stuart, as far as good looks went—even though his expression showed no great degree of happiness at the moment. He was wondering how he would break the news to this young girl that she was to be dispossessed. He was wondering if he would break the news to her at all. He felt slightly lower than a mole.

"You're going to stay, of course," she suggested hospitably. "I don't know what Mrs. Lang has inflicted on me for dinner, but it will be something substantial at any rate. I don't meet a new cousin every day, and, frankly, I'm consumed with curiosity."

"So am I," Bob admitted. He indicated the castle and the surrounding property below the hill with a generous wave of his hand. "This whole thing mystifies me. Why the home for derelicts, and those odd signs? And that affable party named Mortimer, that looks like an ambassador and talks like McGuffey's First Reader—and you, last, but not least."

"Thanks," she laughed. "Starting with me, I'm Anne, released two years ago from a rather expensive school in the South. I am free, more or less white—when the tan wears off, and twenty-two. Mr. Mortimer, whom you so effectively describe, bought a small interest in Shady Rest while mother was alive, and ran the community in her absence. He is lord mayor, business manager and official entertainment committee."

"Do you—I'm asking a lot of questions—live here the year round in the enchanted castle on the hill?"

"Only for the past month. I had to give up the apartment in the city and come up here to live. It's cheaper. But it's more drafty than enchanted. I don't think they could have been very comfortable in the Middle Ages. I spent my vacations here, but mother and I lived in the gate house. I shouldn't criticize Cousin Josh after he was sweet enough to leave us a home, but I don't think a medieval castle is such a hot idea."

SHE stood up, straight, slender, full-throated, and threw her head back, tossing the gleaming hair from her shoulders.

"And the idea of a refuge for the homeless?" Bob pursued. "Mortimer spoke of a Founder—Uncle Josh."

"Mother called him that," she said. "She thought the world of him. But it really was Mr. Mortimer's idea originally, to make a sort of philanthropy of it. Mother was deeply religious, and she believed in helping people.

"She felt grateful to Cousin Josh for what he had done, and dedicated the notion to him, but it was Mr. Mortimer who attended to the details. He has wonderful ability and personality, don't you think?"

"You bet," Bob agreed half-heartedly. "He's just bathed in personality as if it was bay rum, or that smelly stuff the barbers put on your hair if you don't watch them. How are his lots going?"

"Very slowly. Mr. Mortimer is particular whom we sell to. And he has a customer for the whole business when I want to sell." She picked up her book. "I'll run in now and get dressed. Further information will be advanced at dinner. Did you bring a bag?"

"Yes." Bob stood up. "It's in the car. But I didn't figure on camping on you—I can put up at the home."

"Indeed you can't," she said decidedly. "If there's one thing we have nothing but here, it's guest room. I'll send our seneschal Lang out to fetch your bag and show you your chamber of horrors."

Bob watched the red swimming suit and yellow blond hair flicker through the arched gateway, as he plucked and chewed distastefully a blade of grass. He felt for the wallet in his pocket that contained a typewritten and witnessed paper.

He should perhaps have brought the matter up immediately. It was not going to be any easier or pleasanter to break the news to her after accepting her hospitality. Of course, the sensible business procedure would be to engage Cooper to take the necessary legal steps to safeguard his interests.

"Hell!" Bob complained to no one in particular. "I can't throw the poor kid out without a home, can I?"

He ejected the chewed blade of grass forcibly and followed the path down the hill to his car. He pushed it off the driveway into the shadow of the trees, where it would not obstruct traffic, and reached into the dusty tonneau for his hat and the elaborately bolted and strapped kit bag of pigskin—a relic of his former grandeur. It fell open as he lifted it and he laid it on the ground, stooping over to snap the brass fasteners.

A shadow drifted silently across Bob's bent back.

"Can I help you, sir?"

Bob looked up at the thin, white-coated figure. "Oh, you're—"

"Lang, sir." The man gazed straight ahead with the wooden-faced, heavy respectability that Bob connected with the perfect servant. "Miss Barnaby sent me."

Bob stood aside, while the man fastened the locks, his long fingers—as innocent of hair as his browless face and shiningly bald head—working deftly and quickly. "Probably jarred open on the road, sir."

"Probably," Bob nodded. "Will the car be all right here?"

"Oh, quite all right," the butler's colorless lips essayed a feebly reproachful smile. "No one will disturb it, sir. It will be perfectly safe. This is Shady Rest, sir."

"If I thought," Bob added solemnly, "there was a chance of any one stealing it, I'd leave it on the main road with a five dollar bill pinned to it to recompense them. Where do we go from here?"

"This way, sir. Your room is in the White Tower." He marched ahead up the path, Bob following the gleam of the bald head along the sun-spotted driveway, across the green softness of the lawn, and over the re-

verberating planks of the drawbridge into the courtyard.

BOB looked around the cobblestoned interior, appreciating the extent to which Josh Stuart had gone to preserve the illusion of an ancient stronghold. The center tower, or "keep," of dressed stone contained not more than half a dozen rooms, with narrow windows and a heavy oak door on the ground floor and larger casement windows on the upper story.

Running from both of the front towers to the second floor of the keep, fifteen feet or more from the ground, were completely inclosed bridges, also of stone, and with slim windows of stained glass. The two rear towers were apparently unoccupied and meant more for ornament than usefulness. Behind the keep, along the rear wall of the inclosure, was a wooden, single-story shack with smoke lazily curling up from a rusted stovepipe in the side.

"That's the kitchen, I suppose," Bob pointed to the shack.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Joshua Stuart had it built. There was no other means of cooking in the keep, sir."

"Unless they had a barbecue in the main hall," Bob agreed. "The world do move. Were you here in Uncle Josh's time?"

Lang stared straight ahead, as if he were patiently waiting for this inquisitive person to follow. "No, sir. My wife and I have been here only since Miss Barnaby arrived. This way, sir."

He turned to the right, crossed the court to the tower that guarded the southeast corner, and stood aside by the open door.

"The White Tower, sir. The guest room is up above. Mind your step, sir, in the dark."

It was dark enough on the lower floor. Not much light came through the slitted windows, barely enough to show the winding stone stairway that led up to the circular room above. Bob barked his shin, found the landing, and ascended.

For an outside by no means attractive, the room was surprisingly comfortable-looking. A white-canopied bed, fresh and clean, and a chest of drawers were on the side toward the moat, and a window seat, velvet-upholstered and curved to fit the wall, was beneath the broad, leaded window facing on the court. There was an expensive Persian rug on the stone floor, a shelf of books, and a leather-backed peasant chair. A closed door indicated the "Bridge of Sighs" that connected the tower with the keep, and an iron ladder was attached to the wall.

"The bath is a standing shower in the room below," Lang deposited the bag on the window seat. "The ladder leads to the top of the tower. Dinner is served in the keep."

He pointed to the closed door. "Through that way, when you are ready, sir."

"It's unlocked, I see," Bob tried the knob.

Lang smiled again reproachfully. "Nothing is locked here, sir, not in Shady Rest. It is not necessary. Honesty—"

He seemed about to hold forth on this topic, but evidently changed his mind, closing the bridge-door quietly behind him. Bob examined the brass locks of the kit-bag again. One was scratched deeply, and the other bent askew as if it had been forced by a metal instrument or a key that didn't fit.

Bob opened the bag and surveyed the disordered contents that he had packed so carefully in the morning.

Nothing had been taken, but in the short time that the bag had reposed in the car at the foot of the hill, some one had ransacked that bag thoroughly, searching every pocket and corner and hastily tumbling the contents back in—probably on hearing Bob's footsteps.

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "For honest people they surely work

fast in Shady Rest. Now, I wonder who is so inquisitive—and why?"

CHAPTER V.

BOB TAKES A STROLL.

IT was quite a complete and up-to-date bathroom that Bob discovered downstairs, tiled and towelled and with appurtenances for cleanliness that any respectable robber-baron would have viewed with alarm. Bob shaved and showered and located a clean shirt in the kit-bag that hadn't been pawed over by the searcher, and was ready when the booming of a Chinese gong sounded from the court below.

He passed through the short bridge, opened a second door of rough-hewn oak, and found himself on a balcony overlooking the great center hall of the keep. Above his head the colorful evening light streamed through the tall, leaded windows, aiding the feeble beams from the deep, narrow openings on the first floor. Below him were Oriental rugs, a glimpse of stone flagging between, candles on a snowy tablecloth, a lot of stiff and massive chairs, Anne's gleaming hair beside a shaded lamp, and the houseman's shiny bald head busy about the table.

Anne looked up at the sound of the heavy door closing, and waved to Bob. "Come on down. Stairs are at the right. Don't trip."

Bob didn't trip, but he almost tied himself into a knot circling the tightly-winding spiral stairway that had been Josh Stuart's idea of medieval improvements.

"How do you like our gloomy mansion?" she asked. "This is all there is to it. I always feel as if I'm eating in church."

Bob grinned. "You're the one bright spot."

"Oh, this," she looked disapprovingly at her flowered chiffon. "It's one of the few rags I have left. I don't know what I'd do if I had to buy stockings. The style of going without is a godsend to the poor."

Bob sat down opposite her in one of the massive walnut chairs.

"How poor are you? Or is that a figure of speech?"

"Is this another questionnaire?" she laughed. "Well, if you'll promise that nothing I say will be used against me if I go into bankruptcy, I'll tell all. Besides this dress and one or two others, a raccoon coat three years old, and some assorted shoes, I am the proud possessor of about eighty dollars and this thriving village, which, I should judge from the latest reports, is worth about eighty dollars, too, if some one was foolish enough to pay the taxes on it."

"It ought to be salable," Bob remarked, "though not every one wants a place like this. I thought you said Mortimer had a buyer."

She nodded. "He's trying to negotiate now. He really works awfully hard to make something out of the place. But the lots don't seem to sell easily and he says this kind of a house is hard to dispose of."

"Those signs would drive a buyer away," Bob said bluntly. For the moment he was forgetting his own interest in Shady Rest. "And that idea of letting every bum in the neighborhood drift in and camp—that's not the best advertising in the world."

"I know," her forehead puckered in a worried frown. "It doesn't help. But mother wanted it that way, and Mr. Mortimer really feels that he wants to help those unfortunates. Still, I don't know; sometimes I wonder if they are all so deserving. I don't mean to be uncharitable, but some of them, if they really wanted work, could find it. Mr. Mortimer feeds them out of his own pocket, I think, half the time and I don't believe it does any of them any good—"

Lang's expressionless and waxen face appeared above the lamp. "Dinner is served, miss." There was almost,

Bob thought, a note of reproval in that respectful monotone.

Bob mentioned the houseman later, during one of Lang's absences in the direction of the outside kitchen.

"He's a conscientious worker," she said. "Mr. Mortimer was very fortunate in getting the couple for me, especially as they work for practically nothing besides their board and room.

"Lang has been unfortunate; lost his position and health, too—liquor, I think—and he's grateful enough for even this poor job. He seems genuinely attached to the place and the charity going on in the home."

"I won't hurt his feelings then," Bob smiled. "But I don't mind telling you there's a light-fingered bird in that nest somewhere, or an inquisitive one. Anyway, my bag was jimmied open awhile ago and pretty thoroughly gone over."

"Really?" Her eyes widened over the coffee cup. "Some one tried to steal—"

"Oh, they didn't take anything," Bob reassured her. "There was nothing in it worth taking. Looks as if some one needed a shirt or a pair of socks and found they didn't fit."

"I SHALL tell Mr. Mortimer," she exclaimed indignantly. "He'll have the man, whoever he is, put off the property."

"If he can be located," Bob pointed out, "which isn't an easy matter with a floating population like that in the home. I wouldn't worry about it. There's been no harm done. I'll just keep my eyes open hereafter. It seems that Jake, the constable, isn't as particular with every visitor as he was with me."

He described his hurried exit through the gateway, propelled by the brawny Jake and his cohort. He omitted no details even to the final and undignified dive into the barberry bushes.

She gasped. "Why, how perfectly outrageous! I don't see anything to laugh at!"

"The humorous aspect of it appeals to me," Bob admitted. "But I'd rather not make a fuss about it. After all, Jake was within his rights to question me."

"But you came in here on a perfectly friendly visit! Your intentions were certainly not underhanded and I don't—"

Bob flushed quickly. "I didn't come to steal the shrubbery anyway. But it's all right with me. I've been thrown out of much worse places than this. And, speaking of being thrown out—"

He hesitated to express what was in his mind and decided not to. But she thought she sensed his meaning. The red lips curved in lofty contempt.

"If you're thinking of that absurd man-made convention that says you may not sleep under the same roof with a helpless female—"

"I wasn't," Bob protested.

"You were," she corrected calmly. "But I feel quite safe. We won't be under the same roof anyway—my room is in the Gray Tower and the Langs, husband and wife, occupy one of the balcony rooms here. Furthermore, I think it is an unflattering convention when you consider that the modern girl is perfectly capable of taking care of herself."

"I surrender," Bob laughed. "Don't rub it in. I'll ask Mortimer—he probably invented the rule."

"In that case," she said judiciously, "if you are properly repentant, you may smoke a cigarette. I suppose that is one of your vices."

"It is." Bob whipped forth his cigarette case gladly, proffered it across the table.

"No, thanks," she stood up. "I've tried it at school. It chokes me all up. Don't let Mr. Mortimer see you smoking in public. He's awfully sensitive about the town regulations. Can you play two-handed bridge?"

"I can learn easily," Bob boasted.

It was a boast not founded on fact, if Bob's performance during the next couple of hours was a criterion. He did not seem an apt pupil, due perhaps to his mind being occupied with other things, such as a pair of slim, shapely hands shuffling the cards across the small table, the gleam of lamp-light in yellow hair, the guilty knowledge of his real mission to Shady Rest.

"I'm afraid you're not very much interested," she accused him, finally, "but it's about the limit of our amusements in the evening. Mr. Mortimer is the only one that plays around here. It has been rather dead for me this past month. I don't care to drive by myself. Of course there's the lake. The swimming is wonderful."

Bob accompanied her as far as the balcony stairs. "We'll take a dip in the morning," he suggested. "I brought a suit with me. What do you think of that idea?"

"All right," she smiled down at him. "Before breakfast."

Back in his room in the White Tower, Bob leaned on the window sill that overlooked the inner court, his cigarette glowing in the darkness. In the Gray Tower the light from Anne's room outlined the drawn curtains in penciled oblong. From the court came the low growl of voices.

BOB looked toward the portcullis, and as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, made out the thin outline of Lang's white-coated figure standing in the entrance, his back toward the keep. The other party to the conversation stood in the shadow of the passageway. The talk was pitched too low for Bob to catch the words, but he could make out Lang's flat monotone at times, and the other's rasping tones. Then the white coat vanished under the portcullis, reappeared a blur in the dark.

Bob ground out his cigarette on the window ledge. Evidently the visitor had left and Lang was standing in the entrance enjoying the cool breeze that came through, from the outside. Bob decided to enjoy it with him. It was too early yet for sleep, and there were a lot of things about Shady Rest, including the upright Lang himself, that aroused Bob's curiosity. He wondered just how much of a dumb-bell the houseman had been not to have seen that twisted lock on the kit-bag, and how sincere was his belief in the honesty of his fellowmen.

Slipping away from the window, Bob made his way down the black stairs to the lower floor and out into the cobbled courtyard. The white coat was in the same position.

"Good evening," Bob opened his prearranged campaign of inquiry when within a few yards. "Standing guard here against the invader or just taking the air?"

There was no answer. Bob cleared his throat, took another few steps, and found he had been addressing the white linen coat. It hung on one of the chains that worked the drawbridge and Lang was neither in it nor near it. He had taken the air all right, but had left that conspicuous garment behind.

From down the hill came a dry crunch of feet on gravel as some one descended the path under the trees. Bob blinked into the darkness, rubbed his chin meditatively and listened. The radio was still going in the house in the hollow. Lights blinked there and from the direction of the Community House. A truck without lights rumbled by on the lower road, the sound dying away in the vicinity of the north gate.

A snatch of song, the slamming of a door, loud argument quickly stilled again drifted up on the night wind from the bungalows.

Bob crossed the bridge, and followed the crunching footsteps that were receding down the hill. He had a feeling he would like to know more about

the genial, easy-going gentlemen who were Anne Barnaby's poor and needy.

CHAPTER VI.

KINDLINESS ROAD.

HE had no definite plan in following Lang on what was probably an innocent enough excursion to town. The houseman was doubtless taking a few minutes off from his arduous duties, a vacation to which he was no doubt entitled. But anything that had to do with that too upright person was of interest to Bob.

The winding path was empty when Bob reached it. He went carefully down the hill, making little noise on the rolling gravel, passed his stalled car at the side of the driveway, and emerged on the concrete roadway.

It seemed in the places where the crowding trees did not cast shadow, empty in both directions. Some few hundred yards off the lights twinkled in the home. Bob walked along the road in that direction and stopped in a black patch of darkness opposite the ramshackle house.

The torn shades were drawn down on all the windows where light showed, shutting out everything but the scraping music of the radio and a clatter of voices, but the porch light blazed through its broken globe on the ceiling revealing the single figure that sat underneath—the pallid youth in the rakish Panama, whom Bob had seen earlier in the day, playing solitaire.

The cards were spread before him on the rickety wicker table. He selected them one at a time, added them to the rows he had made, gathered them up, shuffled, spread them out again with unhurried, deliberate concentration on the business in hand. For all the attention he paid to the noise around him he might have been sitting on a desert island by himself, wrapped in this weird obsession that possessed him to make the cards come out.

Bob wondered if this addict had stopped his solitaire for supper or whether this was a continuation of the same game. Once, though Bob had made no sound, the pallid young man lifted his head and stared steadily for almost a minute, at the spot Bob occupied beneath the trees. Then he went on with his game.

Inside the house voices rose in hot argument. There was a crash of breaking glass, a door slammed suddenly, and a man, hatless and coatless, dived across the porch, took the steps in one jump and vanished under the trees, just as a second man bounded through the door into the light. He was tugging at his hip-pocket.

Bob had only time to note a green and black checkered sweater and a round and enraged red face, before he ducked behind the tree to escape the line of fire. The double blast of the automatic ripped the night air deafeningly.

Bob peeped out cautiously. The fat, red-necked man was glaring at the solitaire player.

"The dirty bum! Which way did he go? Snap out of it!"

The other selected a card thoughtfully, waved a hand carelessly toward the Community House, and smiled with an even show of white teeth.

"That way. Very likely if you chase him you'll run into Mortimer, too. He'll be tickled pink to find you running wild around here with a loaded gun."

"To hell with Mortimer! This is my racket and he can keep his fat head out of it." He proceeded to render an extemporaneous but colorful opinion of the ancestry, personal habits and future state of Mortimer and the man who had just made his get-away—Bob gathered his name was "Slippy" and there had been some dispute about a crap game. In the end, Checkered Sweater pocketed his automatic in a final bluster of words.

The solitaire player waited patiently

until the other had disappeared inside the house, then said: "All right, Slippy."

The refugee's scared face, reminding Bob somehow of a chipmunk with its big, splayed ears and prominent black eyes, showed up over the edge of the porch railing.

"He swapped the dice on me," he complained wheezily. "I seen him do it, Whitey, wit' my own eyes. The big bum is all thumbs. Then when I make a squawk, he pulls a rod on me! He's a dirty cheat!"

"Don't tell the world. You better watch your step and keep outa Nick's way when he's losin' dough." He bent over the cards again. "Beat it now. You got me all mixed up."

"He better watch his step, too," Slippy's whining whisper was full of venom. "I knocked off better guys than that big bag of wind."

THE grinding of a car's self-starter, and the roar of a racing engine that followed, sent him scuttling to cover. From the rear of the house a sedan, with lamps unlighted, rocked across the grass and into the road. It clashed into gear and swept past Bob toward the north gate.

He looked after it. Had he imagined it or was that Lang's bald and shining head that had flashed by in the light of the porch? And what was a car doing out at night when both gates were supposed to be closed?

Both questions seemed to invite investigation. It occurred to Bob that there were a lot of things going on in Shady Rest that weren't mentioned on the signs at the entrances.

He wound in and out between the shadowing trees, skirting the road until well away from the house and then broke into a trot. He reached the north gate within the minute and found it padlocked and no sign of the car. If it had gone through the occupants had taken the trouble to secure the gate behind them.

Some distance away, on the moonlit smoothness of Charity Drive, a figure walked quickly in the direction of the castle.

It was unmistakably the long, thin Lang. Bob started his way. He had come out originally to have a chat with Lang, and he liked to finish what he started.

"Hello, there!" he called, and hastened his pace a little. "Just a minute!"

The man paid no attention, breaking into a run. Bob frowned and gave chase, his feet pattering on the concrete. If it was going to be a marathon he would be in on that, too.

A few yards farther on, the man dodged off the road into the brush. Bob stopped, heard the swish of bushes and caught sight of a fleeing shadow in a patch of clearing part way up the hill.

Bob clambered hastily after him, turned into the path leading to the castle, and got a glimpse of a thin, bent back scurrying across the lawn. Bob opened out in a sprint that, considering it was uphill, did his wind credit.

The tall figure dashed quickly under the arched entrance as Bob clattered noisily across the planks of the drawbridge.

It was the rumble of rusty chains that warned him—just a shade of a second more and the full weight of the iron portcullis would have landed on him with crushing force. As it was, even as he threw himself back, the heavy gate crashing down just brushed his head, sending him reeling headfirst into the moat.

When he came to, not more than ten seconds later, the upright and expressionless Lang, wearing his white coat, was standing on the bank looking down.

Bob sat up in the mud. "What hit me?" he asked.

"I fear it was the portcullis, sir. I heard it fall and came running out through the postern. I hope you are

not seriously injured, sir. Let me help you up."

CHAPTER VII.

A MANIAC AT LARGE?

"DISGRACEFUL! Scandalous! Despicable!"

Mortimer's booming voice quivered with indignation. Hands behind his back he paced the floor, his handsome, statesmanlike features set in resolute lines. He swung about, pointed a plump forefinger at the bandage on Bob's head.

"You have not heard the last of that, sir. I shall take it on myself to ferret that miscreant out and deliver him to justice. To think that we have here in Shady Rest one who would so far forget all decency as to injure you in that manner. I repeat, sir, it is despicable—discreditable—degrading!"

"It is," Bob grinned at Anne, "everything that begins with 'D,' and then some."

They were seated in the coolness of the keep, with the morning sun patterning the leaded windows on the spacious floor. The lantern-jawed Jake leaned comfortably against the window sill nearest, and surveyed the group with watchful, pale-blue eyes.

"Whoever done it," he chewed gum with a rolling motion of his thin lips, "Knows his way around here. Nobody that didn't know the ropes would have snitched the pin outa that contraption so as to let the gate fall."

"That's just it," Bob suggested. "That's why I want to know about this man Lang. He was out last night, as I told you, and I'm ready to swear he ducked through that entrance right before it fell."

Mortimer smiled. "I am glad to say we have completely exonerated Lang. I looked the matter up. He was seen by Jake here at the Community House buying some household supplies. Garner, the man who runs the filling station ran Lang back here in his car early in the evening and was talking to him in the rear courtyard here when you had your unfortunate—er—encounter. I think that, in the vernacular, lets Lang out."

"Maybe so," Bob admitted doubtfully. "But it doesn't explain how my baggage came to be pried open."

Mortimer's eyebrows arched inquiringly. "Pried open? My dear sir, what is this you say?"

Bob told of the incident. "Furthermore, there are some rare doings going on here at night, for such a strict community. How about the sedan I saw last night roaring out of the home toward the north gate? I thought the gates were locked after sundown."

"It was your car, Mr. Mortimer," Jake broke in with a tight grin. "I found it this morning jammed against a tree in the brush by Charity Drive. Some one was joy-ridin' in it."

"My car!" Mortimer thundered. "Who on earth dared—"

"And how about the gambling and gunplay that goes on down there?" Bob persisted. "I happened to overhear a few things last night. It looks like some of those bimboes are running wild if you ask me."

Jake nodded. "That's true. And they're runnin' faster now I bet. Them was the two yeggs I chucked out on their ear to-day, Mr. Mortimer. A! big lad they called Nick and another wart known as Slippy."

"How did they get in here?" Mortimer demanded. "I don't like this at all, my friend."

"I don't know how they got in," Jake scowled. "I only know how they went out—and that was slidin'. I got busy soon's Whitey tipped me off what kind of boloneys they were. In a place like this, all kinds slip in an' you can't tell how hard-boiled they are till you crack 'em."

"Unfortunately that is the case," Mortimer shook his head. "In a purely eleemosynary—ah—institution such

as this, it is difficult to winnow the chaff from the sheep—the deserving poor from the—ah—goats. I am glad to know we have succeeded in eliminating the two that outraged our hospitality."

"But that doesn't help any in finding out who tried to kill Bob—Mr. Stuart," Anne pointed out. "It wasn't either of those two that he chased through the gateway."

"We are coming to that, my dear—my dear Miss Barnaby." Mortimer beckoned toward the doorway. "For that reason I have taken the liberty of asking—ah—these two good people—step forward, my friends."

LANG stepped softly into the room, by his side an aproned woman, who squinted through thick spectacles at the waiting group. Her bobbed red hair and heavy features gave her a masculine look. They waited respectfully silent.

"You are doubtless aware," Mortimer folded his arms and looked piercingly at Lang, "that an attempt was made last night to injure Mr. Stuart."

"Quite so, sir," Lang's voice was quietly deferential. "I helped Mr. Stuart out of the moat."

"Exactly. He suspects you might have had a hand in putting him in the moat. In other words, my friend, that you or some one closely resembling you, willfully, I might say feloniously, released the portcullis so that it might descend on his head."

"Indeed not, sir. I explained it to Mr. Stuart last night."

"Where were you," Mortimer pointed a dramatic finger at the houseman in the manner of a prosecuting attorney, "at the moment it happened?"

"At the moment, sir, I was talking to Garner, the garage man, and my wife in the rear of the courtyard." Lang stared straight ahead, showing no more animation than a tailor's dummy. "I had just put on my coat, which I usually leave behind when going to town for fear it might be soiled. I was just remarking to Mr. Garner what a wonderful night it was and how peaceful the stars looked and what wickedness there was in the world, when I heard the crash and ran out the postern-gate at the side. I thought I saw some one run out the moment before, but I could not be sure. And there the gentleman was in the moat."

The woman pulled a handkerchief from beneath her apron and wiped her eyes. "To think he would be accused of such a thing. I suppose we will have to leave now. It's been such a happy place."

"I'm not accusing him exactly," Bob shifted uneasily and looked at Anne for guidance. "Lord knows I don't want to be the cause—"

"Did you see the party that ran out the postern?" Mortimer asked the houseman.

"Not well, sir. I might have been mistaken. But I thought it was a rather tall, thin person."

When they marched off toward the kitchen Mortimer looked at Bob.

"I'm quite sure the man is telling the truth. It's a very strange affair. Are you sure it was Lang you chased up the road?"

"I don't know," Bob said. "I thought it was. I didn't think there were two such bald heads in town."

"Wait!" Mortimer exclaimed triumphantly. "I have it! You say he was a thin man, quite bald?"

"As much as I could see of him."

Mortimer slapped his palms together loudly and turned to Jake. "I thought so. That explains it clearly. It accounts for the bag being broken open and my car being taken, too. This is Dan's work."

"Who is Dan?" Bob queried. "And why?"

"An unfortunate fellow whom we have been forced to expel from the place before. He appears to be demented and has caused us considerable trouble. Since he tried to set fire to the

Community House last time we have been on the watch for him. His specialty is wrecking cars and malicious mischief. Evidently he has slipped in over the wall again."

"He sounds like an asset for any community," Bob opined. He felt the sore place on his head. "He ought to stick to his specialty. I should think you'd lay hands on a nut like that and turn him over to the proper authorities."

"Not an easy matter, my dear fellow," Mortimer smiled. "The poor creature is cunning enough to lie low in the daytime as a rule. The woods both inside the wall and beyond are extensive and offer plenty of hiding places. But you may be sure we will make a thorough search of the property. I shall make it a point immediately to notify the State police that the maniac is at large. Keep a sharp watch out for him, Jake."

The latter settled his cap on his head preparatory to leaving. "Try to," he grunted. "But I ain't promisin' I can keep him out at night. They's a lot of woods right here in Shady Rest where a crazy guy like that could hang out, takin' pot-shots at the passers-by. He's got a gun, I don't mind tellin' you."

"A revolver?" Mortimer looked horrified. "This is serious."

"Yep. Pinched it offen my desk last night. Least, I figure it musta been him, if he's around again. An' it's the only other gun in Shady Rest besides this one I took offen the big guy this morning."

"I must hurry then," Mortimer said nervously. "The sooner I put the authorities on his trail the better."

HE turned in the doorway, the worried frown still evident. "If I were you folks I'd be careful to lock my door and not venture out after dark until this man is captured."

Anne's brown eyes widened. "You don't mean he would come here!"

"There's no telling what an—ah—unfortunate person like that is likely to do, especially when he is armed. I would take every precaution. Personally, I believe you would be much safer in New York until we locate him."

"But I've got to live here," Anne smiled ruefully. "I can't afford hotel bills."

"True," Mortimer tapped his lips with thoughtful finger. "All the more reason for me to get busy on that sale. I shall get in touch with the buyer I had in mind."

He paced unhurriedly across the court, iron-gray and massive and dignified, followed by the hard-faced Jake.

Anne turned to Bob. "I'm afraid it hasn't been an awfully pleasant visit for you. I'm terribly sorry about last night. But I didn't know we had a lunatic in the neighborhood. I do hope they capture him."

"So do I," Bob looked at the iron-gray head and the close-cropped one disappearing under the portcullis, "but I haven't much hope they will. By the way, have you a gun in the house?"

"There's a shotgun Cousin Josh used to use pheasant-shooting. It's in your room under the window-seat, I think. What are you thinking of?"

"I'm thinking," Bob got up from his chair, "of a lot of things. One of them is that swim we promised ourselves this morning. Game? If Dan is like most wild men, he won't come near the water."

"I'd love to. I'll get Mrs. Lang to put up a lunch and we'll picnic down there."

Bob met the houseman on the balcony, and stopped.

"That business last night," Bob began awkwardly, "evidently I was mistaken in suspecting you had a hand—"

"Perfectly all right, sir," Lang fixed his blank eyes on a spot somewhere beyond Bob's shoulder. "The truth is always revealed in the end, sir, and the innocent separated from the guilty."

It sounded to Bob suspiciously like a transcript from one of Mortimer's discourses. "You bet," was all he could think of.

He made it a point to look for that shotgun in the White Tower before he undressed, and found it where Anne had said, under the padded window-seat. It was a rather rusty but serviceable twelve-gauge double-barreled gun, and there were a few shells in a box beside it. Bob loaded both barrels, and when he was in his bathing suit ready to start, tucked the gun under his arm.

Anne was waiting for him in the courtyard—the faded red swimming suit replaced now by one of glossy black that made the tanned skin of her shapely arms and legs whiter and her yellow hair more golden by comparison.

"Going shooting?" she laughed.

"If I see a target," Bob informed her grimly. "I don't want any more gates dropped on my dome."

CHAPTER VIII.

BOB BUTTS IN.

THEY walked down the grassy path that led toward the lake; a stalwart and warlike figure of a young man in a bathing suit, and a slim graceful girl swaying along beside him. From the coolness of the wooded stretch they came out onto the sun-baked concrete of Charity Drive.

Jake slouched by, grinned at the shotgun but said nothing, tipping his cap in surly acknowledgment of Anne's presence.

"Don't know what that yap finds so blamed funny," Bob grunted. "He didn't volunteer to lend us that cannon of his, I notice."

On the float at the edge of the tree-shrouded lake, Anne adjusted her rubber cap with nimble fingers. "Race you to the other side and back. Ready?"

Bob set down the lunch package and shotgun. "All right. I'll give you a five-yard handicap."

"I don't need it," she called defiantly. "Maybe you do."

It was a boast not unfounded, as Bob discovered when his head emerged again after a blood-tingling dive into the cold water. She was two lengths ahead of him and going fast, smooth arms cascading the glistening drops, her smile flashing back at him from underneath her arm, two tiny rubber-slippered feet twinkling up before him tauntingly.

Bob bent to his task with a will, trying to make up in muscular exertion what he lacked in skill, but his was the shoulder-heavy build of a fighter rather than the svelte lines of the expert swimmer. The two lengths had extended to three by the time the end of the lake was reached, and when he puffed up to the float she was waiting for him, her arms embracing rounded knees, and her dark eyes teasingly narrowed.

"You're good," he admitted. He stretched himself comfortably on the warm, sun-drenched planking, and felt quite at peace with a decidedly pleasant world. "When do we eat?"

She spread the picnic lunch on the newspaper that had wrapped it, and they ate sandwiches that had too much mustard and sandwiches with none at all, olives that were no better for a touch of sun, and iced tea that was lukewarm, chocolate layer cake that gummed on their wet fingers, and dill pickles, the mere sight of which would have ruined a dyspeptic's whole day. They enjoyed it all greatly, with the healthy optimism of youth that heeds its heart but not its stomach.

After that they basked in the afternoon sun, and dabbled their feet side by side in the water, and talked of unimportant things such as football and the movies and the varsity drag and the latest, sexiest, sultriest now-it-can-be-told novel; and what type of man she

liked best—this subject was introduced by Bob. All in all, for a man who had been hit by a portcullis and was in danger of being potted by a maniac, Bob seemed remarkably happy.

At the end of an hour of inarticulate talk he had arrived at the following conclusions, which, for the sake of clarity, might be classified:

A. That Anne Barnaby was a "knockout."

B. That she had a keen mind, aside from not caring for Gloria Swanson.

C. That her literary taste had been perverted by reading the classics.

D. That Mr. Mortimer had ambitions to be more than just an old friend.

E. That she, Anne Barnaby, probably thought that he, Bob Stuart, was an awful wash-out, physically and mentally.

F. That he, Bob Stuart, would like to push Mr. Mortimer into the lake.

G. That Anne Barnaby was too trustful of strangers, and needed protection.

H. That he ought to tell her about that will, and then tear it up and go find a job to show her what kind of fellow he was.

He kicked at his reflection in the water. The kind of fellow he was! Sneaking around with a will in his pocket, getting ready to throw a helpless girl out of her home.

"Goodness!" she laughed up at him, her chin on her shoulder. "You look positively savage. Has my poor little lunch disagreed with you, or what?"

"No," he stood up, took a deep breath and prepared to deliver himself of speech. "It is not the lunch, Anne. Something much more important. I should have told you before—should have—the fact is, Anne, I—"

What sounded like a balloon tire blowing out came from the trees that bordered the other side of the lake. At the same moment a small but sibilant murmur, a faint *pee-e-e-u-u,* passed swiftly by Bob's ear, ending with a rather loud slap against a tree trunk behind him.

He grabbed up the shotgun, leaped to shore and started toward the point where a tiny patch of fog was dissipating itself in the brush.

"Lie down!" he shouted back at Anne. "Don't show yourself!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Maya Diamond Field

FOR more than two hundred years diamonds have been finding their way into the settlements of British Honduras and the Mexican state of Yucatan. Though they are readily sold by those who bring them into the villages and towns, no one has ever been able to ascertain the source of the diamonds.

Residents of Tabasco, Progreso, Campeche and Mérida are all familiar with the diamonds that are brought in by Maya Indians.

The Mayans are very canny in their methods of barter. They never approach a resident of the country with their diamonds; they don't trust them. Instead they seek out casual tourists, who are not so likely to be unduly curious or have ways of trying to ferret out the Mayans' secret.

Expedition after expedition has set out in search of the diamonds' source. None of them have ever progressed past the El Boca del Cerro gorge, itself a natural barrier guarding the unexplored interior.

It is in this wild back country that the Lancadon Indians live. It is believed that the Mayans carry on primitive barter with them and receive the diamonds, though almost every story told about the diamonds' source is pure conjecture.

Harold J. Ashe.

Buck sprang up and forced Wade's hand to the table

The Killer of Lightnin' Jim

Dad Pollock, the white-haired ex-sheriff, and young Buck Jackson were an oddly assorted pair of partners—but out West partners stick together whatever happens

By ERIC HEATH

A BAREFOOTED Mexican boy reached a dirty brown hand into a hole in the iron lamp-post and jerked a wire. Above his head the gas mantle spluttered into life inside a large glass globe, artistically frescoed with fly specks. Night had settled over Horse Creek, and one-fourth of its street lighting system was now in operation.

The Spread Eagle Saloon, against whose garish front this particular arc lamp shed its inadequate rays, was showing signs of activity. Mike O'Toole, the bartender, glanced up as two cow-punchers approached the bar. Without waiting for them to speak, he slammed a half-filled bottle of rye whisky and two glasses on the counter.

Two of the scarred tables which stood against the wall opposite the bar were already occupied. Around one of them three Mexicans played three-card monte to the accompaniment of excited jabberings. At the other sat a lean-visaged, white-haired man of about sixty-five, and a lithe, sun-tanned youth of between twenty-three and twenty-five.

The pair were playing poker, and, judging from their bored expressions they were playing for no other reason than to pass away the time.

Suddenly the swinging doors were thrust open and two men stomped in. The alkali dust which covered their clothing indicated that they had just ridden in from the desert.

The taller of the two newcomers cast a belligerent eye around the room, then bellowed in a harsh, cracked voice:

"Come on, yo' hombres! Step up

an' have a drink on Tiger McGann, from Texas." He scowled at the three Mexicans, who were looking over at him in some trepidation. "That invite don't include no greasers!" he added.

The elderly man at the other table finished shuffling a pack of cards, then glanced over.

"You kin jes' hev Mike bring ours oveh heah, suh," he said.

An angry glint appeared in Tiger McGann's eyes as he replied:

"I axed yuh to step up an' have a drink. I didn't say nothin' about havin' the barkeep serve it to yuh on a platter."

"That bein' the case," replied the man at the table, "we'll jes' hev to refuse yore kind invite." As he finished speaking, he calmly started dealing the cards to his young companion and himself.

"The killer of Lightnin' Jim ain't in the habit of havin' people turn down his offer tuh have a drink," replied Tiger McGann in a menacing voice. "I'm axin' yuh ag'in to step up tuh the bar."

The old man laid his cards on the table and started to arise.

"Aw, Dad, keep yore shirt on!" exclaimed his companion.

"You hush up, Buck," replied the white-haired man as he got to his feet. He stepped toward Tiger McGann.

"MY name is Timothy Pollock, suh," he said.

"Timothy Polecat, did yuh say?" chuckled Tiger. "Glad tuh meet yuh."

"I'm from down Texas way myself," went on the old man, as if he had not heard the insult. "I used ter be Sheriff in Butte City—that was nigh onto eight year ago—an' up tuh lately I been foreman down at the Bar Q ranch in Mason County, Texas."

"I wasn't axin' yuh fer yore hist'ry," Tiger answered. "I was offerin' tuh buy yuh a drink."

"Wall, I was jes' tellin' you," replied Timothy Pollock, "because I thought I hear'n you say you was the killer of Lightnin' Jim."

"I did say so—an' I am!" snapped Tiger, menacingly.

"Um-m! That's funny," drawled Pollock, "because it so happens that *I* was the hombre that killed Lightin' Jim."

As the old man spoke, the bartender stooped hastily to sort some bottles under the counter; the three Mexicans arose and stealthily made their way through the swinging doors; and the two cow-punchers at the bar edged to one side of the room.

Tiger McGann unbuttoned his coat, displaying a pair of ugly looking .45's dangling from holsters at his belt.

"Are you callin' me a liar?" he demanded with a snarl.

"If you say you air the killer of Lightnin' Jim, I reckon I am," replied Pollock calmly.

Tiger McGann's right hand leaped for a gun. As he jerked it from its holster a bullet made a neat hole in the flesh of his forearm. With a howl of pain he dropped the gun and placed his left hand over the bleeding wound.

"Doc Baird's office is right across the street," said Pollock to Tiger's partner, who had taken up a position against the wall. As he spoke he shoved his gun back in the holster under his left armpit.

As soon as Tiger McGann, cursing loudly, was led out of the saloon by his companion, Timothy Pollock turned to the youth at the table:

"Step up, Buck. Now that I'm on my feet, I reckon we'll have a drink."

Buck came up to the bar, a slight smile on his good-natured features.

"Two of the same brand," ordered Pollock.

Mike, the bartender, did not heed the order. He was busy printing some words on a strip of cardboard. When he had finished he took the cardboard and fastened it with a piece of

gummed paper to the mirror behind the bar. The sign read:

TAKE NOTICE!
THE KILLER OF LIGHTNIN' JIM
IS STOPPING HERE IN TOWN

Mike turned to Pollock.

"This is the second time you've spoiled my trade jest because some hombre come in here braggin' he was the killer of Lightnin' Jim. Mebbe that sign will keep these damn fool Texans from pullin' that stuff, comin' in here an' tryin' to make folks think they're hard-boiled."

"That's a danged good ideah," replied Pollock with a smile. "You-all know I ain't hankerin' tuh make no trouble, but thar's one thing I won't allow—no damn' skunk is goin' tuh claim he killed Lightnin' Jim an' get away with it when I'm around! Lightnin' Jim was a great fighter, an' I'm proud of the part I played in his life."

"Yuh mean the part yuh played in endin' his life," chuckled Buck, as he poured the drinks from the bottle which Mike had placed on the counter.

Pollock turned to the two waddies, who had once more resumed their places at the bar.

"Did I tell you gents how I killed Lightnin' Jim?"

"No, but we'd like to hear about it," answered one of the cowboys. He and his companion looked with due respect at this venerable-seeming man who showed such phenomenal ability in drawing a six-gun.

"Say, Dad," Buck exclaimed, "are you goin' tuh tell that story agin?"

"Reckon so, son."

Buck started toward the door, which led to the hotel lobby.

"All right, Dad; but I'm goin' upstairs."

POLLOCK swallowed his whisky, then commenced:

"I guess you fellers air more or less familiar with Lightnin' Jim's record as a bad man. Anyways, he had a total of twenty-nine killin's to his credit, robbed fohteen banks throughout Texas, an' pahticipated in seven train robberies. He was one of the greatest bandits in the hull country, bar none, an' prob'bly the fastest man with a Colt in the United States. I was sheriff down at Butte City at the time he an' some of his men held up the First National Bank thar an' killed the payin' teller. I had jes' been 'lected to office an', naterally, I wanted to make a showin'.

"Wall, I gathered a posse of about thirty men an' lit out after Lightnin' Jim an' his gang. Thar was four of them altogether. I knew thar was only one place he could hide out with any safety, an' that was oveh in the buttes 'bout fohty mile to the Southwest. We followed their trail all that night. Then, next mornin', we read sign an' saw that two of the gang had turned up a gully to the north an' two had kept straight on down the narrow valley.

"I split the posse—part of us followed one trail an' part t'other. Me an' half of my men kept on down the valley. Wall, 'bout three o'clock that afternoon, we come upon a hoss with a broken leg. We shot the critter an' felt mighty good because we knew that the two bandits would prob'bly have tuh ride one hoss—give us a chance to overtake them.

"We caught up with them about five. They was ridin' double, as we figgered, Lightnin' Jim in front an' t'other feller behind, headin' foh a dry gulch. We spurred up an' come within gunshot. One of my deputies dropped the feller settin' behind Lightnin' Jim.

"At this, Lightnin' Jim swung from his hoss an' ran foh an abandoned line shack standin' on top of a low hill. As we come up close he let fire from one of the windows an' dropped two of my men. We took cover behind some rocks 'thout wastin' no time. Lightnin' kept firin' at us foh quite a spell,

an' we peppered that thar shack full of holes. Fin'ly thar was no moh shootin' from the shack, an' we figgered that Lightnin' Jim was dead all right.

"I lifted my sombrero so it showed above the bowlder I was hidin' behind. This didn't bring no response, so I got up an' went foh the shack. Wall, thar wasn't no lock on the door, so I walks in, like a damn fool, gun dangling loose in my hand. Thar was Lightnin' Jim settin' in a corner waitin' foh me. His gun was pointin' right at my heart.

"'Drap yore iron!' he said. An' I'm tellin' you I drapped her! He got up and stuck the barrel of his gun in the small of my back an' says:

"'You an' me is goin' tuh walk outa here, git on my bronc, which is back of the shack, an' then we're goin' tuh ride up the gulch. I reckon yore men won't be puttin' lead into thar nice new sheriff.'"

Pollock cleared his throat impressively and his audience strained forward, intensely interested.

"Lightnin' Jim made a mistake, though, boys," went on Pollock. "He didn't hold his gun so's tuh keep me from seein' that thar was five empty cahtridge chambers. When I spotted that I figgered he was bluffin' an' had shot his last bullet. When he started reachin' down after my revolver on the floor, I felt sure I was keerect in this surmise. Like a flash, I turned an' grabbed him round the waist. I don't keer tuh elaborate on the tussle him an' me had, gents. It wasn't edifyin', tuh say the least. To Lightnin's credit, howsomever, I will say that he wasn't the man foh fightin' with his hands that he was with his fohty-five. I aimed tuh take him alive, but when I fin'ly got him down, I used jest a mite too much pressure on his windpipe."

"Yuh mean yuh killed Lightnin' Jim with yore bare hands?" exclaimed Mike.

Pollock nodded. "Yep. That's the way it were. Naterally, some of the boys in my posse drifted into other States an' started takin' credit foh killin' Lightnin' Jim—an' now it seems like all yore New Mexican bad men are takin' credit foh the deed."

"Shore looks that way," responded Mike. He refilled the glasses. "I reckon that yarn calls fer a drink on the house."

BUCK was lolling on the bed smoking a cigarette when Timothy Pollock entered his room at the hotel above the Spread Eagle Saloon.

"That wasn't perlite, walkin' out on me thataway," said Pollock, as he placed his hat on the bureau and seated himself in a squeaky rocker.

Buck got up and extended his arms in a dramatic gesture.

"An' so I killed Lightnin' Jim with my bare hands, gents!" he exclaimed derisively.

"You shet up!" growled Pollock. But there was no venom in the look he gave Buck. He and Buck had worked together at the Bar Q Ranch in Texas for more than three years, and he had come to look upon the boy in the light of an adopted son. Buck, on the other hand, called him "Dad" and would have spilled the last drop of his blood for the old man.

Buck dropped back on the bed and spoke seriously:

"What do you say we beat it back tuh Texas, Dad? I ain't seen no land up here in New Mexico that I consider wuth a tinker's damn. The feller that said thar was good ranch land here cheap was a liar."

"I agree that I ain't seen no place I'd be willin' foh us to invest our savin's up heah," replied Dad. "Howsomever, I aim to look 'round a bit more afore we head south."

"I did hear tell thar was some good grazing land around Alamo," said Buck. "I reckon I'll ride over thar the fust thing in the mornin' an' spend a few days lookin' 'round up thataway."

"The rheumatiz in my right leg is botherin' me quite some to-day," said Dad. "I 'low as you'll have to go oveh thar alone. But I guess I oughter be thankful the rheumatiz ain't teched my right arm as yit."

"Yeh," grunted Buck, "you shore had, long as you keep gittin' in gun fights over killin' Lightnin' Jim. You oughta cut it out. How'd yuh think I'd run that thar ranch of ours if you go git all crippled up with lead pizenin'?"

"Thar's somethin' in what you say," admitted Dad. "Fact is, though, I hate tuh have you go over to Alamo alone. You're allus gittin' yoreself in trouble when you're by yoreself."

"*Me* gittin' into trouble!" Buck laughed.

"Ef it wasn't foh me, you'd 'a' been knifed down at Claxton," persisted Dad, "an' married in Coyote Wells an'—"

"Aw, shet up!" broke in Buck. "G'wan in tuh yore own room. I'm goin' to bed; got tuh git started ridin' early in the mornin'."

IT was nearly two o'clock the next afternoon when Buck, tired and thirsty from a long ride over a desert trail, arrived at Laguna. Inquiry at a livery stable at the edge of town brought the information that Alamo was about twenty miles to the northwest. He decided to stable his horse, put up at a hotel, and get an early morning start the following day.

Laguna boasted of but one hostelry, the Golden House. Upon applying for a room, Buck was informed by the clerk that there was a cattlemen's convention in town and every room in the house was full.

He was about to turn away, when a well-dressed, middle-aged man, with a thin, sallow face and sharp, black eyes, stepped up to him.

"I had a cot put in my room for a friend of mine who was coming over from Rincon City," the stranger explained. "I got word he can't get here. You're welcome to share my room."

Buck pulled out his wallet as he replied:

"That's mighty good of you, stranger. I'll accept yore invite if you'll let me pay foh the accommodation."

The other extended his hand.

"Jerry Wade's my name. Put your money away. The room's paid for."

Buck extended his hand, then reluctantly put his wallet back in his pocket.

"Hev you put the feed-bag on foh dinner yet?" Buck inquired.

"No," answered Wade. "I was just about to go into the restaurant. Won't you join me?"

"I shore will," Buck replied, "but ef you pay foh the room, I pay foh the feed, see?"

Wade laughed. "That's fair enough," he agreed.

After dinner Wade took Buck up to his room on the third floor of the rambling frame building.

"Make yourself at home," he invited. "I got some business to attend to, but I'll see you later."

As soon as Wade had gone, Buck emptied a pitcher of water into the cracked bowl on the washstand and doused his face and hands. Then he threw himself on the cot which stood against the wall at one side of the room. Almost immediately he fell into a sleep of exhaustion.

He was awakened by the sound of stamping hoofs and hoarse yells from the street below. The room was dark, and he realized that he had slept throughout the entire afternoon.

Arising stiffly, he fumbled around for the gas jet, lighted it, then looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes to nine. Feeling hungry again, he got a sandwich, piece of apple pie and a cup of coffee downstairs, and then walked slowly down the main street of the town.

The sidewalks were crowded, and there was a carnival spirit in the air.

Chinese lanterns had been strung across the street and flags and banners extended from the cornices of the low frame buildings.

Buck watched the crowds for a spell, then, hearing shouts of laughter drifting through the swinging doors of the Main Chance Saloon, directly across the street, he sauntered over.

AS he entered the saloon he saw a number of men collected around a billiard table which stood in the center of the room. Elbowing his way through the crowd, he saw the reason for the merriment.

On top of the billiard table swayed a huge, burly individual dressed in leather chaps and blue flannel shirt. He wore two holsters at his waist, from which protruded pearl-handled .45's. Perched on the table beside him was a chair, in which was seated a frowzy, shabbily dressed old man, so drunk he did not know what was taking place.

In the cow-puncher's right hand was a pair of barber's clippers, and he was engaged in removing the drunkard's long, matted hair from one side of his head.

Almost at the moment Buck stopped in front of the table the task was completed.

Buck scowled. To him there was nothing funny in the sight of that poor old man with one side of his head entirely denuded of hair. It was a cruel sort of sport, and the antics of the cow-puncher as he surveyed his handiwork aroused Buck's ire.

"Cut his whiskers too, Moke!" yelled some one in the crowd.

The man standing on the table grinned.

"Whiskers it is!" he replied.

Buck was about to turn away in disgust when the old man suddenly swayed on the chair. The chair tipped over and precipitated him to the floor with a dull crash.

"Hell's bells!" shouted Moke. "Put him up here again!"

A thin stream of blood was trickling from the shaved side of the old drunkard's head. The sight was too much for Buck. He leaped upon the table and confronted Moke.

"Why don't you pick on somebody yore age an' size?" he demanded.

Moke glowered at him in surprise and anger.

"What the hell's it to you?"

"Shingle him, Moke!" yelled a voice.

Moke gave a loud guffaw and, raising the clippers, reached for Buck's mop of yellow hair.

Buck let drive with a lightning right, which caught the bully neatly on the point of his jaw. He made a vain effort to keep his balance, then toppled to the floor.

Buck was about to jump down, when he felt a pair of steel-like arms encircle his waist. He saw his gun being jerked from its holster.

Some one put the chair back on the table, and, despite his struggles, two men, evidently pals of Moke's, forced him to sit down.

Cursing vilely, Moke stumbled to his feet, retrieved the clippers, which had fallen on the floor, and clambered back to the top of the table.

"Cut it out!" yelled a man.

"Yeh, leave the young feller alone!" Several others took up the cry.

"I'll skin the damn lizard alive!" roared Moke.

Buck tore helplessly at the arms that held him, and glared at Moke as the bully placed the clippers against his forehead and started cutting.

"Damn you, I'll get you foh this!" cried Buck in a frenzy of anger.

Moke had made a deep gash in his hair, when the legs of the flimsy billiard table, unable to support the strain of the weight of its heavy occupants, gave way with a crash of splintering wood.

As the table crashed to the floor, Buck felt the hold on his arms relax. He scrambled up and, plowing his way

angrily through the circle of men, he dashed from the saloon.

RETURNING to his room at the hotel, he went to the mirror and brushed his hair so as to hide the gash which Moke had made with the clippers. Then he threw himself into a rickety rocker and pulled out a cigarette.

"Dad's right," he thought savagely. "I'm allus gittin' myself intuh trouble. Ef that feller had clipped my hair same as he did that pore bum's, I'd 'a' killed him, shore as hell!"

At that moment the door opened, and Jerry Wade entered. He threw his hat on the bed and sat down.

"Lots of life in this little old town to-night!" he exclaimed.

"Yeh, so I see!" grunted Buck.

For several moments the two men remained silent, then Wade said:

"How about a little game of cards before we turn in?"

Buck did not feel at all sleepy.

"That's a good ideah," he replied. "Got a pack of cards?"

"Sure," replied Wade. He arose and placed a table between them. Then he pulled out his suitcase from under the bed and brought out a pack of playing cards and some poker chips.

For awhile Buck won about as many games as he lost, and so acquiesced in Wade's suggestion that they increase the stakes. But as the stakes grew larger, he suddenly became aware that he was losing steadily.

When he had arrived at Laguna he had had slightly over five hundred dollars in his wallet. Dad carried the rest of their small fortune, with which they intended to buy a piece of land, should they find any that suited them. This five hundred Buck had figured on using to buy an option, in case he came across a bargain.

It was well past midnight when Buck made a surreptitious count of the yellowbacks in his wallet. He discovered that he had lost nearly three hundred dollars to Wade. This puzzled him, as he had always been considered the best poker player on the Bar Q Ranch. In spite of Wade's generosity in regard to sharing his room, there was something about the fellow that he did not like. He decided to keep his eyes open.

They started a new game. Wade shuffled and dealt the cards, scrutinized his hand, then said:

"I'll go you an even hundred."

Buck scanned his hand. He had three aces and two sevens. He threw down two fifty-dollar notes.

"Call you," he said.

Wade chuckled and spread out his cards.

"Can you beat a royal flush?" he asked, exultantly.

"I reckon a royal flush is good most any time," replied Buck.

It was his deal. This time he discovered he had three kings. He threw down a fifty dollar bill.

"Make her fifty."

"Take the ante," said Wade, throwing down his cards in disgust. "I ain't got a thing."

Buck's eyes narrowed. He watched Wade's fingers as he made the next deal. A glint of light flashed from the palm of Wade's right hand.

With an oath Buck sprang up and grabbed Wade's hand. He forced it to the table, palm up.

"A mirror ring, eh?" he cried. "Why, yuh damned dirty shark!"

WADE'S face turned pale. He pushed his chair back and reached for his gun.

Buck's hand flashed to his holster. To his dismay, he remembered that some one had taken his gun during the fracas in the saloon. He gave the table a quick shove in the hope of deflecting Wade's aim.

The edge of the table hit against Wade's wrist as he pulled the trigger of his gun. The bullet fanned Buck's ear and dug its way into the wall.

Before Wade could pull again, Buck was on him like a wildcat, and the two men crashed to the floor in close embrace.

Wade tried to fight off Buck's wiry arms, but his dissipated mode of living made him no match for the young, toil-hardened cow-puncher. In a moment he lay sprawled out on the floor by the side of the bed, dazedly endeavoring to clear his brain from the effects of Buck's blows.

Buck picked up Wade's revolver and shoved it into his holster. Then he picked up from the floor the exact amount of money he had had in his wallet when the game had started. The rest he left.

Turning to the mirror, he straightened his tie and fixed his rumpled clothing. Then he picked up his sombrero and strode to the door, where he turned and looked down at the fallen card-sharp.

"No wonder you was so anxious tuh offer me a place to sleep in yore room, you low-down skunk!" he exclaimed.

"I'll get you for this!" replied Wade hoarsely.

"You're a liar!" snapped Buck. "You know danged well you'll go a hundred miles outa yore way tuh keep from meetin' up with me agin."

With that he stepped out into the hall and slammed the door behind him.

As he made his way through the deserted hotel lobby, he glanced up at the clock over the clerk's desk. It was ten minutes past two. If he started out for Alamo, he would get there well before noon. He was anxious to get out of Laguna. There was something rotten about the place, and the sooner he shook its dust from his heels the better it would suit him.

To his disgust, he found the livery stable where he had left his horse closed. Determined, however, that he would not wait until morning to get out of town, he used the blade of his jack-knife and pried back the bolt that held the padlock on the door.

Entering the barn, he saddled his horse, nailed a five dollar bill to the stall post and led the horse out.

After replacing the padlock, he mounted and jogged down the main street of the town. Its deserted appearance was in strange contrast to that of the early hours of the evening, although the saloons and gambling halls were still going full blast.

A FULL moon hovered over the crest of the mountains to the northwest, making the trail and the bordering desert shrubbery plainly discernible.

As Buck rode along in the sweet, sage-scented night air, his spirits arose.

"Thar's a lotta rottenness about mankind," he mused, "but I reckon thar ain't nothin' much about nature but what is good an' wholesome."

His horse suddenly shied from a dark object at the side of the trail, snorting in fear.

"That shore looked like a dead man!" muttered Buck. He patted his frightened animal, and when it was once more under control he dismounted. Leading the horse by the bridle, he walked back.

His surmise was correct. The dark object which had terrified his horse was the body of a man, a bullet hole showing just above his heart.

Gingerly, Buck felt of the cold hands, then lifted the man's head. He gave an exclamation of surprise. The moonlight revealed the coarse, brutal features of Moke, the man who had tried to shear his head at the Main Chance Saloon.

"Tain't no great loss," thought Buck, as he straightened up, wondering just what he had better do.

At that moment the sound of galloping hoofs came to his ears. He looked up to see two men riding down the trail. He waited, and as they came up he hailed them.

The two riders pulled up their horses and looked at him suspiciously.

"Are you fellers from Laguna?" asked Buck.

"We are," replied one of the men.

"Wall, thar's a dead man here," explained Buck. "I'm ridin' to Alamo. Mebbe you'll want to take him back to town with yuh."

The two men swung from their horses and looked down at the inert form.

"Why, it's Moke Gleason!" exclaimed one of the men. He stooped down and his companion followed his example.

"He's dead, ain't he, doc?" asked the man who had spoken first.

"Yes, been dead maybe an hour or more."

The two men arose and turned to Buck. The man addressed as doc gave a low exclamation, then said:

"Why you are the fellow that had a run-in with Moke this evening over at the Main Chance." He paused and scrutinized Buck with narrowing eyes. "And, if I remember right, you said something about getting him!" He turned to his companion. "This looks kind of suspicious, sheriff."

The sheriff proved to be a man of action. His gun leaped from its holster and he leveled it at Buck.

"Stick up yore hands until we smell of your artillery."

Buck slowly raised his hands, entirely dazed by this unexpected turn of affairs. The sheriff jerked Buck's gun out of its holster and passed it over to the doctor.

"Look in the cartridge chamber, doc, and see what yuh find."

DOC broke the gun, investigated the cartridge chamber, and then smelled of the barrel.

"One cartridge exploded," he said bluntly, "and, judging from the smell, it has just been fired within the last hour or so."

"Wall," demanded the sheriff, eying Buck narrowly, "what hev yuh got to say fer yoreself?"

"All I got to say is that you're crazy in the head if yuh think I killed him," replied Buck, angrily. "I'll admit I felt like killin' him when he picked on that pore tramp back at the Main Chance, but the fact remains that I didn't do it. That thar ain't my gun, nohow. I took it away from a card sharp after he fired at me. I jest come from Laguna, headin' foh Alamo, an' my hoss shied when he saw the body. I got down to investigate."

"Of course," broke in the man called doc, "the man's been dead for at least an hour. Maybe you can give an alibi?"

"I shore kin," answered Buck. "I was playin' cards with this here shark I mentioned, over in a room at the Golden House. That was less than an hour ago. I left thar at exactly ten minutes past two by the clock over the clerk's desk in the hotel lobby. It'd take me a good half hour to ride out here, so thar's proof 'nough I didn't shoot him."

Doc looked at his watch. "It's now seven minutes to three. If you can prove that, you certainly did not kill this man."

The sheriff stepped forward and clicked a pair of handcuffs over Buck's wrists. Then he turned to his companion.

"Doc," he said, "you ride over to Brown's ranch an' do what you kin fer that Chink that was stabbed. I appoint you deputy sheriff to arrest anybody you see fit. I'll take this feller back to town an' lock him up ontil I investigate his alibi."

"All right, sheriff," answered doc. He swung into the saddle of his horse and spurred off up the trail.

The sheriff turned back to Buck.

"You git on yore hoss an' ride on ahead. It's a damned lucky thing fer you that doc was with me to establish that Moke here's been dead for a hour—otherwise it would shore have looked bad fer you."

As the sheriff finished speaking, he

stooped and picked up the body of Moke. Showing astonishing strength, he lifted the inert form and draped it across the saddle-horn of his horse with the same casualness he would have used to hoist a sack of wheat. Then he mounted and motioned to Buck to start moving.

SHORTLY after nine o'clock the next morning Buck awoke, rubbed his eyes and stared dazedly at the whitewashed walls and barred window of his cell in the Laguna jail. For a moment he could not realize where he was.

Then the events of the night came back to Buck with startling vividness.

He arose and stretched his aching arms. Then he walked to the window and stared out at the cluttered back yard of a Chinese restaurant next to the jail.

"Here's yer grub," called a voice through the steel grating of the cell door.

Buck turned and saw a bowl of oatmeal and mug of coffee being thrust through an aperture at the bottom of the cell door.

"Say," called Buck, to the Mexican, who had just shoved in the food, "tell the sheriff I want to see him pronto, will yuh?"

"Awri'," grunted the Mexican and departed.

Buck had finished the oatmeal and coffee before the sheriff unlocked the cell door and entered.

"Did you want to see me?" demanded the sheriff.

"Yep," answered Buck. "I wanted to tell yuh about that hombre, Wade, that I was playin' cards with when that Moke feller was killed. He's a card-sharper; tried to pull the old mirror-ring stuff on me. I had to treat him kinda rough. On that 'count, I reckon, he won't furnish me no alibi, unless we kinda take him by surprise. You bring him in here an' lissen while I talk tuh him, won't yuh, sheriff—so's he don't play no tricks?"

"His name's Wade, yuh say, an' he's stayin' at the Golden House?" asked the sheriff.

"Yeh," answered Buck, "room twenty-two."

"All right, I'll send for him right away," answered the sheriff. He walked out, locking the cell door.

Buck seated himself on the iron cot and rolled a brown-paper cigarette.

"I wish Dad was here," he thought, "although I reckon I'll git outa this mess all right. But he shore was talkin' straight when he said I allus stick my nose intuh trouble."

He picked up a battered copy of a magazine which had been left in the cell by a previous inmate and lying back on the cot, he started to read.

He was just in the midst of an exciting detective tale, when he heard the grating of a key in the lock. The sheriff entered, followed by Jerry Wade.

"This here's a friend of yourn, thet wants to see yuh," said the sheriff.

"I ain't no friend of hisn, atall," drawled Buck, as he arose. "Howsomever, Wade," he went on, "I accidental-like took a hundred dollahs of yore money after that little card game of ours up in yore room at the Golden House last night. I jest wanted to hand it back to yuh."

Buck pulled out a wad of bills from his pocket, which the sheriff had not taken from him, and peeled off a century note.

WADE made no motion to take the extended bill. He turned to the sheriff with a frown on his face.

"I don't understand, Sheriff Quigley, what this fellow means about my playing cards with him last night. I never played cards with him in my life!"

"Yuh mean yuh don't know this feller?" demanded the sheriff.

"I ain't saying that," answered Wade. "I met him over at the Golden House, all right. He came in yesterday afternoon and asked for a room. They was all full up. Out of the kindness of my heart, I offered to let him sleep on a cot in my room. He accepted my invitation and came in last night about ten o'clock. He washed his face and hands and went out almost at once. I haven't seen him since, until now."

"Why, you dirty, rotten liar!" cried Buck, as he sprang forward to fasten his fingers in Wade's throat.

Sheriff Quigley rushed in between them and forced Buck back.

"He knows I have tuh have an alibi or be charged with murder!" exclaimed Buck, in a fury. "An' he's tryin' to make a liar outa me jest because I punched his pasty face when I caught him cheatin' at cards!"

"I refuse to stay here and be insulted by this man," said Wade, coolly, to Sheriff Quigley. He turned, opening the cell door, and strode out.

"Lissen, sheriff," cried Buck, as Quigley prepared to follow Wade out, "he's a low-down, stinkin' liar! I was in his room from about ten o'clock to two o'clock this mornin'."

"Can yuh prove that by anybody else?" demanded Sheriff Quigley.

Buck thought fast. The clerk at the hotel had not seen him leave. He had broken open the livery stable door to get his horse—no chance of an alibi there. He realized sharply that he didn't have a leg to stand on.

"No, I reckon not," he answered.

"Thar doesn't seem to be any doubt as to yore guilt, Jackson," said Sheriff Quigley. "The court's settin' over at Horse Creek. I'll arrange fer a quick trial—prob'bly take you over thar tomorrow some time."

"But, my God, man!" cried Buck. "I didn't kill him—I tell yuh I'm innocent!"

"Tell it to the jedge," snapped Quigley, as he strode out.

Buck started to call him back and ask him to send a message to Dad, then he changed his mind.

"No use gittin' Dad all worked up ontil I git over tuh Horse Creek an' kin tell him all about it," he decided.

BUCK spent a restless day. For hours he paced his cell, tried to read, smoked innumerable cigarettes, and finally, after dusk had settled down and the full moon poured a shaft of light through the barred window, he lay down on the cot in an effort to go to sleep.

After a long interval he sank into a light doze, from which he was suddenly aroused by the sound of shouts.

Springing up, he went to the window. By straining his neck he managed to catch a glimpse of the street in front of the jail. A crowd of twenty or more men were dismounting. There was a certain menace in the way they walked out of his range of vision.

"It's a lynchin' party!" he thought. "I'll bet that skunk, Wade, has started this thing to git even with me. He wasn't satisfied with what he already done."

He was not kept long in suspense. The cell door was flung open and Sheriff Quigley entered, his face deathly pale.

"Come on out, Jackson," he ordered.

"Is it a lynchin' party?" demanded Buck.

The sheriff nodded. "They'll kill me ef I don't turn you over. I got to do it!"

"You mean yuh ain't goin' tuh put up a fight tuh see that I git jestice?" exclaimed Buck.

"I ain't goin' to argue," answered the sheriff. He leveled his gun at Buck. "I can't out-shoot two dozen hard-boiled cow-punchers. You'll hev tuh come along."

Buck slowly walked out past him.

"What a fine specimen of yellow tripe you turned out to be!" he told

the sheriff on their way down the corridor.

As the sheriff and Buck came out onto the sidewalk in front of the jail, a hoarse growl went up from the crowd of men gathered outside. One of the men in the front ranks of the mob advanced. He looked at Buck under half-veiled eyelids, then turned to the sheriff.

"Sorry we hev to do this, sheriff," he said, "but thar's been too much killin' 'round here lately. Us boys hev organized a secret Vigilance Committee. We been banded together fer 'bout a month now. We swore we'd lynch the next man that committed murder in this town. We aim to make a clean place of Laguna, a place whar our women folks kin be safe."

The man turned to Buck with a not unfriendly look.

"In some ways, I'm sorry we hev tuh lynch yuh fer killin' that feller, Moke Gleason. He was more or less of a stranger here an' a pretty bad egg."

He continued to explain, but Buck did not listen.

To his joy and surprise, he suddenly caught sight of Dad Pollock pushing his way toward them.

As Dad came up alongside of the sheriff and the leader of the lynching party, Buck opened his mouth to let out a joyful greeting.

But Buck stopped short as Dad gave him a warning look.

"BEG pahdon, gents," said Dad, "I jest now hearn that thar was a lynchin' about tuh take place, an' I thought possibly the feller you-all was about to hang might be the hombre thet I come clear from Texas after." Dad flipped back his coat and displayed a star. "I'm sheriff of Cochise County, Texas. This man I'm after is a train robber an' murderer—thar's a five-thousand-dollah reward foh him, dead or alive."

"This ain't yore man, is it?" asked Sheriff Quigley. He indicated Buck with a motion of his thumb. Dad peered up at Buck.

"Nope—I'm right sorry tuh say thet ain't him," replied Dad, as he shook his head sadly. "This feller was known as Puffy Lomax." He reached in his pocket and drew out a handbill. Slowly he took out a pair of spectacles, balanced them on his nose, then unfolded the handbill and read:

"He was also known as Blacky Jones, Gila Fred, Moke Gleason—"

"Moke Gleason!" broke in Sheriff Quigley. "Did yuh say Moke Gleason?"

"Yep, thet's right," replied Dad, as he held the handbill a little closer to his eyes.

"Lemme see his picture!" Quigley grabbed the handbill out of Dad Pollock's hand, then extended it to the leader of the Vigilance Committee.

"Thet's sure enough Moke Gleason, all right, Hansen!" he exclaimed.

"Hev you-all seen this here Moke Gleason?" demanded Dad. "I hearn he was up this way. Thet's the reason I come here."

"I reckon we know him, all right." It was Hansen, the leader of the Vigilance Committee who spoke. "But he's dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Dad. He stroked his chin and smiled. "Wall, thet's shore lucky! Thet saves me from havin' to chaperone his carcass way back tuh Texas."

He glanced up inquiringly at Hansen. "But who killed him?"

Hansen looked at Sheriff Quigley with a sheepish expression on his face, then he jerked his thumb at Buck.

"Why, this here feller killed him, I reckon. Leastwise, we was aimin' tuh hang him fer doin' the job—not knowin' this here Moke Gleason was a bandit an' murderer."

"You shore come near makin' a big mistake!" answered Dad Pollock.

He shook Buck's manacled hands warmly. "Thank you, suh. You saved

me. a lot of trouble, young man. I reckon the sheriff here will unlock these heah bracelets so's you kin come with me to the telegraph office. I want to wire the bank to arrange 'bout sendin' on thet thar reward to you right pronto."

With a sigh of relief, Sheriff Quigley unlocked Buck's handcuffs. He tried to mutter an apology, but Buck squelched him with a look of utter contempt.

Hansen turned to the men who had crowded around and who were listening in open-mouthed astonishment to what had been said.

"We shore owe Jackson here an apology, fellers," he said. "I reckon we'll be a mite more sure afore we take the law into our hands next time."

BUCK and Dad didn't slow up until they were well out of Laguna. Neither did they speak a word to each other. Buck's heart was too full of gratitude to his comrade to endeavor to express his thoughts. Finally Dad spoke in a querulous voice:

"Damn it, son, I knew you would be gittin' in trouble as soon as you got outa my sight. I just knew you'd git into some kind of a mess, so I threw my weary bones into the saddle about noon the day you left an' started fer Alamo. I rode right through. When I got thar I couldn't find you no place, so I starts back, thinkin' you'd sashayed back to Horse Creek. When I stopped at Laguna, I found out 'bout the mess you was in, an'—"

"How in the hell did you git that handbill an' think up that lie 'bout Moke bein' a bandit?" broke in Buck, impatiently.

"Wall," answered Dad, "I had to do some tall thinkin' besides a lot of travelin'. I had to bust into this fellow Moke's room to git his pitcher, an' then I had to ride back to Horse Creek an' git the printer thar to run off thet handbill.

"Then I picked up my sheriff's badge, which I left in my bureau drawer, an' come back heah. I'm danged near tuckered out."

For a short spell they rode on again in silence, then Buck said with a catch in his voice:

"I reckon, Dad, I'll try tuh keep outa trouble for the rest of my life."

"Uh-huh," Dad answered. "Wall, I guess we better be headin' back for Texas."

"Yep," agreed Buck. "I don't like this here country a-tall." He paused, then added thoughtfully: "Funny about that feller, Moke Gleason bein' knocked off that-away. I wonder who did kill him?"

"I reckon I could enlighten you a whole lot on thet subjick, son," answered Dad.

"You?" exclaimed Buck. "You mean you know who killed him?"

"Umm," answered Dad. "I wouldn't wonder but what I could, bein' it was me thet furnished the lead pizenin' from which he so onexpectedly expired."

"It was you that did it?" cried Buck Jackson, looking at Dad in astonishment.

"I didn't mean foh to kill him," explained Dad, "but much as I hate to say it, my right arm's gittin' a leetle rheumatic. I kain't shoot straight as I uster."

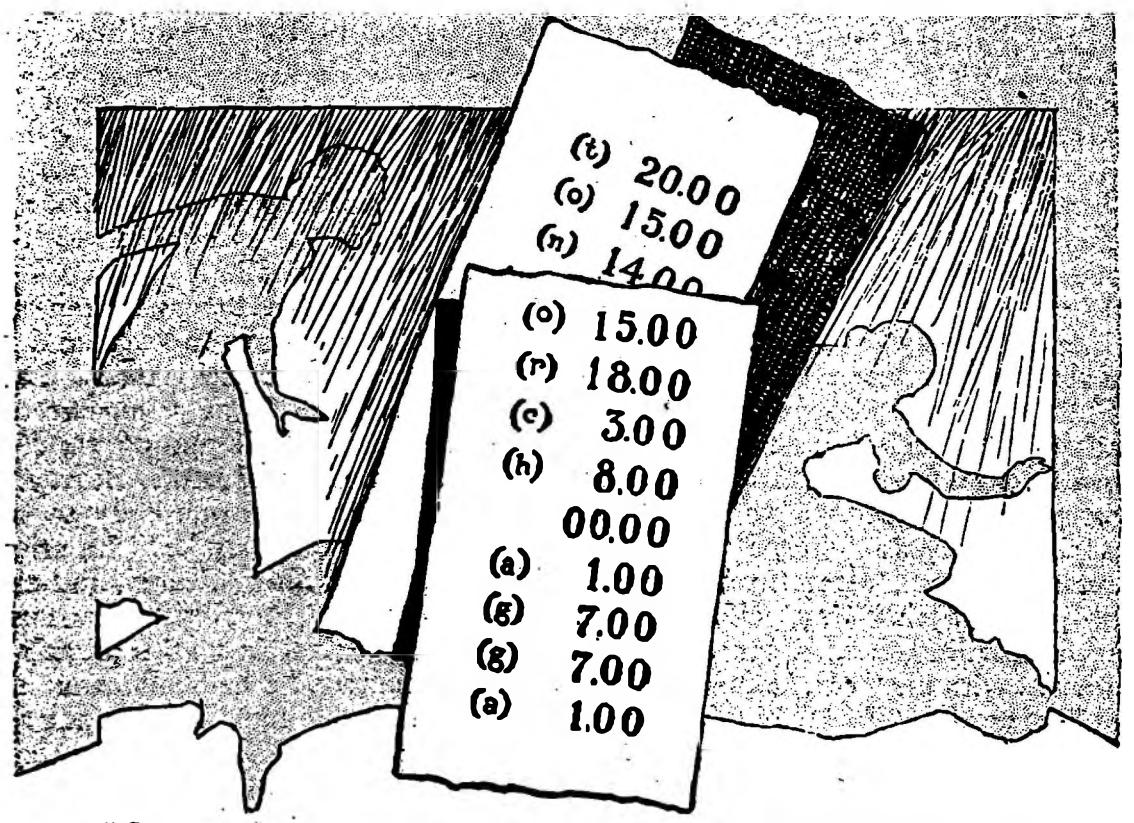
He paused for a moment to adjust a saddle strap, then added: "Thar wasn't nobody 'round to prove thet he drew fust, so I knew it would be bad policy tuh confess to the killin', onless I had to, to save yore hide."

"But why in the name of gosh a'mighty did you kill him?" demanded Buck.

Dad splattered a wayside bowlder with a stream of tobacco juice, then drawled:

"Wall, it was this way, Buck—he 'lowed as how he killed Lightnin' Jim."

THE END.



"Copy down the numbers on those two slips," Mme. Storey said, "and return them to the young man's pocket"

The Black Ace

Matching wits with a past master of psychology, Mme. Storey finds her best resources barely enough to cope with the wizard charlatan, Touchon

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Murder at Fernhurst," "It Never Got Into the Papers," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

AN anonymous client retains Mme. Storey, the famous criminal investigator, to obtain evidence which will put the clever charlatan Dr. Jacmer Touchon behind prison bars. The client tells how a "very dear friend" of his had consulted Touchon, who professes to practice "psychosynthesis," or soul-building, for discontented middle-aged women.

He fascinates them with his compelling personality, gets them to tell all their secrets, and, after filling up the emptiness of their lives with this novel consultation, charges them exorbitantly. But he goes a step further; and after a woman ceases consulting him, he tells her that part of his records, including her case, has been stolen. Soon, from another source, she gets blackmailing threats, and usually is forced to pay.

Mme. Storey sends her secretary, Bella Brickley—who is telling the story—in disguise to consult Touchon. But the clever psychologist, after al-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 12.

most overpowering her resistance with his hypnotic gaze, succeeds in tripping her up on her story and cynically bows her out.

Mme. Storey meets Touchon, who had been her psychology professor at college until he was dismissed for making advances to one of his girl students. He is interested in her, and comes to call—recognizing Bella, the secretary. Yet he continues to come, deeming himself cleverer than even Mme. Storey.

She hires Basil Thorne, an actor, to shadow Dr. Touchon; and he manages to catch him signaling to an apartment across Gramercy Park, where a Francis Fay lives. Thorne makes his acquaintance, and after the messages, decoded, show that Fay, who handles the blackmailing end, is growing discontented with his "cut," Mme. Storey has Thorne drop Fay a hint that she is about to expose Touchon and his go-between.

Fay telephones her, asking if he will be protected if he helps her; and she agrees as far as she is concerned. Fay makes an appointment at eleven o'clock.

A few minutes before that hour, Dr. Touchon calls! Mme. Storey, Bella, and he are in her private office when Fay, disregarding the office boy's order that he should come back an hour later, bursts into the office—and confronts Touchon! From behind the tapestry which conceals a locked private room, a gun is pointed, and with the word "Judas!" the hidden assassin shoots Fay. Touchon, playing the innocent defender, whips out an automatic and fires through the tapestry. A yellow-haired lad falls, with a terrible groan.

CHAPTER VII.

A MALEVOLENT OFFICER.

A SPELL of horror lay upon us.

"How awful," cried Dr. Touchon, "that *you* should have been subjected to this!"

There was a smugness, a complacency about him that in the presence of death was unspeakably revolting. His pretended solicitude for my mistress was ridiculous. Tall, pale, and stony as Nemesis, there was nothing of woman's weakness in her at this moment. She avoided looking at him so that the deadly scorn in her eyes might not tell him that we knew all.

He probably felt the unspoken accusation, for he began to swell and to brag a little. "It is lucky that I happened to be here. That young wretch would have turned his gun on you."

"I think not," said Mme. Storey.

Touchon ran from one body to the other. "Who can they be?" he cried.

"This," said Mme. Storey, indicating the body of Fay, "is, I assume, the man who called me up this morning, and told me that he had important information to give me. He did not tell me the nature of it. I told him to come at eleven o'clock."

I saw a glitter of satisfaction appear in Touchon's eye. He believed that Mme. Storey was playing directly into his hand.

My mistress proceeded to the body of the younger man. "I have no idea who this one is," she said, "but his motive was revealed in his cry of 'Judas!'" She opened the door into the middle room. "I see," she added grimly, "how he got in."

Following her into the middle room, we saw that the wooden false work in front of the old fireplace had been moved to one side. Mme. Storey, stooping, looked up the chimney. "He took up some of the bricks in the hearth of the room overhead," she said, "and in that manner broke into the flue connected with this fireplace." She examined the wooden false work. "He has been in and out through here many times during the past weeks. Stupid of us not to have noticed that the woodwork had been tampered with, Bella."

"Who would ever have thought of such a thing?" I murmured.

"A thief!" exclaimed Dr. Touchon, affecting an air of wonderment.

"No—a spy," said Mme. Storey dryly.

"How lucky that we put all our papers in the safe every night!" I exclaimed. "He could not have seen anything."

We returned to Mme. Storey's room. Eddie, the office boy, stood just within the door, pale and shaking with terror.

"I know who that one is," he said, pointing to the body of the younger man. "He rented the one-room apartment over the middle room. Went by the name of Mr. Carson. I have seen him going out mornings."

By this time a mob of people attracted by the shots were pushing into our offices. It is strange how a tragedy opens all doors. Dr. Touchon, however, with his superbly masterful air, ordered them out, and kept them out by standing guard at the outer door. One by one several policemen arrived. The first was McBrierley, who stands on post at the Fourth Avenue corner. He was well acquainted with Mme. Storey, of course. When he saw the two bodies lying on the floor of her office he froze in astonishment.

"Good God, ma'am," he cried, "a double murder right in your office! What a sensation this will make!"

Dr. Touchon explained what had happened. He took the attitude, of course, that he had been defending Mme. Storey. She made no comment.

McBrierley couldn't get over it. He turned to Mme. Storey as people instinctively do, saying: "What shall I do?"

"This is a headquarters case," she said crisply. "Telephone!"

While we were waiting for the men from headquarters, Mme. Storey stood gravely looking down upon the body of the younger man.

"Nothing must be touched until the police come," she said, "but we can at least make our deductions."

She pointed to some microscopic flecks of white on the dead man's cravat. "Cocaine," she said succinctly; "he took a shot to nerve himself up to this deed. Apparently his hand shook. The condition of his skin shows that he was not yet an addict. Only a beginner. Ah, poor lad—the tedium of an accountant's life was insupportable to young blood. Crime was his only chance for adventure, he thought."

"WHAT makes you think he was an accountant?" asked Dr. Touchon sharply.

Mme. Storey pointed to the dead man's hands. "Observe," she said, "the nail of the index finger on each hand; it is a little run down on one side. This is from tapping the keys of a machine."

"A typewriter?"

"No," said Mme. Storey thoughtfully. "Persons who expect to make their living by typewriting must be expert enough to use all four fingers. I fancy that this young man operated an adding machine. I have observed that only the forefingers are customarily used. He must have worked for a large concern," she went on, "since the degree to which his nails are worn suggests that he did nothing else but work the adding machine. Only a large concern would keep a man at that exclusively; a bank or insurance company."

Dr. Touchon listened to this with a polite smile, but I could see that he was profoundly impressed.

Out of the young man's waistcoat pocket stuck the edge of a piece of paper. Mme. Storey drew it out, and a second piece came out with it. "No harm to look at these," she said, "if we put them back as we found them." They proved to be two short pieces of the strips that are customarily run through adding machines. "You see," she said, showing them.

On the slips were printed apparently meaningless rows of figures. Not meaningless to my mistress, but for the

moment she put them back. "The police, of course, will take the original evidence," she remarked.

"But surely, above all others, this is your case," Dr. Touchon suggested slyly.

"Not necessarily," said Mme. Storey. "Why shouldn't I let the police do the work? I'm entitled to protection as well as any other taxpayer."

I thought he looked a little nonplused, but he made no answer.

Mme. Storey was still studying the body. Out of the breast pocket stuck a row of pencils and pens. She looked over the pencils. "Bella," she said, "we had a letter from a Mr. Matlock a few weeks ago. It was written on the note paper of the North American Life Insurance Company. See if you can find it in our file."

I did her bidding, wondering greatly what could be in her mind. When I fetched her the letter, she held it up to the light.

"I thought so," she murmured in satisfaction. Turning to Dr. Touchon, she added: "You will find that this young man worked in the cashier's department of the North American Insurance Company."

I am accustomed to these feats of deduction on the part of my mistress, but to a stranger they are startling. She herself does not set much store by it, since she believes that the intuitive processes are more valuable than the strictly logical.

Dr. Touchon stared at her without speaking. He pulled at his upper lip to conceal the fact that his mouth was dropping open with astonishment.

"But—but—" he began to stammer; then he attempted to carry it off with a laugh. "Oh, I say, this is miraculous."

"Not in the least," said Mme. Storey. "The pencils in this young man's pocket are all stamped with a Maltese cross in addition to the maker's name. I happened to remember that the Maltese cross is the emblem of the North American Insurance Company. All their supplies are marked with it. I sent for the letterhead to verify my recollection. The paper, you see, is watermarked with the Maltese cross. It would be the cashier's department that required so large a battery of adding machines."

There was a veiled sneer in Dr. Touchon's congratulations.

"Let us verify it," said Mme. Storey calmly. "Dr. Touchon, please call up the cashier's department of the North American Insurance Company, and, without telling him what has happened, describe this young man, and ask if such a one works there and is absent from his work."

He hesitated, not wanting to leave her alone with the body, but he could hardly refuse so natural a request. He had to go into the outer room to use the phone.

"Bella," said Mme. Storey, as soon as he was out of sight, "copy down the numbers on those two slips of paper, and return them to the young man's pocket."

She followed Dr. Touchon into the outer room to allay his suspicions, while I did her bidding.

A MOMENT later the inspector in charge of the detective bureau arrived with several of his men. Mme. Storey brought him to the bodies. If it had been our friend Inspector Rumsey, this story would have pursued a very different course, but there had lately been a change in the administration, and Rumsey, the honest and efficient policeman, had been relegated to the wilds of Bushwick.

His successor was Inspector Creery, a political policeman. Need I say more? Creery was a burly, red-faced man with a stupid, irascible blue eye. Having already been hauled over the coals in the press for inefficiency, it was inevitable that he should hate my mistress, for she was the idol of the reporters.

Creery started asking a lot of questions tending to show that this tragedy in her office reflected very seriously on Mme. Storey. She answered all his silly questions punctiliously, but volunteered none of her own conclusions.

Creery, in his stupid manner, was trying to infer that Mme. Storey knew who the blond young man was. Beyond the two slips of paper there was nothing on the body that might furnish a clew to his identity, and they meant nothing to the inspector. When he put the question to her direct, she answered calmly:

"I am trying to find out for you. Dr. Touchon is telephoning now."

Dr. Touchon entered the room. He said: "The chief clerk of the cashier's department of the North American Insurance Company says yes, he has such a man working for him. His name is Arthur Sims. He was called out of the office by telephone about ten this morning."

"Well, there you are, inspector," said Mme. Storey blandly.

It was remarkable to see how Touchon and Creery seemed to smell each other out. Without a word being exchanged, they cemented an alliance. The bond that united them was a common desire to see Mme. Storey discredited in the eyes of the public. They sought to hide their alliance from the others in the room, and Dr. Touchon continued to play the part of Mme. Storey's defender and upholder; but I could see clearly that hereafter we would always find Touchon and Creery working shoulder to shoulder.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRYPTOGRAM.

WITHIN an hour the first printed accounts of the affair were on the street. It created a profound impression. "Mysterious Double Shooting in the Private Office of the Great Criminologist!"

That was enough to start it off. From the beginning the newspapers, not unnaturally, took the attitude that this crime was a direct challenge to Mme. Storey from the powers of evil, and that it was up to her to make a swift and brilliant reply.

It was tacitly assumed that the police would display their usual incompetence; consequently there was a good deal of disappointment when Mme. Storey refused to accept any responsibility and put the solution of the crime squarely up to the police.

Her attitude was perfectly logical and correct, but the public is never logical, of course. It was disappointed when its favorite refused to perform for its benefit, and a tinge of resentment began to creep into the newspaper columns.

Inspector Creery, undoubtedly advised by Touchon, took advantage of this feeling to appropriate the credit for her brilliant piece of deduction. In one of the late afternoon editions I read:

> Inspector Creery in an interview described how, furnished only with a couple of scraps of paper inscribed with some meaningless figures, and a common lead pencil, he built up the fact that the murderer was employed by the cashier's department of the North American Insurance Company. This proved to be correct.

In my indignation upon reading this, my hand instinctively reached for the telephone. I intended to call up the office of the sheet in which I read this, and nail the lie; but Mme. Storey stopped me.

"We are not going to engage in any controversy with Creery," she said firmly. "That would immediately reduce us to his level. It would suit him far too well."

"But how can I let him steal the credit that belongs to you?" I protested with tears of vexation in my eyes.

"Oh, pshaw!" said Mme. Storey, shrugging it off, "we can perform such

'feats' every day in our lives, while Creery will never pull off another. Let him enjoy his moment of applause. He will have all the farther to fall."

This interview of Creery's had the effect of bringing the police into the running, and after it appeared, all the papers took the attitude that there was a race going on between Mme. Storey and the detective bureau to solve the mystery. First honors to Inspector Creery, who had established the identity of the killer. Next, who was the victim whom Arthur Sims had branded as Judas, and shot dead? Why was he a Judas, and what was he doing in Mme. Storey's office?

"What a mine we could spring if we told what we knew about Fay!" I said longingly.

"It would be prematurely sprung," said Mme. Storey dryly. "We could not possibly convict Dr. Touchon of blackmail with the evidence we have, especially since Fay is gone. You must be patient."

In subsequent interviews next day Creery fed the press with tantalizing scraps of information that kept the reading public on its toes. The victim's name was Francis Fay. He lived at such and such a number Gramercy Park.

Until a year before he had been an employee of the North American Insurance Company—where he had no doubt made the acquaintance of Arthur Sims—and had presumably led a respectable life. But of late he had become an associate of thugs and blacklegs, and had gone into the business of dealing in cocaine and other drugs.

In all this it was evident that a smarter mind than Creery's was prompting him at every turn. No explanation was yet forthcoming of why Fay had gone to Mme. Storey's office.

"They'll have a hard time explaining that!" I said bitterly.

"Nevertheless, they will explain it," said Mme. Storey.

"And will you let them get away with it?"

She merely smiled provokingly.

FURTHER particulars were forthcoming about Arthur Sims. He was the son of a respectable merchant in Leonia, New Jersey, a commuters' town. He was a good-looking, lively lad who seemed to have the faculty of inspiring a deep affection in his associates. Everybody called him "Blondy." He was engaged to a nice girl in Leonia, and neither she nor anybody else suspected that he was mixed up in wrong-doing of any sort.

His parents were crushed. Under pressure they were forced to admit that Arthur had spent a good many nights in town lately. There was the same old heartbreaking suggestion of the effect of evil company. The janitor of the house on Gramercy Park identified Arthur Sims as a frequent visitor to Francis Fay.

"Funny that he shouldn't mention the lad who came with him," commented Mme. Storey. "It looks as if that fact had been deliberately suppressed." With her faculty for picking out the one essential point in a complicated situation, she added: "That lad is our mark, Bella. Fay and Sims are dead, but the third one, so far as we know, is still alive and able to testify."

An ironical note was supplied to the situation when the police got hold of Basil Thorne with a view to finding out what he knew about Fay. Basil, with an air of open-eyed innocence, succeeded in telling them very little.

I should state that Dr. Touchon was receiving great credit in the press for his promptness in shooting the murderer. There was never any move to prosecute him, of course.

When we were left alone in our office, Mme. Storey had me bring her the numbers that I had copied down from the slips found in Blondy's pocket. She glanced at the first one and said instantly:

"This is a note to Blondy from one of his companions in the cashier's department. It reads 'To-night as usual.'"

I confess that I stared at her incredulously.

"It's the simplest form of cryptogram," she went on, "the only novelty being that it was written on the adding machine. No doubt the two friends communicated regularly in that manner while their boss supposed that they were busy totting up their figures. Look! Each row of figures represents a letter of the alphabet according to its number. A row of naughts signifies a space. It's as simple as reading print if, as it happens in my case, the numerical order of the letters is fixed in your mind."

Mme. Storey set down the proper letters opposite the numbers, and the slip looked thus:

(t) 20.00
(o) 15.00
(n) 14.00
(i) 9.00
(g) 7.00
(h) 8.00
(t) 20.00
00.00
(a) 1.00
(s) 19.00
00.00
(u) 21.00
(s) 19.00
(u) 21.00
(a) 1.00
(l) 12.00

Over the short slip Mme. Storey knitted her brows. "This looks like nonsense," she said. "Can you make anything out of it?"

(o) 15.00
(r) 18.00
(c) 3.00
(h) 8.00
00.00
(a) 1.00
(g) 7.00
(g) 7.00
(a) 1.00

"Orch is short for Orchard," I said at random.

"Good!" she cried. "You've hit it. Orchard is a telephone central. This is a telephone number. In this case the last four numbers stand for themselves. It becomes Orchard 1771. Put that away until we need it."

WHILE Inspector Creery was performing in the newspapers the reporters did not neglect us. The majority of these clever, cynical, amusing young fellows were Mme. Storey's devoted admirers. Well, she had furnished them with plenty of good copy in the past. They came to her now, imploring her to take some action and not let this brute Creery get away with murder, as they put it.

As young Crosskill of the *Sphere* said: "The public loves a contest, and it doesn't matter what anybody may tell them, they are bound to look on this as a race between you and Creery to see who can first solve the murder. We're only servants of the public, and we've got to play up to their notions. When you appear to be letting Creery make all the running like this, you are breaking the hearts of your friends on the press. Why don't you come out and crush him with a single phrase, as you know so well how to do?"

Mme. Storey smiled and remained obdurate. "A murder was committed in my office," she said. "It is up to the police to solve it like any other murder. I am not a public official. I have no business in this case. Nobody has engaged me to investigate it. And I am certainly not going to appoint myself."

Crosskill shook his head ruefully. "You are perfectly right," he said, "but that will never go down with the public. They don't think things out. Whatever you may say, they look on you as a kind of public character. They feel that you belong to them, and they expect you to put on your usual good show. It's the penalty you have to pay for all the publicity you've re-

ceived in the past. Now Creery has earned the name of being a nit-wit, and if you let him put one over on you, it will deal a terrible blow to your prestige."

"I am sorry to disappoint my friends," said Mme. Storey, still smiling, "but I have nothing to say on the case except to express the hope that the police will clear it up completely."

Crosskill went away waving his hands.

After this I knew it was useless for me to say anything, but I could not conceal my feelings. I am prouder of Mme. Storey's success than if it had been my own. I am as greedy as a miser of her popularity, and I watch how it waxes and wanes with an anxious heart.

I knew in what a hazardous position every popular favorite stands, because the public is always ready to tear down and trample on what it has itself set up. Already I could see the little sneers appearing in the press, suggestions of the envious that the great Mme. Story was not so much after all.

The tears sprang to my eyes, and the sight of them aroused a spice of irritation in my good natured mistress. "Now, Bella, you at least ought to have more sense," she said. "You can see the position that Touchon has maneuvered us into. He means to 'solve' this case, working through Creery. Well, if he can bring us into it his triumph will be twice as great. The only part for us to play is that of a dignified aloofness."

"How can he solve it when he was behind it all?" I said.

"I don't know," she said frankly, "but he will. This man has a cleverer brain than any I have ever opposed."

"And are you going to let him do what he wants?" I said rebelliously.

"Not precisely," she answered with a dry smile. "Have a little patience, my dear. Touchon doesn't know it, but he is playing directly into my hand. It would have been difficult, perhaps impossible to make a charge of blackmail stick; the man is too clever, and none of his victims would ever have testified against him. But now I shall get him for murder."

CHAPTER IX.

THE THIRD MAN.

MME. STOREY was not as idle in the case as she made believe to be. The police erected every possible obstacle in her path, such as intimidating the witnesses and posting a patrolman at the door of our office, but she serenely circumvented them.

We both got a good deal of amusement out of watching the spectacle of Inspector Creery at this time. Dr. Touchon was clever enough to conceal the leading strings, consequently the inspector thought that he had suddenly been endowed with remarkable cleverness, and his complacency was laughable. In the public humiliation of Mme. Storey he saw the opportunity of his lifetime. The foretaste of such a triumph was sweet to the man who had been so berated for his stupidity.

The ostensible purpose of the policeman at our door was to afford us "protection," but in reality he had been put there to report to his master the names of any of the witnesses who might come to see Mme. Storey. Well, she let them have their witnesses—all except one. When she has picked out the main lead of a case nothing can tempt her into a side issue. The only man she wanted to question was the chief clerk of the cashier's department in the North American Insurance Company. His name was Greenlees.

She called him up on the telephone. When he learned whom he was speaking to he became painfully embarrassed.

"That's all right," said Mme. Storey easily. "I know you have received a hint to keep away from me; and I know these fellows can make it

very unpleasant for you when their hints are disregarded. But you wouldn't have any objection to talking to me would you, if it was kept from the knowledge of the police?"

"No, indeed," he said eagerly.

"Then come to the Hotel Vandermeer when you leave your office. Go right up to room 1214 without sending up your name, and you will find me and my secretary waiting for you."

This was an expedient that my mistress had adopted before when she wished to meet somebody without attracting attention.

Mr. Greenlees was a gentlemanly little man with the punctilious and subdued air of the long trusted clerk. Being called into conference with Mme. Storey was a great event in his life. A little color had come into his pale cheeks, and his voice trembled slightly. His gentleness and modesty appealed to my mistress, and she laid herself out to make friends. In two minutes he was hers, body and soul.

"There is only one thing I want to find out from you, Mr. Greenlees," she said. "Who was Arthur Sims's special pal in your office?"

"There was no special one that I can recall," he said. "Arthur—Blondy they called him—was a popular boy. There were six or seven of the lads who formed a little group. I can give you their names."

"Never mind that," said Mme. Storey. "I doubt if it would be any of these. I think he must have kept his friendship with this one a secret from the others, because they corresponded with each other in cipher by means of the adding machines."

"The adding machines!" said Mr. Greenlees, astonished. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"Well neither did I," said my mistress, smiling. "But with this lead can't you identify the man I am looking for?"

The chief clerk slowly shook his head. "Haven't any idea," he said.

"Well, let us see if we can't get at it by a process of elimination. I assume that most of the clerks in your department are careless, happy-go-lucky lads, as transparent as window glass. Now is there one who is not like that? One who looks as if he might have a secret?"

"There is Jack Coler," said Mr. Greenlees promptly.

"What about him?"

"A handsome, capable-looking fellow," said Mr. Greenlees. "Looks as if he could keep things to himself. He's older than the others; about twenty-seven, I should say. Sometimes I find myself wondering that such a one should be content with so small a job. I strongly mistrusted him when he first came; a fellow with such a bold and independent eye usually gives me a lot of trouble. But I'm obliged to say I've had no trouble with Jack."

"Hm!" said Mme. Storey. "Sounds promising. Have you ever noticed anything between him and Blondy?"

"Can't say I have, madame."

"Well, let's get back to the morning Blondy was called away from the office. You answered the phone, I believe. What was the message?"

"A MAN asked if he could speak to Arthur Sims. Apologized for calling him during business hours, but said it was very important."

"Did you notice anything particular about the voice?"

"Well, yes, madame. It was an important kind of voice."

Mme. Storey smiled. "Would you recognize it if you heard it again?"

Mr. Greenlees hesitated. "Not if I heard the man speak, madame; the phone alters a voice so. But if I heard the same voice over the phone again I'm pretty sure I'd recognize it."

"Good! I will give you a chance at the first opportunity. Did you observe Blondy when he got the message?"

"Yes, madame; the phone was right on my desk."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything but 'Very well,' or 'All right,' or something of that sort. But when he hung up he was very much agitated, pale and trembling. I thought that natural enough, because he told me his mother had been taken sick, and he had to go home. I told him to go, of course."

"And then?"

"He said he would finish listing the checks he had on his machine. He was so long about that I said: 'Sims, hadn't you better go along?' and he muttered that he'd made a mistake and had to do it over."

"He would then be writing to his pal to tell him what had happened," said Mme. Storey. "Their method of communication was somewhat cumbrous, and it would take him some time. Then what?"

"Why he went, as I thought, home," said Mr. Greenlees.

"Did he speak to any of the other lads?"

"No."

"Did one of them leave the room at the same time?"

"No."

"Indeed," said Mme. Storey. "How could he have got that note to his pal?"

"Why—" said Mr. Greenlees with widening eyes, "it has just come to me. It was Jack Coler's job to make the rounds and collect the listed checks. He would pick up anything that was lying on Blondy's machine."

"Excellent!" said Mme. Storey. "It was probably that which had suggested the means of communication to them. Jack Coler looks like our man. Describe him to me, please."

"About five foot nine or ten," said Mr. Greenlees; "strong and set up like an athlete. Weighs one hundred and seventy-five pounds, I should say. Very handsome face with a bold plume of black hair, black eyes and dark red tight-shut lips. Pale skin, slightly yellowish, but healthy looking. A cool customer; has very little to say around the office. He has a triangular scar on his right cheek bone about three-quarters of an inch across; gives him a dangerous look."

"An excellent description," said Mme. Storey. "I wish we could always get as good. That will be all now, Mr. Greenlees. Thank you very much."

The little man was much confused by her praises.

"To-morrow morning," Mme. Storey went on, "I'll send a man to your office to pick this fellow up. One can see that he will be a ticklish subject to handle. Can you describe the position of his machine?"

"Nothing easier," said Mr. Greenlees. "There are four rows of adding machines facing me as I sit at my desk, and Jack Coler's is the first one in the first row starting from the left."

"Good!" said Mme. Storey. "While my man is transacting his imaginary business with you, he can be stowing Jack Coler's face away in his memory and you need pay no attention."

IT was Crider whom we sent to the insurance company's offices next morning, one of our best men. In a few minutes he was back again with a glum face. "Bird's flown," he said succinctly. "Never showed up this morning. Sent no word."

"Then he is certainly our man," said Mme. Storey.

"Mr. Greenlees gave me a photo of him," Crider went on. "Seems the whole force had a photograph taken awhile back. I cut Scarface out of it. The head is small but clear."

Mme. Storey and I looked with interest at the photograph. Mr. Greenlees had not exaggerated his clerk's good looks. A straight-nosed young man with a level gaze and firm lips, he was every inch the cool and dangerous customer that causes a flutter 'round a woman's heart. How came such a one to be listing checks on an adding machine, one wondered. But that was

no doubt only a cover for darker operations.

"They furnished me with the home address he gave," Crider went on, "but that is undoubtedly a fake. So I got the chief clerk to make inquiries among the other employees to try to establish which way Scarface went when he left the office. Mr. Greenlees is to call me here."

Word presently came over the telephone that Jack Coler was known to use the Seventh Avenue subway, and had been seen to get on and off at the Ninety-First Street station.

Starting at the subway station, Crider traced the daily route of his man step by step along Broadway by means of a newsdealer, a barber and a policeman on fixed post. It was an unusually successful bit of work, but it must be remembered that Scarface was a young man whom people were apt to remember.

Crider found his lodging in an apartment house on West Eighty-Ninth Street, but there he struck a snag in an adoring landlady who irately refused all information about her lodger. However, a hall boy told him that Scarface had removed his luggage in a taxi at half past five the previous evening. He was driven to Grand Central Station.

At the station Crider learned through a baggage porter that Scarface had taken the Western Express at six. He had a ticket for Chicago. Crider then got Mme. Storey's Chicago representative on the long distance wire, furnished him with the description, and told him to meet the train.

This man subsequently reported that he had picked up Scarface without difficulty. Scarface loafed around the city for a few hours, called on a girl, and took a train back to New York. The Chicago man was instructed to get a line on the girl. We had both stations watched on the arrival of the train, but our man was not on it then. He had evidently been cute enough to get off somewhere up the line and come in on a local. Evidently the trip had been undertaken merely for the purpose of throwing off pursuit. For the time being we lost his trail completely.

Mme. Storey took it philosophically. "He will bob up again," she said. "If my reasoning is correct, Scarface, through the deaths of Fay and Blondy, has become Touchon's principal agent. He cannot keep out of this."

It will be observed that the nickname so carelessly bestowed by Crider instantly stuck. Scarface suited our dangerous young friend. Even his friends began to use it later.

CHAPTER X.

SCARFACE STRIKES.

MEANWHILE, Jacmer Touchon, taking the attitude that the tragedy in our office had drawn us all closer together, became more and more assiduous in his attentions to my mistress. It suited her plans to encourage him, and he fell into the habit of calling at our office at all hours. He invited us to dinner at his apartment, and Mme. Storey reciprocated by entertaining him at her place.

When they began to go around together after office hours, she stipulated that I must always make one of the party. "Oh, Bella goes everywhere with me," she said carelessly. It was not true, but he had no choice. With me, she was perfectly frank as to her reasons.

"As long as you are present he is forced to confine his gallantry to general terms," she said, "and I can handle him very well. If we were ever alone together he would become personal and then I am afraid I should be tempted to box his ears."

It was a very strange situation, because, of course, Touchon knew that we knew the official version of the crime was a tissue of fabrications. He

knew, notwithstanding what Mme. Storey might say in the newspapers, that we were working hard on the case and hoped to bring the murder home to him. Yet it suited his sardonic humor to pose as Mme. Story's savior and her ardent admirer who hoped to become something closer.

All the shifts, evasions, and posings that this masquerade entailed exercised his ingenuity to the full, and he enjoyed himself. Mme. Storey enjoyed it somewhat less, I fancy, but she was amply able to meet him on that ground, when there was something to be gained by it.

For me it was a continual ordeal. I was terrified of them both. Seeing them smiling at each other with such apparent frankness, indulging in good-natured banter, playing the old, old game of elegant philandering, and knowing, as I did, that each determined nature was bent upon the destruction of the other, the strain was fearful.

Touchon was ceaselessly seeking to charm my mistress with his basilisk eyes, while hers ever skated lightly away, yet always conveying an intimation that they might yet succumb. She did it so well that sometimes I thought it was real, and became sick with anxiety on her account. Touchon was undoubtedly, in his peculiar fashion, "in love" with my mistress; but woe betide the woman on whom his fancy rested!

Still his effrontery puzzled me. I remember saying to Mme. Story: "I don't see what he can expect to gain by his love-making. How can he ever hope to prevail over you when he knows that you're well aware what a black-hearted wretch he is."

She shrugged. "That's the kind of man he is. He believes in the power of evil. In his philosophy, what he calls 'love' has nothing to do with decency. He looks forward to the day when he shall say to me: 'I am a thief and a blackmailer and a murderer, but you cannot resist me. I am your master. Come!' To him that would be the supreme triumph."

I shivered.

On one occasion Dr. Touchon asked us to dine with him at Guillaume's, the smart place of the moment. We met at his apartment for cocktails. He had a blond young man for me whose name was Shaler, I think; but it doesn't signify. I looked at him with interest at first, thinking he might be another of the doctor's agents that we had not heard of. But as we were powdering our noses, preparatory to setting forth, Mme. Story shook her head at the suggestion.

"You will notice," said she, "that Touchon never publicly acknowledges his crooked associates. He surrounds himself with blameless characters."

And so it proved. Mr. Shaler, who spoke in a flutelike voice, was the American equivalent of the *gigolo,* but less attractive than his European brethren, who, at least, bear themselves with a certain swagger. This one was tame, a mere cake-eater, who kept the tail of his eye on Dr. Touchon throughout, and accommodated himself to his patron's every mood. He has nothing to do with the story, so I shall not have much to say about him. At any rate he could dance. It was pleasant to yield oneself to the music, and imagine that a real man was guiding you.

AS is always the case at the dinner hour, the foyer of Guillaume's was densely crowded with people waiting for friends and so on. I fancy that many persons hang about at that time, hoping they may be seen, and afterward sneak out to dine at a cheaper place.

As we slowly threaded our way through, I got a shock as if I had touched a live wire, for there, not two yards from me, looking over the heads of several persons, stood Scarface, slim and elegant in evening dress. I recognized him instantly from the photograph.

He was handsomer than I had expected, and reckless as Lucifer. He had not even taken the trouble to paint out the white scar on his cheek bone, as he might easily have done. He was as pale as paper, and his eyes marked him from all those fatuous grinning faces, for they were blazing with hate or rage. He was not looking at me or at Mme. Storey, but at Dr. Touchon. I could not understand it at all. In a moment we had passed him. Touchon, who was speaking to the *maître d'hôtel,* did not see him, but Mme. Storey did. She made an excuse for us to retire into the dressing room.

"Scarface, here!" I gasped.

"Yes, isn't it awkward," she said coolly. "Just at a moment when I can't handle him. I'm going to call up Crider." She already had the telephone in her hand.

"Did you see the way he was glaring at Dr. Touchon," I said helplessly. "I don't understand."

"He looks as if he intended spoiling the doctor's game," she said enigmatically. "Not that I care about that, but incidentally it would spoil mine." She got her man on the wire. "Crider," she said softly into the transmitter, "put on evening clothes, and come to Guillaume's restaurant at once. Scarface is in the foyer. Watch him closely. Very closely. He looks as if he were preparing to attack J. T. That would not suit me at all. I can't explain further now."

Somewhat dizzily I followed my mistress back to our friends. We saw no more of Scarface then. He did not come into the restaurant.

The dinner, I have no doubt, was perfect: *escargots,* sole, *suprême* of guinea hen; all served with the marvelous sauces for which Guillaume's is famous. But it might as well have been corned beef and cabbage for me. The *ne plus ultra* of restaurants was wasted on me that night. I was haunted by the recollection of that blazing white face in the lobby. There was certainly murder in Scarface's eyes, but somehow there was something different, even attractive. I confess my heart went out to him. There was a self-forgetful, reckless quality in his rage. I knew, of course, that the affair was not finished, merely postponed; it was waiting for us outside. How could one eat? After three or four courses had dragged along, my nerves were in shreds.

Between courses we danced, and throughout the meal men and women alike looked at my mistress wistfully, as they always do, and whispered to each other about her.

"Rosika," said Dr. Touchon—it had come to that!—"I read in the satisfied eyes of those who look at you that the beholders feel they have had their money's worth even in dining in the same room with you. Consider, then, my happiness in sitting at the same table."

"Hear! Hear!" said Mr. Shaler, or whatever his name was, with a fatuous smile that cheapened the compliment unutterably. Dr. Touchon flashed a poisonous look at him through his lashes, and the young man became pale and silent.

"I hope it's true," said Mme. Storey calmly. "One likes to give pleasure."

"It is your air of high assurance that contents them," Dr. Touchon went on. "That is as it ought to be. In the general levelling process that has been going on since the war that air has almost disappeared. Nowadays our princesses seem to feel they must vie in silliness with our public entertainers. Only the efficient secretaries have dignity."

This last with a smile in my direction. I was incapable of rising to it, but Mme. Storey did. "Strange," she murmured wickedly, "how one loves flattery and distrusts the flatterer."

"Ungrateful!" said Dr. Touchon, slightly taken aback.

"Oh, quite!" she said. "Human beings are good at it."

"Is it flattery to state a self-evident fact?" he demanded.

"The truth or falsity of the statement does not constitute flattery," said Mme. Storey; "it is the end designed. One strokes a cat to make it purr."

"Alas!" said Dr. Touchon, "your purring has rather a satirical sound."

"The satire is directed at myself, dear friend," she said, "because you see, I *am* purring."

"I should have known it," he said dryly.

HAD my mind been at ease I should have enjoyed it. Badinage is rapidly becoming a lost art. If you do not believe me, listen to the talk at the adjoining tables the next time you dine out. Under the present circumstances, though, their pleasant fooling had a nightmarish effect for me. Real passion was waiting outside. I wondered with a rather "gone" feeling, if Crider had come.

Finally we arose to go. My heart set up a thumping that almost suffocated me. Mme. Storey and Dr. Touchon went first, while the blond youth walked at my side making agreeable conversation while we ran the gantlet of the staring eyes. I could never tell you what he said. The foyer was empty now, and I had a moment's respite while the gentlemen got their hats and coats.

As we crossed the pavement Scarface suddenly reappeared. I knew that a man with such a look would never be put off. He was holding his hand significantly in his side pocket. The sickening horror of those moments in Mme. Storey's office when I had seen two men killed, came winging back. Then I saw that Crider was close behind him, Crider, thin-faced, wary, and utterly dependable; and I took courage.

A cab drew up under the awning, and Mme. Storey got in. As I followed her I heard a shout behind me:

"Now I've got you, you murderer! Turn around and take it in the face!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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The Flatwoods Cowboys

NOT many years ago many thousands of cattle roamed the pine woods and grasslands of the State of Florida, from the Georgia line south. But the veteran handful of Florida's flatwoods cowboys recently started on their last big round-up. The herd of "Old John" Collier, as he is known among cattlemen, was sold not long ago, and he is going out of business after forty years of active life in the picturesque Everglade cattle country.

The flatwoods cow-punchers were much less active and more easy-going than their brothers of the Far West, who drove trail herds from Texas to Kansas over the Chisholm Trail. These "piney woods" boys owned good saddle stock, but they were unable to use the lariat because of the woods in which the cattle grazed. Their chief implement was a bull whip something like that used by the Australian ranchman. They never saw a pair of chaps, but affected laced boots and overalls. Their head coverings resembled the "ten-gallon" variety, but were more conservative.

Open range began to disappear several years ago when county after county began to adopt laws which forced the cattlemen to keep their stock within fence.

Oscar B. Aldrich.

"Sorry I had to get rough, Terry," Roswell said

The Longhorn Trail

Short-handed, with a restless herd of stampeding longhorns, Wally Farnum and his loyal waddies drive up the trail from Texas —while Nick Roswell's killers lie in ambush

By GEORGE M. JOHNSON

Author of "Trouble Ranch," "Squatters' Rights," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WALLY FARNUM, Kansas cowboy, overhears a kidnaping plot in a Dodge City barroom, and is on hand to frustrate the attackers. The girl he rescues, Jane Palmer—better known as Terry—is naturally grateful, and her father, Colonel Palmer, offers Wally a job as a cow-puncher on his Texas ranch. Wally, expecting to see Terry there that winter, eagerly accepts, to the secret displeasure of Nick Roswell, Palmer's trail boss.

But financial difficulties keep the Palmers away, and in the spring, their only hope rests in the herd of twenty-two hundred half wild longhorn cattle that have been rounded up during the winter, to be driven up the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Dodge City.

Twice attempts are made on Wally's life, and both times he is almost sure Roswell is to blame. Then, while they are crossing the Indian Nation, a band of rustlers surprise them at night, through treachery, and steal the herd,

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 5.

leaving the Palmer men without guns, food, or horses, in hostile Indian territory.

Wally charges Nick and his sidekicks, the Strobel brothers, with aiding the outlaws; and asks the other waddies if they're game to follow the herd on foot and try to surprise the bandits. They agree, leaving the three traitors behind.

In a daring night raid, they kill two of the outlaws and overpower the others. Taking the leader, Gene Sarles, with them, the loyal waddies drive the herd on up the trail, leaving the rustlers behind. Nick joins the outlaws, and they meet another trail outfit, where they get horses. With part of his men, he hurries to Dodge City, where he tells Colonel Palmer that Wally and the other cowboys have stolen the herd!

Terry believes in Wally, and thinks Roswell is lying; but despite her protests, the colonel authorizes Roswell to hire a band of gunmen and recapture the herd. Nick rides away, determined to wipe out Wally's men.

CHAPTER XV.

HANK WILLET, OUTLAW.

DAYS dragged wearily for Terry Palmer, burdened with a feeling of hopeless despair. Colonel Palmer was beside himself with anxiety, while he waited to hear from Roswell, for on the success of Nick's venture, as the Texan firmly believed, hinged his own future prosperity.

One day when Colonel Palmer was away from their rooms, there sounded at the door a faint and hesitating knock. Terry opened it, to find a rather disreputable individual standing there, a man whose right arm was missing at the elbow. In his left he held a battered Stetson.

"Your father here, Miss Palmer?" the caller asked, seeming to recognize her at a glance, though he was a stranger to Terry.

"No, he isn't," she replied. "But I'll take a message for him. Won't you step in?"

"P'raps I'd better, if you don't mind, ma'am."

He entered the room, standing there in a helpless, embarrassed fashion while Terry closed the door.

"What is your name, please?" Terry inquired pleasantly.

"My name? Well, now, ma'am, I guess they's no harm in telling you. I'm known as Hank Willet." He paused uncertainly; then, with a rush, said: "If I told you something worth while, ma'am, you'd give your word of honor never to make trouble for me account of it?"

"You have my word that Colonel Palmer will be fair," Terry promised. "And if what you tell me is valuable, he will gladly reward you."

"That's satisfactory. Now I can get down to brass tacks. First of all, ma'am, I was one of them chaps that tried to kidnap you, up the river." Terry gasped, and the man hurriedly went on: "You promised not to make trouble about it, ma'am. Well, another one was your dad's trail boss, Nick Roswell."

"Nick Roswell!" Terry echoed, aghast at such unexpected news.

"Yes, ma'am. Nick's part was secret like, because he didn't want to run the risk of you spotting him. He's a smooth-acting gent, is Roswell.

"Nick got in a jam two, three years ago," he went on to explain. "He had money of your dad's after he'd sold some cattle for him, and Nick lost the cash in a big poker game at Abilene. Of course he had to dig up money to pay the colonel, or he was through. Gene Sarles and another lad staked him, so he could make good the loss; and it was done with the understanding that Nick would join 'em later in any proposition that promised profitable. They had you in mind all the time, and Nick knew it. But they had him where he couldn't help himself.

"Gene was plumb disgusted when Farnum broke up the kidnaping game here, and right away he framed up with Nick to steal your dad's herd this summer. They had a good plan, and it come mighty close to working. But it seems this lad Farnum is one hell of a guy—begging your pardon, ma'am!"

"But how do you know all this?" Terry cried.

"I don't blame you for wanting to know that, ma'am. About a year ago, I had a fight with Gene Sarles, and he shot me up." The man nodded toward his right arm. "Well, as far as the gang is concerned, I'm through, but I know their hangout down in the lower part of town, and I did a little gumshoeing when Nick was explaining what he expected to pull off. I'd seen him and the Strobels ride in, and I figured there'd be something doing."

"Why *didn't* you tell us before?" Terry repeated.

"I ought to've, ma'am, I know. But I was sorta scared of how Colonel Palmer'd treat me."

Even as Terry sat there, perplexed and hopeless, her father opened the door. Incoherently she poured forth the story.

"I was right all the time, dad," she concluded, sobbing. "I knew Wally Farnum couldn't do a dishonest deed."

Palmer was aghast at the slaughter of his loyal men, which seemed sure to result from his trusting acceptance of Roswell's proposition. He cross-examined Willet, but the man's story rang true at every point.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRAIL BOSS.

THE recovery of Palmer's herd put a heavy load of responsibility on Wally Farnum. The task confronting him would not have been easy even for a man of far wider experience in the art of trail driving.

Palmer's outfit had left Texas with one man over a full complement, but the number of actual riders had been reduced to seven by loss of Roswell and the Strobel brothers. It entailed two night shifts instead of three, with a corresponding increase in the time each watch was on duty.

Of the seven herders, one, a chap named Ross Glasby, was partially incapacitated by a bullet wound in the arm, and though Ross protested that he was able to carry his share, Wally refused to assign him to night herding.

Wally gave sober thought to the matter of what the defeated outlaws might do. It was conceivable that Nick and the Strobels would eventually join the other rustlers, in which case the party would outnumber his force. But danger of an immediate attack did not impress itself seriously upon him. Several considerations argued against this.

But while discounting the danger, Wally resolved to play safe. Briefly he explained the situation to the men, concluding:

"The riders on night herd are expected to keep their eyes open every minute of the time. If you see anything suspicious, shoot first and talk it over later. Don't take any chances. They's one thing we can count on sure as gospel. If Nick figures another shot at Palmer's herd, his plans will include making buzzard fodder of every last man in the outfit." The logic of this was obvious to all of them.

Their camp the second night was a flat south of the North Fork, which they reached too late for a crossing that afternoon. About the time when the first shift came off duty a rascally coyote began yapping close to the bedded cattle, and that trivial alarm started them on a stampede.

"Just as if we didn't have trouble enough anyway," Wally grumbled resentfully, as he tore after the panic-stricken herd; Buckskin and Ross were assigned to the post of camp guards.

That stampede was broken up after a breathless three-mile run west along the North Fork. When a tally was made at dawn some twenty or thirty animals were missing.

IT was during the search for these strays that Wally first became aware of another trail outfit not so far away, the outfit from which Nick had picked up equipment for his dash to Dodge City. This drive also had a stampede on its hands, and in the process of rounding up lost steers Wally and the other trail boss chanced to meet. Naturally they stopped to exchange news and gossip, during the smoking of a sociable cigarette.

"See any Indians?" Wally's fellow drover inquired, after they had passed the time of day.

"Not to speak of. We struck a bunch down on the Washita that looked plenty ugly, but we got out of it without a jam. Mostly they've left us pretty much alone."

"You been lucky, from what I hear," the stranger said. "That bunch you speak of south of Washita crossing wiped out a whole outfit a little while 'fore we come through. Killed the riders and stampeded the cattle all to hell and gone. And day 'fore yesterday a outfit blew into my camp that had lost dawgone near everything they owned, including some men."

Wally pricked up his ears at this.

"Yeah?" he said, interested. "What became of 'em?"

"Why, they had three cayuses, and wanted more, to get 'em up into Kansas in a hurry. I sold 'em three out of my remuda, and next morning six of the crowd piled out. Four are trailing with me now, waiting till we get through the Nation."

"So they told you Indians hopped 'em, did they?" Wally remarked. "They're trail robbers, and they took a shot at my outfit. If you can hold the polecats till you get to Dodge, I judge the town marshal might like to put 'em in his hoosegow. You got a notion which way the six rode?"

"I heard 'em talking, and mention was made of Dodge. One of the bunch seemed in a powerful hurry to get there, for some reason or other. He didn't specify what it might be."

"I bet I know who he was," Wally mused. "Riding toward Dodge, eh? Well, I'm obliged for the news, pard."

Later on Wally rejoined his men, driving a pair of C P dogies he had picked up in a brushy ravine.

"We did get some luck out of that stampede," he told them, and described his encounter with the trail boss of the neighboring herd.

"They're halfway to Dodge by now, assuming I've called the turn. Allow 'em two or three days more on the trail, a day in Dodge City, mebby two days to make their plans and perhaps dig up a few extra hands; then they'll start south hunting us. And look out for fireworks!"

"According to that we'll still be short of the Cimarron," Curly observed, "judging from the pace we're hitting so far. Five, six days from now and we can expect 'em any time."

Each member of the outfit understood the situation and accepted it without complaining at the increased hours of duty. After the first few days Ross Glasby's wound had improved to the point where he took full part in the routine.

Sarles himself was kept in the chuck wagon, tied hand and foot, against the remote possibility that he might meditate an escape. He remained sullen and defiant, refusing to talk when Wally tried to get information out of him. When accused point-blank of having had a part in the attempted abduction of Terry Palmer, he profanely denied all knowledge of the affair; nor would he admit that he even knew who Nick Roswell was.

Wally's scouts reported no signs of the outlaws, but this did not lull the trail boss or his men into any sense of

security, and at no time did they relax their watchfulness.

"We'll get wind of those lads 'fore long, I expect," Wally told his second in command. "And then it would be a good hunch to give their imaginations something to work on. That, plus a little luck, is all we need. Didn't it ever occur to you, Curly, that imagination is a grand thing?"

"I hadn't thought much about it," Dobson confessed.

"You ought to ponder the subject," Wally advised him, "because it's worth any gent's sober consideration. What I'm sort of counting on is this—" And Wally proceeded to outline his ideas in some detail.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT DEAD OF NIGHT.

NICK ROSWELL parted from his employer harassed by an uncomfortable doubt.

"I wonder, now, if Terry smelled a rat," he worried. "I don't guess I've much chance to marry her now, but things might break my way; I ain't give up by a damn sight!"

Nick lost no time in starting forth from Dodge as soon as Palmer advanced cash for the expedition. He had already picked up two more questionable characters who could be depended on to sling a mean forty-five in a scrimmage, and felt that eight men would be enough for his purpose. It was understood that a clean job would be made of the affair. Corpses are not able to make damaging explanations.

"If we work it careful," Nick summed up, "we ought to wipe out that bunch of waddies plenty easy without giving 'em a chance to burn powder. Our skins ain't safe long's a solitary one of 'em's left to spill what's happened."

Roswell made an error in his calculations, which allowed the herd progress about equal to that of a normal drive, whereas various reasons had materially slowed up Wally and his fellows. Thus, instead of cutting the trail of the Palmer outfit, he almost committed the blunder of riding directly into it from the east side. He saw them just in time to avoid certain discovery, and quietly called his band together for a conference behind the shelter of a low hill half a mile off the line of march.

"That was a close shave," he said. "I certainly thought they'd be further on than this."

"What's next on the program?" one of the men inquired.

"Get a line on things before springing the trap. But we'll need to watch our step."

Nick himself did most of the scouting, for he appreciated that if his whole band were allowed at large some one would surely be spotted. This went on for a day or so, while it became increasingly apparent to the spy that Wally Farnum had his hands full.

"He's too short-handed to drive a herd that size," Nick gloated, "and it don't seem like those waddies are getting any sleep to speak of. They can't keep it up."

He reported these facts to his followers, adding:

"All we've got to do is wait our time. I've sized that crowd up, and every waddy in it is blamed near licked. They're practically asleep on their feet right now, and half the time when they're riding they're dead to the world. Farnum's plumb crazy."

"What're we waiting for any way?" one of the two recently recruited members grumbled. "Time to get busy. I don't like this fiddling along."

"I'm holding off," Nick stated, "until they get so dawgoned sleepy that we have a chance to salivate the whole crowd at one lick. Farnum's playing it like a fool. For the last three days I'd say his riders ain't averaged two hours' sleep to a man.

Figuring out his game is too many for me, but it's a cinch them waddies can't hold the pace. Don't be in too big a hurry. Our time's coming, and we'll be able to do the job in comfort."

A night or so later the herd was bedded down in a little valley flat bordering a stream. Nick noted this from a respectful distance, grudgingly approving the choice as ideal for holding cattle overnight. The flat covered perhaps thirty acres of land, fronted by the stream course on one side and on the other by a line of low hills which curved around behind it.

With the coming of darkness, Nick cautiously made a closer inspection, taking vast pains to avoid discovery by the night herders. The cattle appeared quiet, and everything was as it should be, save that no cowboys were riding herd.

"Funny," mused Nick, becoming bolder. "Ain't they any waddies on the job?"

He spent a wary fifteen minutes, and was at length convinced that the steers had been left unguarded. In the course of his survey, Roswell made another discovery—the remuda had also been thrown on the flat, grazing by themselves a short distance away from the bedded cattle

"Those guys are taking a night off," was the gleeful thought in Nick's mind, "figuring their animals will stick to the place where they left 'em. This looks good, but it'll bear investigation a little more. I'm playing safe."

Before dark, Roswell had observed the location of the outfit's chuck wagon, and now, with redoubled caution, he approached it. Dying coals from the camp fire shed a feeble light over near-by objects. Nick could make out the massive wagon and a number of silent forms stretched on the ground about it. A tiny spark glowed, apparently in mid-air, off to one side, and Nick judged that it came from the cigarette of a man who stood guard while his companions slept.

"I figured something like this," he mused triumphantly.

While Nick watched, the camp guard tossed his cigarette away, and approached the fire, yawning audibly; then he sat down, resting his back against one of the wagon wheels, a vague mass barely distinguishable in the feeble glow from the embers.

"I bet he'll be asleep inside of five minutes," Roswell muttered to himself. "This is what I've been waiting for."

Noiselessly he slipped back from the camp, recovered his horse, and rejoined his companions, who had been waiting while their leader looked things over.

"What do you say, Nick?" one of them asked as he returned.

"All set," was Nick's crisp answer. "I told you that gang was near dead. They've put the herd and remuda in a sort of park by the creek, depending on luck to keep 'em there, and now the whole outfit's pounding their ears, with one hombre standing guard. From the looks of things he was about ready to slip off. It's a cinch!"

"How do we work it?"

"We can sneak up from this side, where they's a few scattered bushes growing, and cut loose on those waddies while they're snoring in their blankets. The fire ain't quite dead, so if we hustle it'll give a little light to help our shooting. Let's go!"

The party proceeded on horseback to the place where Nick had previously left his pony while exploring, and here they dismounted.

"BE awful quiet from now on," Roswell whispered. "We work up the creek about a hundred yards, and then swing to the left, which puts us right in front of their camp. We'll spread out about three, four feet apart, and when the shooting starts take 'em in order; that is, the fellow on the left of our line will salivate whoever's sleeping farthest to the left, and so on. I'll say when. Savvy?"

A mutter of agreement showed their comprehension, and the squad set forward on foot, following along the left bank of the creek. It was a clear night, still for the most part, though occasionally a little breath of air stirred along the valley, in response to which the coals of the camp fire could be seen glowing fitfully into temporary flame.

Slowly and with infinite caution the line of men drew closer to the silent camp, where tired riders were sunk in the sleep of utter exhaustion. Twenty-five paces distant they paused, at an almost inaudible order from Roswell, on the extreme right.

"Close enough!" Nick whispered to the one next him. "Each fellow pick his man!"

This command was passed down the line. A wandering breeze puffed at the coals, which sparkled with renewed life. Their momentary radiance showed the sleeping forms, and the dim bulk of the guard, head sunk on his breast, supported by the wagon wheel.

"All right!" Roswell said aloud. "Let 'em have it!"

Eight rifles belched their deadly contents in a volley which crashed on the stillness of night with a hideous pandemonium.

Before the would-be murderers could grasp the startling fact that not one of their lead-filled victims had moved, out of the darkness to the right and left burst rapid flashes of fire. Grunts of bewildered astonishment and savage oaths escaped the outlaws, mingled with the thud of bullets striking home as their ranks were swept by a leaden hail.

The sickening knowledge that he had walked squarely into an elaborate trap left Nick Roswell fuming with rage, but helpless to remedy the fatal blunder. Those silent forms on the ground were dummies, not sleeping men! He snapped at a rifle flash, and in an instant bullets fairly smothered him. One whipped away his hat, while another seared his shoulder as if a white hot iron had grazed it.

Two or three of Nick's companions followed his example, drawing on themselves a withering blast of lead. Then Roswell and the others who had survived broke and fled in frenzied panic, thinking only of escape. The sound of their flight was followed by a spray of bullets, fired in a blind hope of locating some target. One of the bandits fell.

"Good God!" Roswell thought, aghast at the almost unbelievable volume of shooting. "Those fellows must have half a dozen guns apiece!" Which did not come so very far from the actual truth.

The firing ceased, for lack of anything to shoot at, and then for the first time was heard the thunder of stampeding cattle. The midnight battle had been too much for longhorn nerves.

"They're off!" one of Wally's riders shouted. "What d'you say, boss?"

"Let 'em go!" Wally rejoined. "We might have to spend the next two days rounding 'em up, but that's no more'n I expected. From the sound of things, we did one good job a'ready to-night."

"And the dogies started north," Curly added complacently. "The farther they run the nearer they are to Dodge City."

"Anybody get hit?" Wally next asked.

A check-up disclosed no casualties, though Sun-up Hopkins had received a slight wound from one of the hasty return shots fired by the outlaws. But the raiders had been too demoralized by the awful suddenness of the sleet of lead to offer much opposition.

In fact, the majority of them were past the power of resistance after thirty seconds' exposure to the blast of death that swept them. Five bodies were found within a thirty foot circle, and farther away lay a sixth, the man who dropped as he fled through the darkness, vainly seeking safety.

"Six," Wally mused grimly. "How many would you say there were? Nine?"

"No more'n that," Dobson replied. Then he laughed. "Your scheme worked great, Yank. Those hombres took the bait like so many hungry fish. I bet our blankets are full of holes."

"Imagination," Wally chuckled, "is a handy thing to have, but any gent who's got too much of it is liable to be out of luck at times. Somebody better take the gag out of Gene's mouth, and ease up on the tie rope so he can stretch. What noise he makes won't hurt us now."

The dead outlaws were buried in a hastily dug grave, the two Strobel boys being among the fallen, but Nick Roswell had fared better.

"Too bad, some ways," Wally declared soberly. "I'm not fond of killing folks, but these fellows don't deserve any salt tears; they got no more'n they were trying to hand us."

"I'D be just as well pleased if we'd got Nick," was Dobson's savage statement. "I always knew he had the instincts of a skunk in human form, but the odor hanging over his trail this last season would shame a skunk. What was that other business you hinted at awhile ago? Remember? You said he and Sarles had been working some shady scheme together."

Wally gave his friend a fresh insight into the rottenness of Roswell's past.

"Well, I will be dawgoned!" Curly ejaculated. "And to think that's the kind of hombre I been associating with! Well, he's through now any way. Probably he'll leave the country in a terrible hurry."

"He'd better!" Wally said. "The first time we meet one of us will turn up missing at chuck call next morning. He's a very irritating sort of hombre, is Nick Roswell. I'm plenty peevish at the thought of him."

"Peevish don't half express it. I'll match you to see who shoots him, Yank. Come on, now. Be a sport!"

"Ordinarily," said Wally, "I'd match you for chalk, money, or marbles; but shooting Nick Roswell's a privilege I value too high to risk losing. He's my meat, Curly."

At dawn the Palmer riders set out on the trail of their runaway steers and the remuda, for the little flat was barren of livestock. Practically all the horses were located together about a mile away.

The steers had scattered somewhat, and within two or three miles they began to come upon occasional bunches; a little later on the main portion of the herd was encountered. These were all thrown together and allowed to graze, while the search for strays continued.

Darkness finally came, the number of recovered animals increased by a scant half dozen, with Bill Ordway not yet heard from.

"Hope we don't have to go hunting a wrangler," the trail boss muttered, uneasy at the thought that Bill might have ridden into trouble. There were signs of Indians about, not to mention a few bandits whose good luck had enabled them to escape destruction.

Wally's apprehensions were at length allayed by the arrival of Bill Ordway.

"I struck the trail of about a dozen dogies," he remarked, "with tracks of two or three horses mingled with 'em. From the signs they'd been making good time, and I fogged after, hoping to catch up. The trail was getting fresher by the minute, and just when I figured on delivering the goods, six or eight painted bucks jumped at me from back of a brush patch, shooting, and yelling, and pouring leather to their ponies plenty.

"Right then I lost all the interest I had for them roaming dogies. I sorta remembered that unless I humped back I'd be late for grub pile."

"We need you more'n we need the steers," Wally approved. "I'm glad you had sense enough to let 'em go."

Ordway tackled some of Buckskin's cookery with an appetite born of a hard day in the saddle.

"I didn't want them redskins—I hadn't lost any Injuns," he mumbled. "The odds was too heavy; but it was a plumb shame to let 'em get away with that many steers."

"Never mind the steers," Wally told him. "I don't guess Colonel Palmer will crab."

"What does the last tally show?" Ordway demanded.

"Twenty-one, fifty-two," Wally replied. "And we left Texas with twenty-two hundred. Forty-eight shy ain't bad showing for what we've been through."

"You said plenty," Buckskin spoke up warmly. "It ain't so long ago we was shy the whole works."

A load of worry had been removed from Wally Farnum's mind with the crushing defeat administered to Nick Roswell. The future looked bright, marked by no worse vicissitudes than those normally to be encountered on the long trail. Indians might bother, but the danger of redskin forays would rapidly diminish as the outfit got north into Kansas.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DUST OF A TRAIL HERD.

THOSE were wretched, unhappy days for Terry Palmer up at Dodge City; barren days, followed by nights of bitter regret and longing. The strain told on her father, too; he became haggard, drawn with care, lacking in his customary buoyant spirit of optimism.

Vague, disquieting rumors filtered up out of the Nation, rumors of a pitched battle fought between two trail outfits, resulting in the annihilation of one party.

Colonel Palmer meanwhile had come to a decision regarding the course which he felt should be pursued. For several reasons he preferred that no publicity be given the affair, and accordingly kept from friends and acquaintances his knowledge of Roswell's duplicity.

But as the time approached when Nick might be due in Dodge City, Palmer unburdened his soul to the town marshal, who heard the astonishing revelation with unmixed surprise.

"The thing to do," the officer decided, "is to arrest every hombre of the gang as soon as your herd comes in."

"They're desperate men," Palmer mused. "Once aware that the game is up, they'll fight like so many tigers. Rascals of that stripe are hard to take alive."

"Then we'll take 'em dead," was the marshal's grim reply. "I'll put a rider on watch. You'd like to be notified when the herd's reported?"

"I would appreciate it, sir," Colonel Palmer replied. "I want to be there at the show-down."

Palmer had not intended to tell Terry all this, but she wheedled it out of him.

"I'm going, too," she stated quietly.

The colonel opened his mouth to utter an emphatic protest, but one glance at Terry's set face convinced him that she would have her way, as usual.

The summons came sooner than either anticipated, while they were at dinner the next noon: a brief note from the marshal.

Fifteen minutes later they rode up to his frame shanty of an office where a posse of mounted men, heavily armed, was awaiting their arrival.

THE level plain beyond the Arkansas was dotted with grazing cattle from herds already up the trail. Occasional riders could be seen, men belonging to the outfits which had driven these cattle out of Texas. Terry rode close by her father, speaking but seldom, busy with her unhappy thoughts. Their course led southeast,

toward Mulberry Creek, some miles away.

Beyond Mulberry Creek a larger dust cloud became visible, hanging in the still air. The town marshal indicated this with a broad wave of his arm.

"Guess that's your herd, colonel," said he. "Things 'll be lively soon, if the hunch we're acting on is correct."

"Don't let Roswell get away, whatever happens," Palmer muttered.

"We'll get 'em all," the marshal said; a little later he gave curt orders to his men, and the group broke up, riders scattering off to either side.

Nearer and nearer they drew to the advancing drove, until the individual steers composing it could be distinguished. A man rode at the head, but as she gazed Terry found her eyes suddenly dazzled by the sun.

"We'll ride up close to that fellow," she heard the officer saying, "and I'll roll a gun on him 'fore he knows what's up. The rest of his gang will be taken care of the same way."

The distance between the approaching groups steadily lessened, while Terry's anxious gaze was centered on the nearest rider, the man who pointed the herd. The sun was so blinding that she could hardly see, and Terry rubbed her rebellious eyes, striving to banish the dancing, blinding sun spots.

The rider touched spurs to his horse, coming toward them at a gallop and waving his Stetson by way of greeting. All the color drained from Terry's face; her heart, for a moment, stopped beating. She could now see clearly the horseman who approached them; it was Wally Farnum!

CHAPTER XIX.

TRIUMPH—AND DISASTER.

TERRY, victim of a sudden weakness that she fought desperately to control, remained at first merely a spectator of the meeting between Farnum and her father.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, now!" she whispered savagely to herself. "Show a little backbone if you've got it!"

Palmer enthusiastically pumped Wally's hand.

"By gad, sir!" the colonel cried. "You must be a miracle worker! I learned too late what Roswell was up to, and I've been worried sick. Terry, too. We thought Nick had wiped your crowd out to a man."

"Not quite," Wally Farnum grinned cheerfully. "So you were expecting him with the herd, were you, colonel?"

"That's it. And we were ready to give the scoundrel a warm reception let me tell you! He certainly had something coming."

"Oh!" Wally grinned again, glancing at the marshal's posse which was converging toward them. "I got it now. I didn't figure you knew, and the young army hereabouts was something of a puzzle."

"Guess you have things straight now," Palmer said, then realizing that his daughter was holding back, "Hey there, Terry, what's the matter with you? Aren't you going to tell Farnum how tickled you are that he's not planted somewhere down the trail?"

"You didn't give me a chance," Terry responded, smiling and now almost master of her emotions. Frankly she held her hand out to the returned hero, clear, honest eyes looking straight into his. "I'm so glad to see you, Wally," she said, and Wally's tanned face flushed with pleasure at the natural way his name slipped from her lips.

"I can't half thank you now for all you've done," she whispered. "I want to do that later—if you'll let me."

"Crowds are a terrible nuisance, aren't they?" Wally grinned. "But I'm not looking for thanks, Miss Terry, though the chance to see you alone is a privilege I'd appreciate more than anything else I can think of."

"Well, well!" Palmer cried. "If

there isn't Curly Dobson! Hello, Curly!" as Wally's *segundo* rode up.

"How are you, colonel!" Dobson beamed effusively. "Howdy, Miss Palmer! Looks like we kicked up considerable excitement, eh, Yank?" and he winked at his trail boss.

"It's a glorious achievement, all that you boys have done," Palmer assured Curly. "I'll not soon forget it."

"Shucks, colonel!" Dobson disclaimed. "We boys of the outfit ain't entitled to the credit. Yonder's the man deserving bouquets," and Curly jerked a thumb toward Wally Farnum, who vainly motioned him to silence.

"You don't want to believe what Curly says, Colonel Palmer," Wally urged. "Except for Nick and the two Strobels that outfit is made up of lads worth their weight in solid gold. All I did was make a couple of suggestions, which the same were carried out prompt and with much enthusiasm. Curly was a ball of fire from start to finish. They all were."

TERRY looked from one to the other, smiling in quiet amusement at the way each tried to dodge the glory.

"We might hire the town hall and let you two fellows stage a debate," Palmer observed dryly. "But it occurs to me that the best notion is to split the credit—half to the trail boss and half to his men. Before I'm through I want to thank each waddy personally, and shake him by the hand. Not to mention a more tangible reward." His eye fell on the marshal of Dodge City. "What happened to Nick Roswell?"

"Likely that shorthorn left the country pronto," Dobson spoke up.

"Who's acting as *segundo* for you?" Palmer asked of Wally, who slapped Curly Dobson on the back.

"And a dawgoned good one, too, colonel," he declared.

"Turn the herd over to him. I'd like you to come into town with us. You know what to do, don't you, Curly?"

Dobson's eyes twinkled mischievously as he caught an insight into how the land might lie. A blind man could hardly have missed it.

"Sure, colonel," he rejoined. "Guess I can handle things O. K."

Gene Sarles, surly and defiant as when first captured, was removed from the chuck wagon and placed on a horse. In charge of the town marshal's posse he headed for Dodge; Palmer, Terry, and Wally Farnum riding a little to the rear.

The colonel was voluble in his outspoken praise and gratitude.

Terry said little, though she smiled expressively at Wally from time to time, and those smiles were enough to put him in the seventh heaven. Obviously Terry had been deeply concerned for his safety, and it was equally obvious that she was delighted to see him safe and sound. What more could be asked?

THEY reached Dodge late in the afternoon.

"I'm having a little dinner party to-night," the colonel said, his eyes twinkling. "That is, Terry and I are. You'll be the only guest, Wally. Can we count on you?"

"I wouldn't miss it for all the cattle in Kansas," Wally assured him, looking at Terry. "But I'll need some time to get the trail dust out of my system."

"No hurry. Eight o'clock will be soon enough."

Terry dressed for the evening with unusual care, planning to make herself as attractive as possible. The colonel had concluded arrangements for having a dinner served in his suite.

Steps sounded in the hall outside; then a knock at their living room door.

"There he is," said the colonel. "Let him in, Terry."

To her surprise it was not Wally, but one of the hotel attendants.

"A Mr. Farnum's downstairs, Miss Palmer. He'd like to speak with you there for a moment."

"Why didn't he come up?" Terry demanded.

"I couldn't say. He seemed quite anxious to see you."

"Wally's waiting down below," Terry called to her father. "I'll find out what he wants."

Puzzled at Wally's unaccountable behavior, Terry accompanied her guide to the first floor, glancing quickly about the unpretentious lobby. Wally Farnum was not to be seen. Doubtfully she turned to the employee who had brought the message.

"Where is Mr. Farnum?" she asked.

He nodded toward a door opening off the lobby to outside.

"He said he'd rather wait for you there, Miss Palmer."

Terry frowned, confessing a sense of disappointment that Wally should order her about in this unconventional manner. Then, impulsively, she stepped through the door, which closed behind her, and Terry found herself standing on a narrow, unlighted side street.

Without warning the heavy folds of a blanket enveloped her, muffling the startled cry that escaped her lips. Choking, strangling, unable to scream and scarcely able to breathe, she was picked up bodily by two men and rushed into the seclusion of a near-by alley.

The sweet, sickish odor of chloroform pervaded the blanket, and Terry struggled in vain against its sinister influence. Gradually her senses yielded. A host of queer thoughts flashed crazily through her brain, among them dismay that her gown would be ruined by contact with this filthy, bad-smelling blanket.

Then it seemed to Terry that she was in a canoe, sweeping helplessly down the rapids of a turbulent cañon stream, where white water zigzagged between huge bowlders. A score of times she escaped destruction by a hair, but at last the canoe slipped into quiet water, and ceased from its dizzy plunging. Lulled and soothed by the more gentle motion, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XX.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

WALLY FARNUM'S preparations for the dinner were hardly less painstaking than those of Terry herself.

"Good thing I've got plenty money," Wally mused. "All I need is new boots, new hat, and every last thing in between. This stuff I been wearing would dawgone near made a scarecrow blush."

A bath, shave, hair cut, and new clothes brought about a tremendous improvement in Wally's appearance. But all these details required time; more time, in fact, than he had counted on, and it was after eight when Wally finally presented himself at Palmer's suite.

"Where's Terry?" the colonel demanded, admitting his guest.

"Terry?" Wally repeated blankly. "Why, colonel, I haven't laid eyes on Miss Terry since I left you folks late this afternoon!"

"You didn't send up from downstairs, saying you wanted to see her? Half an hour ago, or a trifle longer?"

"Not me! Colonel, something's gone wrong! Who said I wanted Miss Terry?"

"One of the hotel boys, I guess. He stayed in the hall while talking to Terry, and then she called in that you were waiting down in the lobby. When she didn't come right back I supposed the two of you were together." Anxiously his glance questioned Wally's face. "What's up?"

"Some damned deviltry of Nick Roswell's. We've taken too many things for granted, colonel." Wally's eyes smoldered with a sudden blaze of fierce passion. "We can't sit still and

let Nick have his way with Terry, colonel! How we going to find where he's taken her?"

"There's a man in town named Willet," Palmer told him. "He's our only hope."

TERRY regained consciousness a short time after she dropped off, for the anæsthetic had been used sparingly. She was seated in a chair, bound hand and foot. The sound of music and scraping feet of dancers could be heard, its harshness softened by distance. Terry opened her eyes to see Nick Roswell regarding her by the flare of an oil lamp, standing on a cheap, varnished washstand. A bed was the only other article of furniture.

"Sorry I had to get rough, Terry," Roswell said, "but we tried not to hurt you. Everything's going to be all right."

Terry's glance showed her utter loathing and hatred as she returned his look. The girl was badly frightened, but attempted not to betray it.

"You're flirting with death, Nick," she informed him. "Your only hope was to leave the country, and stay away. I can name at least two men eager to kill you at sight."

"Your friend Farnum's one of 'em, I suppose," Roswell sneered. "He'll never kill me. What killing goes on will be the other way."

"And you think my father will tamely submit to this outrage!" Terry flared. "You're a bigger fool than I believed, Nick."

"I ain't worrying about the colonel," Nick said easily. "I've got him fixed. He won't do anything brash against a member of the family. You see, my dear Terry, I expect to marry you. That will make things a pile different."

An icy hand gripped at Terry's heart, and her face grew pale in spite of herself. Roswell's keen eyes noted the girl's sudden perturbation.

"Guess you understand now," said he.

"I won't marry you!" Terry cried. "A ceremony like that wouldn't be binding anyway."

"It better be binding," Nick stated brutally, "for your own good if no other reason. Because just as soon as the job's done we're going on our honeymoon. I'll admit it would be pleasanter to take a willing bride, but I'm so keen for you, Terry, that willing or not I'm going to have you."

"You're mad!" Terry gasped, horrified at realizing how completely she was in his power. The mere fact that Nick had not bothered to gag her proved the futility of crying for help. She inferred that this building to which he had brought her served him and his associates as a sort of headquarters.

"Sure I'm mad," Roswell agreed, "mad about you. Give me a chance, and I'll be a decent husband." He glanced at his watch. "I've got to leave you for a spell, Terry. Yelling won't do any good, but I want to save your voice. It's a nice, clean handkerchief, so you needn't mind."

Terry clamped her jaws firmly together, resisting the gag, and when Nick rashly tried to force them open she sank her white teeth deep into his thumb. He swore under his breath, but persisted—and the handkerchief was tied in place. Terry could no longer speak, though her eyes still flashed defiance.

"Good-by," Roswell said. "I'm going after the parson. If I don't hurry he'll probably be too drunk to splice us." With that, Nick blew out the lamp and departed, locking the door.

ANGER, fear, and desperation struggled for mastery in Terry's breast. It seemed incredible that Nick Roswell should carry through this insane scheme as a means of reinstating himself in Palmer's good graces, but Terry did not delude herself with vain hopes. It was only too clear that he meant business.

Slowly the minutes dragged, and

with their inexorable passing Terry's panic grew, deepening to black despair. Soon Nick would return. What might happen after that she dared not think. Steps sounded faintly without, as of some person or persons stealthily approaching her prison. There was a sinister and frightful significance about that almost inaudible movement. A key was thrust in the lock; the door swung open on squeaky hinges, while Terry's eyes strove to pierce the darkness.

"This is the place," a voice muttered. "Nobody here, I guess."

A match snapped, and by its feeble light Terry perceived her father and Wally, each with a drawn pistol in his hand; a third man proved to be Hank Willet, whose presence explained how they had come to locate her so promptly. An instant later Terry was free, sobbing in her father's arms.

"I thought you were Nick coming back," she said brokenly. "He'll be here any minute."

"Then let's shift," Wally spoke up grimly. "I've got a scheme I'd like to work on that hombre. First thing, though, is to get Miss Terry to the hotel where she'll be safe. I'll go with you that far."

Without delay they left the hateful room, Terry not yet fully awake to the blessed realization that her awful nightmare was really over. Wally hurried them along, cautioning against noise. Apparently no one noted their departure.

At the entrance to the hotel, up in the more respectable part of town, Wally held back.

"There's a little matter of business needs attending to," said he quietly. "I'll be with you later, colonel. *Adios*, Miss Terry. It won't take me long."

Terry knew what the errand was, and instinctively caught at Wally's arm, protesting his determination.

"No, no!" she gasped. "You mustn't go there again, Wally! He'll kill you!"

Wally smiled at her, a smile both reassuring and tender.

"You stay with the colonel, Miss Terry. In a little while, if you want me to, I'll be coming to see you. I can't stop now. You understand, don't you?" anxiously. "I've got to go!"

Terry's heart was torn with dread, yet her intuition told her that Wally had no choice. Just as he said, he had to go. A failure to return and face Nick Roswell would seem to him a blot on his manhood; and he would not feel that she was ever safe, with Roswell still at large. Colonel Palmer drew her close to him, and they entered the hotel.

Wally Farnum made record time down into the dubious section of shady resorts from which Terry had so lately been rescued.

"I might be able to put the thing over yet," he thought hopefully, "if Nick's slow getting back."

A light glowed faintly at the front of the building, but otherwise there were no signs of occupancy, and Wally cautiously slipped in from the rear, working a slow, silent passage to the second floor. He stopped at the room that had been Terry's prison.

"Looks like I'm ahead of Nick," was his jubilant thought.

The door was still locked as they had left it, and Wally entered by means of a key he had obtained from Hank Willet. A match snapped in his hand, was instantly extinguished. Nothing had changed in the room.

"Now," Wally thought contentedly, "we'll bait up the trap."

He locked the door behind him, settling at last in the lone chair to await developments.

FIVE minutes passed. Finally the low mutter of voices came up to him, followed by creaking stairs as visitors ascended. Boot heels scraped on the bare wood floor outside.

"Everything's all set." It was Nick Roswell speaking, as he opened the door. "I'll strike a light."

"Good idea," a wheezy, horrible voice chuckled eagerly. "Do I kiss the bride?"

"Try it once and see what you get!" Nick grunted angrily, his back to Wally's chair while fussing with the lamp chimney. Then he turned, jaws sagging open in dismay at the sight before him.

"How are you, Nick?" said Wally. "Surprised, sort of, ain't you?" He lounged negligently in his seat, thumbs hooked into the belt from which hung the holster sheathing his forty-five. The man who had come with Roswell, a whisky-saturated, pasty-faced wreck, drew his breath sharply, and began a gradual, crablike movement toward the door. Wally's eyes flickered at him, though they did not actually leave Roswell.

"Freeze where you are," Wally ordered, "till the party's over!" and the "parson" froze, shaking visibly.

Nick stood close by the lamp, striving to get a whip hand over his numbed faculties. Again had Wally Farnum proved a Nemesis, wrecking his carefully made plans—and as always, just at the point when success seemed within his grasp. There was a mixture of fear and hate in his eyes as he stared at Wally Farnum; nervously his tongue moistened dry, parched lips.

"Well," said Wally coldly, "I'm ready any time you are."

"What do you mean?" Nick parried. He knew, but chose to pretend ignorance for the added time it gave him.

Wally laughed contemptuously.

"Guess you're wise, Nick. I could have killed you when you lit the lamp, but I didn't want to. I wanted you to have a chance to suffer a little, knowing you were going to die and knowing they was no way to dodge it. That's part of the punishment. They was another reason, too. I can't quite bring myself to shoot a fellow in the back, even a skunk like you that deserves shooting twenty times. Pull your gun, Nick! The best man wins!"

Roswell possessed the heart of a bully and a craven; yet there is a certain courage born of utter desperation, the courage often shown by a trapped animal, though it be only a rat. And Roswell, trapped, desperate, facing the end of his warped career, and yet dearly wishing to live, staked all in a mad gamble with death.

His right hand darted for the gun on his thigh—a motion that Nick Roswell never finished. Before the weapon cleared its sheath, a blast of hot smoke enveloped him, while the small room echoed with the deafening crash of Wally's forty-five, drawn with a speed which made the lightning-swift stroke of a deadly snake seem slow by comparison.

Thus did Nick Roswell pay the inevitable price of his misdeeds.

The horrified spectator wheezed like a leaky bellows, staring through the powder smoke with fear-dilated eyes.

"Get out!" Wally curtly told him, and without delay the fellow sidled through the door, panting, grotesque in his terror. Pausing only to extinguish the lamp, Wally followed.

"Killing folks is bad business," he thought. "But I couldn't do a thing else. Looked like Miss Terry never would have been out of danger with that skunk alive. If she only understands!"

FOR the second time that night he knocked at the door of Palmer's suite, admitted as before by the colonel. His glance questioned Wally, who nodded. No other reference to Wally's errand passed between them.

"Terry'll be out in a minute," Palmer said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "I made her lie down for a little rest."

"It was a good thing to do," Wally agreed, and then Terry emerged from her room, pale, but looking none the worse for that harrowing experience. She sensed from their attitude that Nick's days of evil plotting were ended, yet Terry was a girl of the West, where

such things had to be. The frontier code is without mercy for one who deliberately chooses the wrong path.

"I'm so glad you're safely back," she said softly.

There was a moment of awkwardness and restraint, which Palmer broke by jovially exclaiming:

"That dinner I ordered is a total loss, but we'll have the cook fix us up a substitute. If you young folks will excuse me, I'll see what can be done."

"I haven't thanked you yet," Terry told Wally in low tones, when they were alone, "for all you did. It was wonderful. And I really think it saved dad's life. I've been terribly worried about him during the past year."

"You know why I did it, don't you, Miss Terry?" Wally said.

Terry's eyes drooped before the ardor of his gaze, the pallor of her cheeks suddenly mantled with a crimson flush. To Wally she seemed more beautiful than ever, more to be desired.

"I wasn't going to speak out so soon," he went on, "but I just can't hold in the words any longer. For almost a year I've been thinking about you, wishing to see you again, yearning for the sweet sound of your voice. I was proud of the confidence you put in me when you wrote that last letter, and I swore I'd live up to it or die trying. I guess you know how much I love you, Terry—I've loved you ever since first laying eyes on you, up the Arkansas that day a year ago. Do you think you could love me, too?"

Terry raised her face to his, eyes sparkling bright with the unshed tears that trembled in them.

"I can't help loving you, Wally," she confessed. "I shall want you always—for my very own!"

THE END.

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Hands vs. Heads

SI PERKINS was a "lazy, good-for-nothin', triflin' cuss," which he hated everything that looked like work; his fam'ly said that Si was "bad, an' gittin' wuss an' wuss," and the mildest thing they called him was a shirk.

But Si, he didn't worry none as long as he was fed, an' 'lowed to sit around and smoke and think; for he had the germs of forty great inventions in his head, from perpetual motion to a cure for drink.

The neighbors said that Si was "cracked"; his "roof was full o' holes," and they "reckoned that his hind wheels didn't track"; so they laughed and joshed Si Perkins, but deep in their secret souls they believed that Si would some day hand it back.

The village smarty said his spark plug wasn't workin' right, and his carburetor didn't carburet; and if Si had not perfected an invention one dark night, the village would be laughing at him yet.

But now he's Mr. Perkins and a multimillionaire, and the village folks don't dare to josh him now; but they wondered how he did it, so they asked him if he'd care to make a speech to them and tell them how.

At the banquet that they gave him in the new Masonic hall, Si rose and cleared his throat, and simply said: "While you fellers was a workin' with yer hands—an' that was all—Si Perkins was a workin' with his head!"

Will Thomas Withrow.

Slinking in from the outer darkness came a sleek, soft-moving yellow shape

Shorty Returns

Shorty craved adventure, so he hit the trail for Africa on a big-game hunt—but even he was surprised at what he got

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

"YEH, I spent three months in the wilds of Africa," said Shorty. "Just got back yesterday."

Bill and I gazed at him enviously. We had never got farther from American soil than across the bay to Staten Island.

"You saw wild savage women dancing in shredded wheat costumes to the music of tom-toms in the African jungle, eh?" said Bill.

"Take your elbow out of my ribs," snapped Shorty testily. "The only women I saw were dusky housemaids and the only music I heard outside of talking machines with cracked records, was the buzzing of mosquitoes."

"Spent all your time looking for big game, eh?" suggested Bill.

"Big game!" echoed Shorty scornfully. "I tore the clothes off my back pushing through the goldingedest tangle of vines and trees ever planted under one sky, day after day, looking for tigers and elephants; but all I ever bagged was a mangy house cat from the hotel. The chef asked me to shoot it for him."

"Where in thunder were you?" demanded Bill in amazement. "In New Jersey or Africa?"

"Africa," sighed Shorty; "but I might just as well have been in Jersey. If there were any wild women in shredded wheat costumes, I must have scared them away."

"That's possible," interposed Bill.

Shorty gazed at him reproachfully.

"You aren't no Adonis yourself," he growled, and went on sadly:

"All this stuff you read in travel books is a lot of hooey. I went to Africa expecting to see and hear something—wild women, tom-toms—and to achieve the ambition of my life, to bag some big game in its native haunts; but what did I get out of it? What?"

A reply clearly was expected.

"Nothing?" ventured Bill.

"You said a mouthful," said Shorty. "That's just what I got, and a lot of it. I blew in two thousand smackers on this trip, two thousand, mind you; and all I've got left are the clothes I am wearing, some cheap trinkets that they couldn't sell in the ten cent stores on this side of the ocean, and my little old gun." He resentfully kicked the travel-battered valise at his feet. "Just that and a handful of change."

"Maybe you hit the wrong part of Africa," suggested Bill.

"I went as far as the steamer would take me," declared Shorty, "and then I pushed a hundred miles inland; but there's just as wild country up through New England as any I saw in Africa, except that the weeds grow higher. Civilization's ruined things. Not a sign of any game, not a sign of any savages—unless you could call a dusky guy a savage because he wears a high hat and stiff shirt, but no trousers. Not a sign of any tom-toms, no nothing." His voice was almost a wail. "Hooey, that's what's in the travel books. And here I am back on Broadway."

"Well, at any rate the food was dif—" began Bill, but Shorty promptly interrupted him.

"Food! The same old food you get here, only they didn't know how to cook it, and they didn't cut the purple inspection stamps off the Chicago beef before they scorched it. The first time I went out back of the hotel I thought it was Mount Amazon I saw, but—"

"Amazon is a river," corrected Bill.

"Well, whatever I thought it was, it proved to be nothing but a colossal pile of empty tin cans with pictures of tomatoes and things like that on the labels. A guy doesn't have to spend two thousand smackers to get food like that. I haven't had anything but Chicago beef and canned stuff since the outbound steamer dropped anchor under a blazing sun and the purser pointed to a hunk of green and blue sticking up out of an azure sea and announced: 'There's Africa.'

"Now I'm going up to Gus Beary's place in the Bronx right away and stow away a six-course fancy dinner. Who's coming with me?" He paused, and there was a tense silence. "The feed's on me," he added reassuringly. "Who's coming?"

"We are," Bill and I chorused. We hadn't tucked away anything since breakfast.

"YOU won't recognize Gus Beary's place," warned Bill sadly. "Jim and I stopped there on the way down. He's made it into a cabaret with all the fixin's."

"I don't care what he's done to it," declared Shorty stubbornly. "I'm going to eat at Gus's place. Come on." And he led the way toward the subway.

That's Shorty all over. He's as generous as a millionaire politician at a ward picnic. "Spend it when you got it," is his motto, which, perhaps, explains why he doesn't very often have it. Nobody but Shorty would have ever blown in his one and only nest egg on a trip to Africa in search of big game and tom-tom dancers. And for once in his life Shorty was disgruntled because he didn't get something in return for his money—not even a lion's tooth to hang on his watch chain.

Gus's place, once one of the niftiest beef stew joints in the city, had degenerated into a brightly lighted cabaret palace on one of those sparsely settled but heavily traveled roads leading out of the Bronx. The lights were just being switched on when we blew in, so Shorty saw the place in all its glory.

"This 'll make me forget Africa and my lost two thousand," he chuckled.

Gus was tickled pink to see us. That's one thing about Gus—prosperity hasn't turned his head.

"Order anything you want to-night—the feed's on me," Gus declared hospitably.

"We want something besides Chicago beef and canned stuff, something different," said Shorty sociably.

"You blew in at just the right time, old man," Gus interrupted. "I've got a real treat for you."

"Beef stew," whispered Bill reverently, as he licked his chops.

Gus sniffed disdainfully. "Better than that, something you never tried before," he confided with an air of mystery. "You couldn't have come at a better time." He seemed immensely pleased with himself.

He led the way to a secluded table which commanded a fine view of the big dance floor.

"I got a bully show on to-night, too," he said. "You'll like it. Hey, George!" He beckoned to the head waiter. "Look after these three men as though they were your long-lost brothers," he directed.

George eyed us with the morose air of a man who never had thought very much of his long-lost brothers; but perhaps he was calculating the size of the possible tips.

The tables were rapidly filling. Most of the men were dressed like floor-walkers and the women like the statue of Venus. From behind a patch of palms came the sounds of an orchestra tuning up for its deadly work.

"I wish to thunder those palms weren't there; they remind me of Africa and my wad of money," said Shorty irritably. "Plentiful eyefuls of palms were about all I got in return for my two thousand. I don't want anything around that reminds me of Africa. Hooey, that's what the travel books are full of." And he was off again, full steam, on his favorite topic. He stopped as George was passing our table and signaled to him.

"Where's our feed?" he demanded.

George was apologetic. "It's coming, sir, in about fifteen minutes. You were a bit early; and Mr. Beary is having a special delicacy prepared for you. It will be a most pleasant surprise, sir, and a rare treat. The program is about to begin, and after the first number your dinner probably will be ready. The wait won't be long, sir."

"It wouldn't be if I didn't have to keep looking at those danged reminders of Africa," sighed Shorty, waving in disgust toward the palms.

The next instant the orchestra blared out with the opening number, and as the familiar jazz notes reverberated through the big room Shorty relaxed and momentarily forgot the palms. Suddenly, though, he stiffened and a look of anguish crossed his face. The jazz had given way to a steady, rhythmic beat—the monotonous *boom, boom, boom* of a drum, above which sounded faintly the wail of a violin.

"Sounds like a tom-tom," remarked Bill sociably. "It—" But he saw that Shorty wasn't in any mood for conversation.

"I spent two thousand smackers and staggered a seasick trail halfway across the face of the globe to hear that stuff, and never heard it," he groaned.

A DOOR at the far end of the room swung open and there appeared a file of eight or ten dusky maidens wearing shredded wheat dresses. Slowly they danced their way to the center of the floor, with the drum and violin keeping up their monotonous beat. It was a good dance act, and everybody was watching it with rapt attention.

I didn't dare look at Shorty.

"All this is thrown in free with the food," Bill explained.

"Free!" groaned Shorty. "Free, and it cost me two thousand to—"

The *boom - tiddley - boom - tiddley-boom* of the orchestra drowned out his words as the dusky maidens swung into a savage dance, displaying all the wild abandon of the jungle. Back of them swayed the palms. Gus was right. It was a bully act.

Suddenly there was a shrill scream. It came from outside, otherwise it might have passed as a false note on the violin. At first I thought it was the screeching of automobile brakes, and apparently everybody else who heard it thought the same. It was blood-curdling, but so is the screech of automobile brakes. The next instant, however, the door at the far end of the room was flung open and a white-faced young man pitched headlong into view.

"A lioness has escaped from the zoo! It's coming up the street!" he shouted in terror, and, without stopping to close the door behind him, he flung across the room, ruthlessly pushing the dusky maidens aside and plunging terror-stricken up the narrow flight of steps leading to the balcony.

The dusky maidens and everybody else in the big room promptly tried to follow him. Pandemonium reigned. A woman pointed in horror toward the door and screamed. Slinking in from the darkness, probably blinded and bewildered by the light, and lured by some unconscious hereditary urge to the beat of the tom-tom, came the sleek, soft-moving yellow figure of a big catlike animal.

I wanted to join the scampering, fighting mass of humanity on the stairway, but for some reason or other I couldn't seem to move my feet. Bill seemed to be afflicted the same way.

At first I thought that Shorty had fled, but he straightened up from behind the table, and I realized that he had been feverishly opening the travel-stained black valise. He picked up something, pointed toward the lioness, and the next instant a shot rang out.

The lioness dropped dead in its tracks.

Shorty calmly restored the gun to the valise and sat down again.

There was a period of absolute silence and then wild applause.

George slid down from the top of the balcony pole up which he had shinnied, and the heads of two other waiters appeared from beneath convenient tables.

"Bill, I just shot a lion," declared Shorty in an awed voice as though he was spilling a bit of real news.

There might have been some kind of a demonstration for Shorty, but his attitude discouraged anything like that. He sat with unseeing eyes, staring into space.

"Nerves," gushed a half-dressed dame at a near-by table.

Bill winked understandingly at me. "Nerves!" he chuckled scornfully. "Poor old Shorty can't get Africa off his mind."

Shorty snapped back into life.

"I don't give a hoot about Africa," he growled, "but I'm thinking how I blew in two thousand smackers for something I didn't get, and then—"

He spread his arms in an all-embracing gesture which took in the palms, the tom-tom, the dusky maidens, and the carcass of the lioness which was being dragged off the floor.

Gus himself came to our table bearing a heavily laden tray.

"Smells almost like beef stew or steak," Shorty commented critically.

"Do you know what that is?" whispered Gus impressively. "It's something that's never been served before in a New York cabaret—it's elephant steak."

There was a crash. Shorty had keeled over.

"Just a plain case of nerves," gushed the lady on our right.

Bill turned toward her sardonically. "Yeah," he remarked, "he's just come back from a rest-cure."

THE END.

"Well," snarled Skyles, "I see from your looks that it's all up with me"

The Phantom in the Rainbow

Wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice, more mighty than monarchs, Edmond Fletcher blindly struggles against ghastly horror and the uncanny genius of Sigmond Van Mortimor

By SLATER LAMASTER
Author of "Luckett of the Moon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

EDMOND FLETCHER, young associate in the brokerage house of Morton, Keene & Co., is walking down Wall Street outside the Bank of the Western Hemisphere when a distinguished gentleman with a Vandyke bows to him, and seems astounded to get no sign of recognition.

All the rest of the day, Morton is flooded with inquiries about Fletcher, from commercial reporting agencies.

As Fletcher is walking away from the office that evening, an Isotta Fraschini stops and the liveried chauffeur inquires if he wishes to go now. Fletcher, a good gambler, sees a chance to meet wealthy clients, and steps in. He goes, by car and yacht, to a vast estate—and learns he is being mistaken for Sigmond Van Mortimor, wealthiest youth in New York, who has just returned from a fourteen year absence abroad.

The only relative, the lovely and petite sister Gloria, accepts him unhesitatingly and will not listen to his explanations. Fletcher falls deeply in love with her, and her loneliness and pent-up affection for her "brother" make them very intimate. But as he

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 29

is kissing his "sister" a weird, unearthly wailing as of some dead soul strikes them with supernatural terror.

Time and again Fletcher feels evidences of this weird influence. Once he sees it face to face—and it is his own face and shape, ghastly and horrible!

Fletcher takes Van Mortimor's place in the business world without question, and even his former boss, Morton, and his chum Bland, whom he hires as his confidential secretary, accept him despite their first suspicions, for he is too generally recognized for them to question his identity. He takes charge of the vast railroads, banks—including the Western Hemisphere, where he has a suite of offices—and other Van Mortimor interests, administering them justly and well.

Then comes a summons to a consultation with the family physician, Dr. Bates, and four European specialists. They tell him he has a deadly blood clot on his brain, which will quickly drive him into stupendous criminal activities, toying with victims' emotions. The only cure is an operation on the brain. But at the last minute, Fletcher is saved by Dr. Bates's plea to have more time to cure him by other means.

Fletcher suspects Dr. Bates knows his identity, but the doctor acts as if Fletcher were having hallucinations. He finally gives Fletcher the stenographic notes of the doctors' consultation giving the strange history of Sigmond Van Mortimor.

An eccentric undirected genius, Van Mortimor, with all the world at his command, had sought the superlative thrill in adventure, epicureanism, voluptuous dances and bacchanalian orgies in Paris, finally indulging in incredible quantities of drugs; he had gone to India, where he became a hashish addict, and delved deeply into the hidden mysteries of Hindu fakirs and all the strange possibilities of the occult. There it was that Van Mortimor learned this unearthly wailing cry, the mournful wail of ultimate hopeless desire after unattainable ecstasy—a cry of the damned!

Fletcher suspects he is the puppet of this super-sensualist and trifler with human emotions, possessed of occult, fiendish knowledge and power; but he bravely goes about his great financial work.

At the same time he determines to make an effort to develop Gloria's character so that there can be true and deep love between them; for she has been shielded from all contact with the world and its realities. He has Bland hunt up three or four appalling cases of destitution, misery, and squalid death in the tenement district—part of which is Van Mortimor property—and then proposes that Gloria go with him on a slumming expedition.

CHAPTER XI.

GLORIA GOES EXPLORING.

THEY started forth as on a holiday excursion. Gloria clung to Fletcher's arm in the car as if they were about to explore a strange and dangerous country. Never in all her experience had she been beyond Third Avenue, the beginning of the tenement house district, although she had lived most of her life within a few blocks of it.

By some strange irony of fate, in great cities the tenements and poverty always lurk only a few squares away from the exclusive residential sections. All Gloria's knowledge of the slums was pleasantly modified, amusing melodrama with the shock extracted.

Four hours passed in that strange and extensive brick world of grinding poverty; four hours of shock, disillusionment, awakening to reality for Gloria; four hours of equal torment for Fletcher, who understood only too well the agony and horror of spiritual rebirth that was racking the slight form which so bravely stayed by his

side as long as her beloved brother wished.

At last they left the dismal room which had just been the scene of a squalid and horrible death. Their unseen stage hand and *deus ex machina,* Bland, had found one for his employer with ease—with tragic ease.

Gloria was shuddering as they sank backagainst the car's soft cushions. She had always been so carefully shielded from all knowledge, let alone sight, of human sorrow and suffering.

Fletcher's emotions were rather mixed. The plan had worked, thanks to Bland's masterful and truthful dramatics. He himself had been grieved —though not startled—to witness these scenes in the Van Mortimor tenement property. But Gloria was awakening, he knew, into a truly glorious creature. About this he could not help but be elated. Misery did not long oppress him. He had seen and even experienced not a little of it.

But now he wondered whether he had not perhaps gone a little too far within the bounds of his trust. What would the cold, calculating Van Mortimor think of Fletcher's playing on the sensitive sister's feelings? Van Mortimor would scarcely be in sympathy with the impulses toward social justice that would probably follow Gloria's excursion.

From the history of his case, it appeared that Van Mortimor had elected himself alone to the office of dealing high-handedly and ruthlessly with the human emotions involved. Surely he would not relish the idea of his pawn and victim entering this field even in a small way, particularly when it concerned Van Mortimor's own sister. Under his obvious calm, Fletcher was really a little nervous and excited.

AS they neared the edge of the better part of town, an undertaker's motor hearse shot out of a street ahead of them and blocked their path. To be sure, it was nothing unusual to see one of these death cars on parade, but it struck him that it was very strange at this hour of night. Normal people don't bury their dead after dark!

When he and Gloria finally got past it, the funeral car dropped in behind their motor, cutting in ahead of the plainclothes men in the other car which trailed them.

Fletcher looked back, quite casually —to discover that the haunting thing was following him! Of course it might just be going their way on some casual errand. But the possibilities of that "errand" made him uncomfortable.

Very faintly, as they passed through a dark tunnel of a street, Fletcher heard a sinister sound, the low shrill notes of the blanched face!

The damned thing was with him again! Terror-stricken, he glanced back once more. It was rather dark, but the hearse loomed up, obliterating everything else. The ghastly vehicle was so close behind him that its mudguards must be touching the rear of his machine.

Why did it have its lights turned off? Why didn't Fletcher's detectives keep that infernal thing away from him?

Fletcher felt suddenly alone and helpless. He drew the curtain in the rear of the car to shut out the maddening sight, in case Gloria's eyes had followed his strained gaze. She had not said a word. He hoped she hadn't heard the weird cry.

The car turned quickly into a broad, lighted avenue. What a boon to mankind was light, floods of light! Edmond Fletcher boldly raised the rear curtain. As he had suspected, the hearse was gone.

"I must have light at all times hereafter—lots of light," he meditated solemnly.

What an arrant fool he had been! So many big things he was confident he could do, and yet he could not conquer

his own ridiculous fears. He realized that in fact he had been as frightened as a child in the dark!

CHAPTER XII.

A HUMAN DYNAMO.

THE next morning Edmond Fletcher arose early. His personal desires must be subordinated for the time being. First, he must get into the harness; set his house in order. Such excursions as that of yesterday were a trifle premature. He must get his great business machine running smoothly at once, hitting on all cylinders; and it certainly had as many cylinders as a centipede has legs. Then if he wished to win Gloria or delve into philanthropy, he would have a clear mind with which to fight the occult influences that surrounded such attempts.

Fletcher sat down before his clean desk and chuckled gleefully. Let Floyd, his front secretary, and the willing gang of underlings dig the stuff up, wade through it, sort it out, and bring him its essentials. He would pass them on to his other secretary, Bland, for an acid test, and then he himself could make quick decisions on policy. He glanced at the opening prices. Everything was rolling along merrily!

Two weeks of incessant business activity followed. Through the days Edmond Fletcher interviewed important executives, took over control of enormous corporations, visited his banks, and displayed generally the qualities of a human dynamo, plus the startling ability to strike like forked lightning.

He might have been seen just dropping in wherever he had interests at any time, without notice, looking through the vaults, and delving into the actions of all his institutions for any signs of favoritism or fraud among their officers. Many a man broke into a cold sweat at his mere appearance. Others by herculean efforts made quick restitution when the news of what he was doing spread through the ranks.

THE few who were caught red-handed were handled without much mercy. After a scathing denunciation before his fellow officers, the guilty party was told to report the next morning at Mr. Sigmond Van Mortimor's office and warned that if he tried to escape he would be relentlessly hounded down wherever he might go.

One famous bank president and several men of impeccable reputation answered this stinging summons. This avenging angel dealt with all of them alike in private, although not one of them ever knew exactly what happened to any other than himself.

As soon as this Sigmond Van Mortimor felt he had the last penny of restitution which he could possibly get, he ordered the guilty party to settle up his affairs quietly, and just as silently leave the country with his family. The price of every parole was utter secrecy; each one was warned that if he divulged anything about his disposal he would be arrested, brought back and summarily tried in the courts. If they were penniless he gave them funds.

These complete and unexplained disappearances served Fletcher much more effectually than any public punishment. In each instance Fletcher's parting words had been that he bore the man in question no personal ill-feeling. It was simply that he and his institutions could no longer afford to associate with the fellow, nor would he permit him under any conditions to pollute the atmosphere of his companies by a "rotten apple" presence in the country. Edmond Fletcher always said these things with a secret smile, for actually he was taking a tip from the real Van Mortimor, utilizing the tremendous potency of the unseen.

Gradually this determined "understudy" covered all his interests in New York, and in a few more weeks his

influence crept out through the country over the railroad systems he controlled. As time wore on, he was learning at first hand the integral parts of his vast machine. Clerks looked up from their ledgers, great lawyers came out of private offices, railroad officials turned about sharply, office boys stuck cheap literature in their desks; cashiers heard a new key turn in the locks of their cages, to find a solemn but kind-spoken young man at their shoulder.

The humblest to the mightiest under him never knew but what this firm youth of avenging fire might appear like a flash from the blue. Strange to say, he was admired for these very qualities. Wherever anything was wrong in the entire Van Mortimor régime, he grew to be expected—and he came!

Steadily, through shrewd orders to Morton, Keene & Co., the adamant young leader was getting rid of all the minority interests in various stocks which he did not want, and acquiring majority stock interests in useful companies.

"Edmond Fletcher's commission account should show big earnings in Morton, Keene & Co.," he reflected sagely. That, he felt, was permissible pay for his services, inasmuch as his deals would have cost the same commissions anywhere else. In painstaking fashion he was now welding his mighty business machine into its maximum working power.

For a month he had been so busy that his only relaxation had consisted of a few hours with Gloria in the evening. They would go to some affair, meet some of Gloria's friends.

Fletcher's terrific activity, as reported in the papers, was an ever-recurring wonder to Gloria, who had been a pampered, idle orchid in a field of perfect leisure, and she found considerable pleasure in just having with her this striving young Hercules. It was a joy to her to domineer playfully over him in their home.

The rude view of life which Fletcher had given her was instilling within her a healthy new curiosity about humanity in general. As a result of that memorable excursion into the slums, Gloria bombarded him with questions about the poor, and about the tenement properties which the Van Mortimors owned. Edmond could see that as soon as he found time for it, he could direct Gloria's new and genuine interest into valuable work in permanently bettering conditions. In time, the Van Mortimor properties would prove, not an "obstacle to progress," as city officials had termed them, but a great force for good. But Fletcher dared not think of philanthropy for the time being. He explained that he must get the Van Mortimor business firmly in hand, and then they would work, hand in hand, along other lines.

STRICT attention to work and abnegation of his generous nature was showing splendid effects in clearing Fletcher's mind of his greatest enemy and weakness, fear of the incorrigible Van Mortimor.

Evidently he was pleasing the occult roaming spirit, if such there was, for the moment, and his derelictions had been overlooked, for not once since the incident of the mysterious hearse had he been disturbed in the least. He realized that it was paramount now that his mind be as free as possible while he completed the organization of his huge affairs. As an extra precaution he even began keeping distant from Gloria herself. But she didn't exactly approve of this tendency.

Her "brother" had opened up flood gates of new emotions in the dazzling little beauty, and although she admitted his superior judgment in most things, she wanted more of him now than his time afforded. Gloria Van Mortimor had deferred many of her plans for the social season merely to be as near him as possible, and she believed that she was getting cheated!

Sunday afternoons afforded no business excuse for an absence, and on one of these Fletcher sat quietly smoking by the pensive Gloria. This Park Avenue scene was singularly domestic. A very dreamy look came into the girl's eyes—and Fletcher started to call Parkins for his hat.

"Sigmond, dearest!" she asked very contritely, "can a sister love a brother as I love you?"

"No!" he answered emphatically.

"But, Sigmond!" she exclaimed, "I know positively that you are my brother, and I am very much ashamed of myself at times!"

She became so distressed that he simply kissed her and told her to forget about the matter.

BY dinner time Gloria was her natural self. Fletcher had already learned that when she was in the mood of the afternoon it was better not to argue. He well knew that the affection of a beautiful woman is as uncontrollable as the ocean wave. One has it or one hasn't. To attempt to control it directly is futile. He believed that the love of woman must come voluntarily of its own accord, and if, as it so often seemed, it thrived to some extent on discouragement, Fletcher hoped that element too would break in his favor! He waited for Gloria to raise the subject again.

"We shall forget," she soon began, "what I said. You are my brother, and that settles it! However, if there should be anything to your queer fancies, which I just won't permit you to discuss, it surely will all be decided conclusively in a few months. Suppose we just forget about it for that time and be happy, since we have each other anyhow."

Fletcher readily agreed. He himself badly needed time to get his bearings in the Van Mortimor mystery and to work as only a very few mortals had ever had the opportunity to work in this world.

But though Gloria had arbitrarily settled their personal relationship for a trial period, it was too big a matter to remain definitely in suspense. One morning at breakfast Fletcher sensed heavy tragedy hanging in the air the moment Gloria greeted him. Her face was pinched with anxiety, and all that he could draw from her was that she "didn't feel very well." He realized that this answer unsupported from any woman was just a little worse than none.

The truth came out when Fletcher attempted to leave the table. Gloria did not want him to go to the office that day, and she became frantic about keeping him at home as he insisted upon going. Finally, when she could keep him no longer by her pleas and even tears, she produced a tabloid, the *Morning Star*, which had evidently been brought to her attention by one of her maids. Gloria handed him the newspaper with the words:

"You will find out anyway, Sigmond, as soon as you leave—so I might as well show you!"

Before his eyes danced big headlines:

SIGMOND VAN MORTIMOR IS NOT HIMSELF!

In His Strength Is His Weakness!

This paper will expose one of the most daring and amazing frauds ever perpetrated anywhere, involving Sigmond Van Mortimor, our leading young American financier, in a series of authentic articles which will begin in to-morrow's issue.

This paper renders a great service to the whole nation with our astounding information. It will present simply enough of Mr. Van Mortimor's real character for the people at large to know him and then compare that knowledge with Sigmond Van Mortimor's present life.

Strange to say, in the surprising strength of the pseudo Sigmond Van Mortimor lies his greatest weakness, for this alone, when we are through presenting the matter, will be ample to

prove that everything done by Mr. Sigmond Van Mortimor since he started his business career in this country has been either the work of an insane man or a substitute!

This "great" man and all he has done will topple over like a house of cards when the real facts of the case are laid before the public!

Imagine the situation in the financial district when it is conclusively proved that every recent business act of Sigmond Van Mortimor has been the work of a lunatic! That every recent signature of his has been a forgery! Imagine the consternation which will prevail among the thousands of railroad employees and officials throughout the country who get their bread and butter from this man's shifty hands—not to mention the plight of those who draw their pay from the interests which he has in banking and realty circles right here in New York.

Imagine the dishonesty, legal complications, and snarled financial dealing already perpetrated by this man, if he is not himself!

The *Morning Star* is safeguarding the rights of the American public with this startling disclosure as no other paper ever has done! For your own personal sake begin these articles in tomorrow morning's issue of the New York *Morning Star!*

THERE followed long columns about Sigmond Van Mortimor and his enormous fortune. Through it all, carefully written in, was a thinly veiled hint of the true situation.

Somebody knew what he was talking about; had either pieced all of this together, or could guess enough to take a chance on opening up a broadside fire upon him!

Fletcher was struck dumb with amazement, for what confronted him was the literal truth! How could he deny it? Somehow his imposture had never seemed quite so bad as all this. But on even a momentary reflection he was bound to admit that everything was as the paper said.

All Fletcher could do was stare stupidly at Gloria Van Mortimor, now miserably huddled in a chair. Her head was down in her arms sobbing as if her heart would break. Then as if he were in a daze Fletcher began wondering vaguely why she should take the very truth itself so hard!

Of course, the world had stepped on him now—but then, he had stepped on the world! The truth about him had to come out some time. Awful as this was, it came as somewhat of a relief from the great strain he had been under for a long time! Maybe the big conspirator behind it all, and any others involved in this tremendous affair would be forced into the open now, and Fletcher could patch things up decently. But Gloria's terrific disappointment presented a real problem.

Fletcher went over to her and touched her gently.

"Gloria," he said sadly, "it seems that the game is up! Will you remember me long?"

She looked up at him in stupid bewilderment and as he continued to stare at her, her expression changed into one of deepest anguish.

"Sigmond," she answered, "are you going to let them say these horrid things about you—that you are!"

"Do you still believe I am your brother?" he asked, incredulously.

"Before everybody in the world," she declared, "you are my brother!" And there could be no doubt of her sincerity in that answer.

"Then," he said, "I am!"

His words had come painfully, sharply, as though many things which had escaped his attention were suddenly flashing before his eyes now. Simultaneously, his face hardened. "Parkins!" he called through the door. "Plug me in a phone here at the table!" He pounced down in a chair as the butler hastily obeyed.

"Oh!" exclaimed Gloria, a smile dawning in her tears, "you are going to fight them!"

"Hell, yes! Pardon me," he barked, grabbing the instrument away from Parkins. "Good thing you delayed me, Gloria—office is open now.

"Come on, operator! Beaver 10—Bland, please—glad you're on the job! But keep awake! Have you seen the *Morning Star?* They've been trying to get me, eh? Fine! Some dirty work at the crossroad there! Hold the line! Gloria, dress for the street quickly! Don't ask me questions, just hurry!"

As soon as Gloria had run out of the room, he resumed:

"Bland! Listen closely. The *Morning Star* is due for an eclipse! Dig out this libel and get hold of all the parties responsible. Call in all my secretaries and split these duties up among them quickly. Find out who owns the *Morning Star* and find out who holds its obligations! Get name of the landlord of its building! Have every man connected with it shadowed for all outside contacts! Notify press associations and wire all major papers labeling the story a canard, but give out no other statement—I'll do that! Now get the screws ready for this gang and wait at the office for me!"

THE receiver smashed in place, and there stood Gloria before him, perilously balanced on one heel, but ready for the street.

"You do love me, don't you?" she asked excitedly.

"Well—if what I do to that paper is any evidence of it, just wait and see!"

"Where am I going?" anxiously inquired Gloria.

"Come on!" he ordered, and then a little more kindly: "You're coming along with me. I may need a lot of your sort of faith in me to-day!"

They rushed down to the car and Fletcher slammed the door so hard that the servants nearly fell over.

"I believe you are mad!" exclaimed Gloria, jerkily. "And goodness, you didn't eat any breakfast!"

"This is horrible!" declared Fletcher, giving away to his feelings. "I should be ashamed of myself getting you into this awful mess."

"I can stand it all right! But what about yourself?" hazarded Gloria.

Gloria was watching intently the present actions of her new brother, and well she might. Fletcher was undergoing a terrific mental readjustment. His folly of grasping at any straw whatsoever to humanize Gloria, even to the extent of parading her around in the slums, had probably suggested this scandalous exposure.

In short his infernal and impractical idealism was showing its usual results, much as might be expected. He was falling down on his great job and hurting Gloria, the dearest thing in the world to him, even while he was trying to help her.

How differently would the real Sigmond Van Mortimor have acted in these late circumstances! Never would he have embarrassed the family unintentionally — at least anything that sinister personality might have done would have been done purposefully. At worst Sigmond Van Mortimor was not a blundering fool!

Nothing hurts a man so much as to be made to appear ridiculous. This rag of a paper was undertaking to make a fool of "Sigmond Van Mortimor"; and nothing can hurt so much or make one quite so mad in such a situation as to know that he has been acting the part. A very little more of this kind of thing and Fletcher knew that he was through! He was human, very, very human, and the madder he got at the ridicule which the newspaper was heaping upon him, the more he realized that this sort of thing must be stamped upon.

In a flash of anger, there occurred to him the thought of what the old man, Phelps Van Mortimor, Gloria's and Sigmond's father, blustering along and brooking no interference, would have done if some one dared to take advantage of him in such a meddlesome manner!

He must root this rotten thing out at once, and the more he thought about

it the angrier he got at this yellow sheet. He would show them in very quick order how he could obliterate his enemies! Any one who trifled with him and, which was much more serious, the great name he bore, would shortly realize his error and retract his words!

Gloria was deeply concerned with this entirely new development in her brother. Such violent resentment was decidedly alarming in one whose past was rather noted for excesses. She had never seen him angry before, and now her calm, easy-mannered brother was burning with rage, a quiet white heat that penetrated the atmosphere about him, and she did not like it.

He banged on the chauffeur's pane.

"Break through that traffic!" he said sternly. "I'll handle the police!"

They were moving at a frightful pace now and though Gloria expected some dreadful smash at any moment, she was much more disturbed over what was going on inside her brother's head.

She did not like this overmastering rage. For some deep reason which she could not fathom she even partially feared this singular relative, not for anything which he might do to her, but for other things. There were always to be considered those horrible rumors about him in Europe, and at times even with her his conduct had been so queer.

"WHAT are you going to do to these people?" she gently asked, half afraid of his burning temper.

Fletcher's face had become long and set and his upper lip was just a thin white line as his anger mounted higher and higher, and he decided upon the punishment, which not for one moment did he doubt that he could put into execution.

"Wipe the country clean of them," was the verdict, uttered through set teeth; then, as he saw a wave of fright sweep over Gloria, he added:

"No personal violence. I wouldn't so much as leave the bodies of these curs around."

"I don't know how to understand you," soothed Gloria, "you are so kind and good, with such admirable qualities, that I never suspected you had such a terrific temper. You know, dear, there are some very strange things about you. Please don't get too excited!"

Fletcher subsided into a better outward demeanor lest he unnecessarily scare his precious ward.

With one long and undulating shrill blast of the horn, they had come flying through the financial district of the metropolis. Could all of those crooked little streets have been cleared for him? Traffic backed and filled as if making way for the fire department. No one else would have dared to thread the narrow needle of Nassau Street as he did at high speed. But he did it, not knowing that it could not be done.

When the car came to a standstill before the bank, his information was before him at his desk. William Thomas, majority stockholder of the *Morning Star*, banked at the Tremont National Bank. William Skyles was the managing editor and a large stockholder, and there were other sundry and pertinent data. Through his banks, Fletcher knew an effective lever to use on the Tremont National Bank if it should be necessary.

A few minutes at the telephone and he had several persons in quiet conversation. Little do most people realize what power bankers hold, but Edmond Fletcher did. They literally can decree the life or death of industry. The grim words "no money" are uttered, and industrial death ensues; on the other hand easy credit is allowed some favored endeavor, and it flourishes like the proverbial green bay tree.

"I have taken the liberty," reported Bland, "of buying the building which houses the *Morning Star*, and everything else about them that was pur-

chasable on the instant from the third parties. The press manufacturers still have some liens on their printing presses, and already feel that they might get rusty where they are!"

"Thanks!" said Fletcher. "We can just wait right here for these meddlesome people to drop in as we turn out the light of this morning star! But say, Bland! Better go out and drive in forcibly any of this crew that are slow in coming!"

"Yes, sir!" replied Bland instantly departing.

SOON the anteroom of the private office began filling up with strangers. Prominent among them were a fat gouty man and a tall, cadaverous-appearing individual. They seemed to be the ringleaders of the aggregation.

Through an open door Fletcher sat silently, studying each one as he entered his outer office. They had been informed that Mr. Van Mortimor would see them a little later, and soon they were pacing up and down in full view of him exercising their pent-up energies and glowering at one another.

"Go outside," whispered Fletcher to Floyd, who was hovering at his elbow, "and use your own judgment in admitting them; and, Gloria," he said as his first secretary went out, "step in Bland's office and leave the door open! You may be my very best weapon and safeguard yet. Keep unobtrusively but plainly in sight in that other room all the time!"

"Sigmond! You certainly do act peculiarly," she whispered over her shoulder but with all the confidence in him that could possibly be crowded into those big eyes.

"And you, Gloria," he answered, "can scarcely guess how much you are helping to-day!"

A portly banker, neatly dressed, spoke a cold good morning to those outside and passed through the anteroom. These bankers had to be so very careful—one could never tell what change in standing might come over a good depositor in a night! The sleek president of the Tremont Bank was instantly admitted into the inner sanctum. He took some papers from his pocket just as a door closed shutting out a view of him to those who waited. Shortly the banker left the inside office—rather hastily, it was, too, as though now he feared some one of the men outside might in some way try to presume upon his acquaintance.

William Thomas, the owner of the paper, was the fleshy man; and he was let in next.

"I am the owner of your personal notes and all the obligations of your newspaper," stated Fletcher in very evenly spaced words. "Some large items will come up for renewal soon. You look to me like a poor banking risk from the rotten way you conduct your sheet. Let me have the truth about this libelous attack!"

"Mr. Van Mortimor," sputtered the gouty gentleman, who was out of breath from all the clamor about the story, and fully realized the purport of what he had just heard, "I only run what I think is true. I try to make an honest but sensational newspaper. My editor must have gone crazy. He said he had a big surprise for me! And so he did! But I never thought it would be one like this. I have brought this lunatic to you and I wash my hands of him!"

"Are you willing to print a full retraction in the same space and headings, and to handle this rat as I direct?" shot from between set jaws.

"Yes, sir!" Thomas quavered.

"What's your editor's name?"

"Skyles."

"Have a seat!" snapped Fletcher to Thomas, and he reflected a moment. Fletcher had never heard the name before, but here in this man Skyles was the brain behind the exposure. Something seemed to identify this fellow in Fletcher's mind from among all the

others outside. He was the only man out there with a truly menacing personality. Already, however, Fletcher had learned that his tale was not overwhelmingly convincing. It simply appeared to be a question of who could bluff with most force.

FLETCHER stepped briskly to the door and opened it suddenly.

"Skyles!" he called out sharply.

The long, cadaverous man slouched in. His hands were slightly smudged with blue pencil, and his clothes were spotted here and there with glue.

"I am Bill Skyles," he announced as he looked from the one face to the other before him without getting any sign of sympathy and then his gaze strayed into Bland's office, where it seemed to stop fascinated at the surprising presence of Miss Van Mortimor here. Gloria did her part nobly. There was enough scorn in the withering glance she gave Skyles to intimidate an iron man.

"You dirty rat!" Fletcher flared, now letting his passion blaze, "the only reason I do not give you your just deserts with these hands," his hands doubling and twisting as he spoke, "is out of consideration for my sister. Come clean! What's behind all this?"

"Well," said Skyles, "I see from the looks on the faces around here that it is all up with my job, so I may just as well get a little satisfaction out of this swift 'How do you do' and 'good-by.'"

As Skyles spoke the upper lip of Fletcher stretched into a white, thin line.

Skyles went on: "I have a pretty fair nose for news, and I smelled something fishy about your return from Europe and your actions since. I took a long shot in the dark on those headlines and blurbs of mine! If I was right, you couldn't deny it, and I would have scooped America. I have been watching you, Mr. Van Mortimor. You're a queer duck, and my nose tells me," he pointed to it vulgarly, "that there is a big story lurking around you somewhere. This was just the first shot, but it looks like I missed the bull's-eye from the hell of a row you are making. A pig that is stuck right, no matter how big he is, doesn't holler at all; he just rolls over and stays there." Skyles frankly leered at Mr. Van Mortimor.

Fletcher was experiencing a sensation akin to the desire to murder, but he had in mind what he had previously decided upon, a policy which he considered a far more effective way to rid himself of this scavenging pest. His upper lip merely became whiter and thinner until it appeared just a bare thread, as he said:

"I can wipe your yellow paper off the face of the map. I can blacklist you from your filthy employment in this country. In short, through the courts and otherwise, I can ruin you and break you horribly. Regardless of any rights that you may have, I can incarcerate you until you rot, through my power alone, if I wish! The alternative is that you leave America, forever—and at once!"

"How shall I live, and what will my family do?" Skyles asked calmly.

"A rat like you can live anywhere. As for your family, I'll pay them in installments the value of your stock in the paper. If you take them along I'll have it sent to them. Do as you please about that; but be out of the country in thirty-six hours or by everything in hell, I'll smash you!"

Fletcher turned to William Thomas.

"See that he does this or I'll finish up you and your yellow rag. Now get out, both of you!"

"I must say," commented Skyles sarcastically, "that it is kind of you to pay my traveling expenses where I am going!" And two men slunk away to settle some difference of their own.

Gloria timidly emerged.

"Sigmond," she ventured, and as he faced her, she nervously jumped.

"You are not—not yourself," she stammered. "Let me get a doctor?"

At no other time could he have been so abrupt and cross with her, but something stronger than himself was urging him on. For a second he saw Gloria only as a part of the problems confronting him.

"Young lady!" he declared. "This is a business game, and from this moment on, I am going to be on the job. In the future, you amuse yourself!"

"Goodness!" she flung over her slender arched shoulders as she staggered out of the office. "You *must* be my brother!"

THEN he dismissed the others concerned and invited in the gentlemen of the press from all the other papers who had, during the interview, been carefully excluded.

"Mr. Van Mortimor," Fletcher announced to them, "awaits with the keenest interest the forthcoming disclosures about himself in the New York *Morning Star!* Possibly he is not well acquainted with himself and will learn many interesting things about himself!"

The reporters left, laughing hilariously. The papers were full of ridicule of the silly story about him. On top of that, the *Morning Star* printed its full apology, and publicly thanked Mr. Van Mortimor for not prosecuting them under the "regrettable" circumstances.

The columnists and humorists of the whole country widely caricatured this incident. Such expressions as "Is Sigmond Van Mortimor himself? I'll say he is!" and, "As sure as Van Mortimor is himself!" became by-words and a part of the slang of the nation.

Edmond Fletcher, nevertheless, pondered gravely over his wonderful success on the very brink of failure. "So shines the truth," he mused cynically and then he caught himself, "but maybe things like this can only happen when its candle power is weak!"

The rest of the day of his signal victory he worked with an iron grip on his actions. One in his position must be very careful what he did or his generous acts would jump up and wreck him.

While lunching with a railroad official that week he had a very peculiar experience. A thought came to him and provided such a shock that he dropped the day's work precipitately. It was the doubt whether he had done all this absolutely unassisted. Maybe there had been some lashes of the phantom whip behind him driving him on to his mad conduct. This violent, avenging wrath he had exhibited was not altogether natural to him.

What a genius this fellow Van Mortimor must be! "Of all possible things," he worried, "I believed my mind was at least my impregnable castle in which I had undisputed sovereignty, yet I can't be so sure of that now, for it seems that this Van Mortimor makes me do what he wants me to, when he feels it necessary!"

Fletcher knew he could handle tangible things, but what about such occult influences as had seemingly been at work within him? He determined to run things more firmly still, lest this mysterious influence should increase its sway over him.

A different, sterner Edmond Fletcher dined with Gloria for many evenings. He slept peacefully at night and felt better in every way while he was keeping up the hard pace. Best of all, when he retired he felt free from Sigmond Van Mortimor.

Gradually Fletcher's great business went ahead. He shook off his sentimental fancies and redoubled his efforts.

But the most appalling thing everywhere to his sensitive nature was the exploitation of the workingmen in his organizations, and their lack of foresight. Fletcher knew that for the average family man to lose employment or meet with illness meant that

the wolf was instantly crouching at the door. How he would like to see every one of his employees self-respecting and financially secure!

ONE thing, though, was noticeable. Fletcher was instilling a new spirit into the men. Crack trains were coming in everywhere on the dot of the hour. Great freight movements were proceeding punctually. Farmers, all about over the nation, found empty cars on the sidings for their produce as if by magic, and the country was getting real service from his systems. One incentive for this was that the men were taking pride in the personal leadership of this strenuous young magnate, who, no matter how hard-boiled he might be reputed to be, was violently on the job!

For some time he kept his face set to his task, driving things through by the sheer power of money and will force. Kindness was one luxury that he could ill afford. If he was ever generous again he must wear steel gloves, for the objects of his liberality would jump up and bite his hands—or Sigmond Van Mortimor would do it for them.

Then one night he sat watching Gloria contemplatively. How careful he must be if he ever stood a chance of getting her. Yet only a worm working on a mulberry leaf with patience made a silk gown. Patience was needed; he must not do anything rash, just do the best he could from day to day, and some day his very own Gloria would emerge from the mulberry leaf of his labors.

Gloria climbed over on the arm of his chair and began studying him. Fletcher wondered if she was reading his thoughts correctly.

"The other day," she said pensively, "you called me 'Honey.' It was peculiar—but nice, Sigmond. Just what did you mean?"

Fletcher became nervous. It was easy to tell from Gloria's soft eyes now that she was engaged in the further consideration of the strangely contradictory feelings which he also aroused in her. Almost simultaneously now would come those wildly sweet flashes of feelings from her which so secretly brought that baffling question for her: "Was he her brother?"

"Just that," said Fletcher quickly. "But how are you getting along with this Martha Adams, the social service worker you've employed to investigate some of those cases over in the tenement district?"

"Martha and I are accomplishing a lot!" declared the winsome young lady. "However, some of our cases are terrible disappointments. You would be surprised how thirsty our very worst cases are! Often we find that we are only helping the bootleggers in their vicinity."

"Um-m-m!" he answered, but delighted to find something safe and sensible to discuss.

"So," said Gloria wisely, "we have decided not to help people who aren't willing at least to try to help themselves."

"Fine!" complimented Fletcher. "But that's the trouble with most unfortunate people, in the first place—they won't help themselves when they have an opportunity. I wonder—I do wonder," he pondered aloud, "if we couldn't make some improvement on the usual charity systems. If a fellow could just hit on it, there must be some way of playing on human nature to make people help themselves!"

Fletcher was deeply absorbed for a few minutes. Suddenly practical ideas were breaking upon him like shrapnel. A ray of light was coming to him by which he could help all his many employees.

"Wonderful little Gloria!" he proclaimed excitedly to the dainty slender creature, all curled up like a big kitten and half sleeping beside him. "I see how I can really help people, even against their own wishes!"

An engulfing emotion was flooding Fletcher's innermost being. As ever when deeply moved, he trembled and his eyes became moist. This bold young dreamer was beginning to vision how he could actually do something for which his heart had so long striven in vain.

Gloria awakened, looked up at him in a puzzled manner.

"I do not think I understand!" she said.

"But I do!" cried Fletcher exultantly. "You see it is fine to put people on their feet, but they should be able to stand alone after you do that. Now I have found a way of sort of propping them up so that they will stand up, whether they really want to or not! This is too good to keep—I must get busy at once. I shall explain it all to you and show you how it works a little later. Now, let's retire so I can get up early in the morning!"

"I suppose that is right!" said Gloria dreamily, "but all I know positively is that you certainly are a very sweet brother!"

CHAPTER XIII.

REMOLDING THE WORLD.

FLETCHER reviewed his business handiwork the next day. His great machine was working as a unit. Thanks to the efficient work of his staff in carrying out details, everything was so beautifully dovetailed and organized that his slightest wish, once expressed, reverberated to the farthest ends of his vast enterprises and rippled back promptly in complete execution. He tuned up his solid organization a little bit here and there, where he might expect some friction, and sat back in his chair satisfied.

The whole octopus of his double's fortune was pulsating with new life in every tentacle, and all the great Van Mortimor wealth was actively ready for him to use in molding some things nearer to his own heart's desire. First he contemplated he would make a few strokes beyond the desire for gain, and see if he could not sound some new harmonies for his employees in their bungling human relations. For at last, he felt, Fletcher knew how to go about that too!

That night, up in the playhouse, he worked out his first big stroke and discussed it with Gloria. She was also enthusiastic at its prospects as she came to realize them.

"You see, it is like this," he summarized. "We must begin to help people practically, otherwise our efforts and funds are thrown away, just as most charity fails of its purpose. Thrift is the first practical step to comfort and happiness among working people and I have caught an idea by which I can force people despite—or through—their own nature to practice thrift with our help. I can make most of all our employees independent and self-respecting in no time. This is going to cost us something, but it will be worth all it costs and may even prove profitable. I am sure I can do something worth while for all of us!"

Then he went ahead and showed Gloria how he had worked everything out for this. When he finished he exclaimed jubilantly:

"Can you imagine how much happiness this will bring?"

"You are now your own true self," she praised, "my old Sigmond. If you can make them any part as happy as you make me, this will be a sweet old world!"

But that night he was a little restless. He had some anxiety about putting this potent thing into execution. Where would his own impetuous nature lead him? Van Mortimor must be lurking around somewhere, nor would he be too well pleased with his proxy's present intentions! This revolutionary thing which he had planned for tomorrow necessitated a large cash expenditure, and it might very probably

bring this eventual catastrophe down quickly upon him. Where would his uncontrollable impulses to help people finally land him.

THE next morning Fletcher was in the office early, lest his resolution weaken if he considered too long its personal consequences. It was surely inviting personal disaster from the power behind him. Of the things that might happen, he rather hoped it would bring Van Mortimor out into the open—if alive. Fletcher felt himself fairly intrenched now, and Van Mortimor would have to admit that Fletcher's stewardship had been permitted.

Once fairly begun, Edmond's scheme would carry itself along, while he dealt with Van Mortimor at any personal cost. So it would be if he came out in the open; but Fletcher did not fear that half so much as what else Van Mortimor might do! From what he knew about him, it was far more likely that Van Mortimor would mete out from his mystic ambush some diabolical punishment concocted at his leisure. Be that as it might, this thing was too big for him to consider selfishly. He would take chances on his fate.

Within his first hour of business he issued this astounding bulletin throughout all of his enterprises:

> Effective as soon as arrangements can be perfected, this organization will give each employee earning under three thousand dollars per annum, who is accredited by a duly constituted bank with saving ten per cent or any less amount of his salary, a sum equal to one-half of such savings.
>
> This additional sum is absolutely donated and deposited to the employee's credit in his personal account, on conditions entered into between the employer and employee, namely, that the employee cannot withdraw this money, either his special personal savings or our donations, in part or in whole while in the service of this company, except with the consent of the company, which will be freely given where and whenever any real necessity arises.
>
> This is designed as true life insurance. It really insures life while living, for those who accept its benefits, the people making under three thousand dollars a year, who most need such a safeguard. It is presumed that all making over three thousand dollars a year have sufficient of the wolf in them to keep the kindred animal away from their door themselves.
>
> Not one of you employees is to be put under the slightest obligation to save, and it is purely optional with each of you whether you do so or not. This simply means that we will absolutely give you regularly every pay day one-half of what you permanently save.
>
> SIGMOND VAN MORTIMOR.

"Now watch them save like beavers, just as they work," Fletcher chuckled merrily after this was posted. "Their very selfishness to get that fifty per cent will make them forego extravagances, as nothing else on earth could do. It isn't so ruinous to us either, considering that ten per cent of the highest salary is only three hundred dollars, which means we can only pay out a maximum of one hundred and fifty dollars, just a decent bonus, to one man in a year. But it sounds like a tremendous gift to the employee, and in its results it is," he craftily reflected, "for he has saved at least twice as much as we gave him, and with compound interest he will find himself respectable and on the road to independence before he knows it."

However, though scattered bonuses had frequently been given to special classes, no one before had ever dared to give a great bonus daily, and to all workers generally.

Instantly the office was a storm center. Fletcher had never guessed that he could start such a bedlam. Every one in the place was busy at telephones and interviewing a frantically interested mob. Fletcher was besieged by all who thought they had a chance of getting his attention. Both telegraph news tickers were devoted to details of this gift, nearly to the exclusion of everything else.

Fletcher, with some misgivings, turned to the opening clicking of the stock ticker. Ah! here was the real answer to what he had done if he could just interpret it aright.

Beginning at this moment the answer would start and it would all be discounted on the stock tape months in advance of the actual results. If he could just feel this pulse of the nation to-day, to-morrow, this week, and read the true results at once—then there would be further selfish opportunities which would please Van Mortimor himself.

THE market opened hesitantly and then the avalanche of selling stunned Fletcher. In lots of thousands of shares the sales came, his stocks holding as fast as they could, but gradually receding—then there was a lull and the selling and prices strengthened slightly.

"Ah!" he grinned as he half-guessed the cause for this and his breath came a little freer. "The professionals, the wise boys, sold the market short against the news, and there's been some little liquidation. Now they are all wondering just which way the cat will jump and they are afraid of supporting orders from me. In the next few days we shall see what the minority interests do with their stock in all these companies in which I hold control! If they sell, prices will go lower and I'll get bargains, according to my way of thinking."

Thus, while he put through a great heroic good, another spirit within motivated him to profit selfishly by it and he listened to this second inner voice just as gladly as the first. Such is the nature of us all.

To his brokers, and particularly old Morton's frenzied request for advice, Fletcher said laconically:

"No supporting orders! The situation is well in hand."

He refused to see officers, directors, and stockholders, no matter how big their holdings in his companies. Knowing what to expect from these people he had issued a blanket reply for all of them which was nearly as insulting under the circumstances as if he had sent around a handbill to them. His message was:

> All great pioneer benefits entail some sacrifice. I stand to lose more than all of you put together and am absolutely within my rights. If you are not with me, sell your stocks.

And with that stereotyped message behind him, he left the office at noon, through for the first day, leaving pandemonium to reign in that short street called Wall which has a river at one end and a graveyard at the other.

Gloria had all the "extras" awaiting him. Reading about her brother in the papers had become a steady diversion with Gloria in Fletcher's absence. For her now he had a sort of dual personality; one was this kindly good fellow with whom she spent such a big part of her time, and the other the vainglorious demigod of industry who could be relied upon to give one a thrill almost every day in the news.

Gloria had a letter from Martha Adams, her social service worker, explaining some special work and some new arrangements she had made for her many patients. Much to Fletcher's delight Gloria had planned an expedition to inspect the patients and see that they wanted nothing. As Fletcher was very busy she invited Myrtle Marbleton and Count Rononotski to accompany her.

Myrtle came very near accepting, as of course she relied upon Van Mortimor's cheering presence in this obnoxious undertaking. When the personnel of the expedition was made known, she was nearly stricken with apoplexy, considering the number of conflicting appointments which she found in her engagement book.

Fletcher did not leave the house the next day; and that afternoon Gloria

and the count, closely followed by the detectives whom Fletcher had been careful to provide, came in exhausted from their efforts. In appreciation of his helpfulness Fletcher and Gloria insisted upon the European's dining with them. One had to admire his sportsmanship. He was a good fellow at heart and Gloria was very close to that organ indeed, for more reasons than he had originally intended. At dinner the count voiced weakly:

"Mr. Van Mortimor, you know it—I would help them as I could for your sister. But the next time I dress like a truck driver and wear one Red Cross sign so that they will know I am a noncombatant! Too many things they happen accidental-like!" He inspected his clothes for spots and nursed his toes under the table.

"But it is a wonderful country, *n'est-ce pas?* No matter how miserable the people be here, they have a keener sense of humor than I."

After dinner Fletcher slipped away to his rooms and left the count with Gloria for an evening which he certainly deserved.

FLETCHER took this opportunity to study seriously the press comments about himself. He hadn't realized what a pandemonium his action could start throughout the whole nation. The papers varied widely in their opinion of him. But the consensus of opinion was that he had acted rather foolishly in view of his previous sane and rigorous policies.

Capital was unanimously bitter in its denunciation of young Van Mortimor's "suicidal liberality." Great industrial leaders contended that if he established this silly precedent, men would be clamoring for the same benefits from competing companies, and that there was no telling how far this thing might spread. Fletcher keenly enjoyed this vein of thinking.

A socialist paper acclaimed him as a money baron with a spark of intelligence, but doubted that his men would really get the money as freely as it was promised. And here was something small but powerfully significant: the Roundhouse Union of Racine, had elected him an honorary member. He made a note of that. Those boys would get an inspiring wire of acceptance from him.

But all the other harsh criticism wore down Fletcher's spirit. One can assert that he is immune to others' opinions and remarks, but each lash flicks on the raw, each criticism sinks a little barb in his consciousness and depresses one, just as every one feels a sense of exhilaration when praised.

Fletcher had a much better criterion than the news by which to judge what he had done, but this was not blazoned in the papers. Thousands of letters and messages were flowing into the office from employees, thankfully anxious to get started saving. As against this, the prices of his securities were slowly, but steadily declining on the exchange. Fletcher glanced over the stock tables gloomily.

Surely this thing would bring Sigmond Van Mortimor down upon him, but where was he? Last night Fletcher had been in mortal terror, yet nothing had happened, and to-day, so far, there had been no evidence of his ghostly shadow. If anywhere, Van Mortimor was probably very near Fletcher, right here in New York!

But this Van Mortimor was no ordinary antagonist who could be easily seen. He might at this very moment be watching him and coldly calculating some torture in which he would take a ghoulish delight at just the most opportune time. Sitting in his very comfortable seat Fletcher shuddered to think that most anything horrible might happen to him at any minute now in these luxurious surroundings!

He arose and inspected the window fastenings, and minutely went over the upper floor of the apartment. Fletcher didn't see how he could sleep without

ventilation and yet he scarcely dared leave a window open.

Near one of the windows, partially hidden by the side drapery, he found an ingenious device recently installed for controlling the heat of the radiators concealed under the window seats. By a thermostatic arrangement the heat was controlled automatically at any degree it was set.

This intrigued him. He set the hand up ten degrees and he could hear the steam charging into the radiators. He pushed the hand violently in the opposite direction and the temperature soon got chilly, compelling him to reset the heat indicator. It greatly interested him—this small delicate instrument having such perfect control of all the cumbersome steam-fittings and power which went to make up the heating system.

This clever little mechanism stealthily throttling, propelling, and gauging all the heat, reminded Fletcher very unpleasantly of the way Van Mortimor invisibly regulated his proxy's conduct and emotions to suit his own desire. The very stars were set against Fletcher now! The pressure he would feel would make him writhe for his last offense!

FLETCHER could not sleep well during the night. He purposely left on a light, and only had one of the windows in his bedroom open, just a little from the top. During the early hours he woke up suddenly with a sense of something burning his hand. Then he felt very foolish, for he was standing over by the window with his hand on the heat regulator.

Evidently he had been playing with its indicator in his sleep. Never had he been given to sleep-walking and this new experience rather nettled him. The steam contrivance must have strangely fascinated him. It was very late and still, but the light was burning as he had left it.

The much disturbed young man turned the lever up sharply. The heat charged up with a gentle pulsating sound. It was unpleasantly warm. He turned the heat off. Then he thought he heard faintly the notes of the blanched face coming from his window. But it was not distinct. Probably he had only imagined this, he reflected, as he had just quickly turned down the steam and the radiators were under the window-seats. That might account for what he had heard, but he wasn't sure. He got down on his hands and knees, and putting his ear as close as he could to the pipes listened.

How silly he was—suppose some of the servants saw him! Getting up, he looked searchingly at the tiny indicator which had such a powerful grip on the steam and such a suggestive and irritating influence over him. Fletcher did not like the thing and a fury surged up in him against it.

He would order it removed, for he couldn't tell whether he heard the guttural notes of his avenging Nemesis or not with such a weirdly gurgling thing in his bedroom. It was useless to try to sleep. He dressed and unnoticed, slipped out into the night, but he did not go far, for fear of being caught unprotected by the great thrill pander who followed him.

He soon came back and lay down in one of the rooms below where they had not yet installed that infernal device which softly pulsated and gurgled so humanly.

With the day Fletcher's fear somewhat abated. Darkness and fear, light and self-confidence are so inseparably interlinked in our understanding. He disliked to disrupt the household with his eccentricity and give in to what was most probably only a figment of his imagination. Then, too, the strenuous market of which he was now the storm center distracted his attention from this haunting fancy at home. There was no use worrying about Van Mortimor in that maelstrom. Time enough when the thrill hound came!

Fletcher had a premonition that there would be no doubt about it when Van Mortimor came this time—he believed he would know it as a man might feel the touch of a thousand needles. So he slept with his door open and lights on, and kept a servant in his rooms on the pretext that he wasn't well.

Meanwhile throughout the ensuing week, the strain of the falling stock prices became terrific. Pressure was being brought to bear from every source upon this wild young capitalist to support the market and not let his securities go lower, for they were now leading the whole list downward. But he sat maliciously inactive, and silently watched the tape, while he rigorously counseled his soul to wait for the utmost bargains. To do this he had to steel his heart against all entreaties.

BUT even as he schemed so Satanically, this adamant young financier took every short-cut and precaution for putting his new pet philanthropy into operation. Within a few days he had it so generally authorized that it would be in evidence on every pay roll of all his many enterprises that week even if hell must burst with it.

He, who had been so easily seen, so likely to drop in anywhere, had become a recluse hugging his ticker behind tight-locked doors, while all the world could praise him or damn him as they wished.

Now came the day! Friday, it was, and truly a black one. It was about two o'clock as Fletcher watched the tape sullenly. He had believed for five consecutive minutes that his stocks were scraping bottom, as low as they could be carried at this time.

Then and then only did he begin to buy cautiously, and all the time that he was buying, he kept answering desperate appeals for the support of the market with his cryptic reply that he wasn't interested in the gamblers over there—meaning of course on the New York Stock Exchange where now he was the very biggest speculator.

The bargains Fletcher got were thousands and thousands of shares of America's greatest corporations. He did not bid up for anything. He just took them quietly at the last sale or under as they were offered, his sly purchases almost unnoticed in the day's demoralization of values.

But to his chagrin the market did not firm up after he had bought absolutely all he wanted. On they came, these avalanches of big selling orders. Prices sagged lower.

Now he gave forth the news that he was supporting the market—blatted it over the news tickers—rushed it through the wires over the country, inasmuch as he had his chosen line very fully purchased.

Yet still the stocks came for sale until he was forced really to support the market, and now he stood desperately overbuying to protect himself. Soon his brokers were frantically taking everything on his rushed orders to stem the tide and hold his already swollen purchases from further depreciation.

Never during that awful day did Fletcher know how much he bought. He only knew that he was still within the cash assets of the Van Mortimor fortune, as magically calculated by his feverishly working corps of secretaries from moment to moment.

An hour and twenty minutes after the exchange closed, which was twenty minutes after four o'clock, the ticker was still running, despite the emergency use of the most abbreviated code: it was that far behind, but it closed steady for the last ten minutes on his herculean support. Blankly he stared at the prices which could not go lower—that day. Most of the Van Mortimor fortune was spent for securities which must be paid for by fifteen minutes after two o'clock Monday.

The door of Fletcher's private office opened without formality, and there

stood old Wilkerson, the president of the bank.

"Your requirements here, sir!" he cut in brusquely, "surpass even your credit with this bank by one half million dollars!"

"Get it!" spoke the young financier coldly.

"No, my boy!" answered this staid old veteran of innumerable big loans, "this is a poor time for you to pull your bold authority on me! I don't have to listen to you!"

"Why?" snapped Fletcher.

"Because the legal limit for your credit with this bank is reached; and there is another reason why you shouldn't ask this of me as a favor!"

"Well—spring that, too!" demanded Fletcher breathlessly.

"Because," Wilkerson said kindly, coming around to put his arm affectionately on Fletcher's shoulders, "I have already personally arranged your little deficiency here! By Gad, it does my heart good to see you working—just like the old man, you are, pulling off stunts and running everybody ragged when it's nothing but a blind for you to steal control cheaply of some of your competitors in all this excitement! I know two or three big corners in stocks will show up soon!"

WILKERSON stalked out in high satisfaction before Fletcher could thank him, but this wild young financier went ahead thinking confusedly. Corners nothing! He had not stopped to concentrate all his buying on two or three important companies in this demoralization, as he might well have done, so that he could now engineer corners and run the prices up to break even in any event. He was just desperately overburdened with his own and all other good stocks—a bull on America and that was all!

At ten o'clock the next morning prices would move again. If they held or went up, all would be well; but should they go much lower not even he could support his tremendous line of stocks for many minutes more. This stupendous business organization and all its wealth of which he had had sole charge would be wiped out!

Suddenly Fletcher clutched his desk with both hands, for faintly but distinctly the weird cry of the blanched face rang in his ears as his true situation flashed upon him. In that instant he painfully saw that the entire Van Mortimor fortune was threatened with ruin, while Edmond Fletcher, through the commissions accredited to him in the office of Morton, Keene and Company, was a wealthy man!

Let Van Mortimor come and give him his just deserts quickly, Fletcher inwardly moaned. He deserved the worst that the outraged owner of this fortune could possibly do to him. Scarcely cognizant of his surroundings, he made his way down to the car and was driven home in a daze.

Fletcher tried brokenly to explain to Gloria the frightful thing he had done, how they might be poverty-stricken through his acts; but she could not understand and insisted on sticking by him in all events.

"I know," he informed her contritely, "come what may, where I have enough to insure you a living," and in his heart he thanked providence for that positive proof of his real identity which was so safely tucked away in a safe deposit box to be opened on his signature.

"You mean to insure *us* a living!" she insisted. "With everything else gone, happiness may still exist for me now, but not without you, my dearest!"

"Don't, Gloria," he pleaded, "you make me ashamed of myself, you sweet, wonderful girl. But you don't know what you say! You are simply repeating the fool ideas that I have given you."

While they dined, he mustered courage to ask:

"Gloria, may I make a silly request of you?"

"Certainly," she agreed readily, "anything you wish."

"Would you mind if I had those steam regulating devices taken out of my room at once if possible?"

"Not in the least," she responded, no little surprised, "but don't you like them? The workmen went to terrific pains putting them in a few days ago under a big engineer, who was sent here from Chicago especially to install them in this apartment just for us alone. No one else in the building has them! I don't know how we could get them removed instantly."

"Then we can't get them out tonight," he spoke sadly, "but forgive me; it is just a queer fancy which I have taken against them," and they both laughed nervously.

Fletcher excused himself and retired early, worn almost to the breaking point under the strain. His servant in the next room, sleeping there by his orders, annoyed him moving around, and Fletcher snappishly dismissed him for the night, ordering him to stay away. Before long, he rather regretted this, but his pride prevented him from shilly-shallying before a menial.

HE shut his bedroom up tightly. All doors leading into it he bolted, and he locked the windows securely. Then he tried to sleep with the lights on, but he could not manage to doze off. The light irritated his overwrought nerves and he felt he would suffocate without fresh air.

In desperation he raised one of the two windows just a little. The steam regulator unfortunately was between them, so that he could not avoid its being near the one he opened. He turned off the lights and fell like a dead weight into bed, for he was completely worn out.

Strange to say, sound sleep came to him, the sleep of the exhausted—sleep as of the dead who know no worry.

It seemed, hours later, that from the depths of an all-pervading slumber he found himself floating on the bosom of a river or out in a boat somewhere, for it was very moist all about. He dreamed that he was proceeding slowly through a murky fog. He was in the tropics, he supposed, for it was warm, even sultry. Fletcher was puzzled about where he could possibly be traveling, as he had no boat lines to worry about. He thought he would ask somebody to explain it all.

Now all at once, as occurs in dreams with reason and fantasy combined, he found he was alone in some strange sticky hot place. In an effort to free himself Fletcher wandered about blindly, pushing through dank, wet, clinging undergrowth. It was everywhere.

Suddenly he heard the horrifying notes of the blanched face. Then he stopped breathless with terror. Better to suffer anything than to encounter the fiend. It was getting dreadfully hot and he felt that he would suffocate if he could not get out of this sweltering and engulfing bog.

Then, squarely in front of him, loomed up Van Mortimor with a malicious leer upon his chalky face; and he held high in his hand that haunting steam gauge with pipes swinging from it gushing fire and steam. These the fiend turned upon Fletcher as His Satanic Majesty, Van Mortimor, gave forth a sardonic howl of delight.

Fletcher crumbled under the pitiless assault. He was being roasted alive as the maniac basted him with the fire and live steam from the gushing pipes, in a wet and sticky hell.

The pain seared him right and left as he screeched out in agony, for he was fully conscious now and this was no dream! His yells were getting fainter, already scarcely audible. He was suffocating. In his anguish he even realized that he had locked his doors on the inside, and that he was powerless to open them.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

CIRCUS DAYS

FOR young and old the circus will always have a subtle fascination—a romantic lure. Even for a manuscript-harassed editor there is a thrill in a good circus yarn. That is one of the reasons why we enjoyed John Wilstach's "Circus Blood," in this issue, and why we were interested in Mr. Wilstach's anecdotes and description of his own circus life. At our suggestion he steps up to say a few words about the big top as he knew it:

The usual visitor to the circus only sees the wonderful show, shifting so bewilderingly in three rings and above in the air. Whether or not he would like to turn flip-flaps or ride bareback, does not really matter, because a kinker must be trained from childhood in a family of performers, often veterans of the sawdust for generations. In any case the spectator does not have the time or opportunity to study the tented world from the inside, and watch the amazing feat of transporting it, overnight, from one town to another, and feeding an army of workers three times a day. Here is a great human machine, a marvel of perfectly oiled efficiency in motion, that has never been equalled. Some time ago when press agent for the Ringling Brothers Circus, owners now of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, I had a chance to see the works at close range.

A modern circus travels by railroad in three sections, about an hour apart. The show owns all the cars, flat, sleeper, menagerie and stock. The owner's car is at the end of the third section, so any accident must be ahead of the main guy. After the first section arrives the cook tent is erected, with giant traveling kitchens, caldrons holding many gallons of coffee, and wagons with thousands of dishes, cunningly packed, and enough silverware for a huge hotel. Most of the food, ordered a day in advance, is waiting on the lot. By the time breakfast is over the parade wagons are in line, with their teams, and the performers emerge from a dressing room where their costumes have been laid out. As they leave for the parade the big top and other tents are going up; thousands and thousands of individual pieces of apparatus are in place, without the slightest friction or confusion.

Before the late World War, a squad of German army officers went with one of the greatest shows, studying methods of unloading and loading the traveling kitchens and the work of the various crews. Thus a circus was made the model for an army on the move.

But the United States army heads also studied the mobile force. A certain prominent general found that while heavy circus wagons were run on railroad flat cars by means of block and tackle and an inclined plane, the army had been in the habit of hoisting artillery over the sides of cars, a clumsy and slow method of getting it on the rails. The cavalry was taught a lesson by circus methods of carrying stock. Horses are loaded close together, standing erect; twenty-two to twenty-four are assigned to a car. Each group has a trained "wedge horse," the last to go on, wedging himself in the center, where he pushes and shoves to see that not another equine can be safely loaded. Strangely, there are fewer accidents when horses are tightly jammed together, less chance of harm from jar, fright, or panic. A single animal simply cannot start anything.

Grafting shows are in circus parlance called "strong" outfits. Most of the crooked gambling, with the lid off, used to take place in a "privilege" car. Steerers met well-heeled farmers on the lot; they had been decoyed, with money on their persons, by grifters in advance of the circus, who told them of wonderful bargains in horses, which were to be sold for almost nothing. Entertained when they arrived, they were stripped either by dips or led to the cleaners at the gambling devices.

Crooks with a show paid so much a week for various privileges and protection. There were, for example, the pickpocket, three-card monte and the wheel of fortune privilege. The protection was against the police—and for the power of the show to stop "outside" crooks from operating. The local police were either paid to lay off, or this was understood when the contracting agent paid for the "license" to parade and play. This used to be nothing more or less than a form of local holdup and graft, for the sum asked was often outrageous. The circus paid for the use of the grounds, often, besides. And the way officials demanded blocks of tickets was sometimes worth a couple of murders at least!

As regards the grifters the revenue to the circus was great. In case something was actually taken from the wrong man—a public official or a prominent citizen who could raise a tough squawk—the money or article of value could be returned after the word went about. This was called "the come-back."

After most circuses became "clean," the carnivals took over the rough stuff. It may be surprising to learn that the well-known "license" has been the means of stopping most of them from longer operating. Citizens of particular towns became so enraged against their ruthless methods that they brought pressure to bear; at present writing there are hundreds of towns where certain circus and carnivals haven't a chance to show. Sometimes they pitch their tents just outside the town limits, but it means dragging audiences from a distance.

Of course reform goes just so far. Last summer I caught a circus with an honored name in a near-by town. Not a policeman on the lot. A smooth type of money separating going on inside the kid show; suckers four deep coming across for the old numbered card game. I'll be on the safe side and say the officials of this town *ignored* the outfit. That's a diplomatic way to put it. You see, I still have my summer home in this particular county! The reader may be interested to know that there is nothing not at all possible in "Circus Blood." This is a day of realism, and I know that ARGOSY-ALLSTORY readers like and get stories by birds who have the low-down on the subjects they treat.

A HORSE FANCIER

FIRST cousin to the circus is the race track—a lure to all those who respond to the appeal of splendidly bred and trained horseflesh. Philip Cole, who makes his first appearance in ARGOSY in this issue with "Chin-Straps," is a horse breeder and trainer by profession and preference. To introduce himself he says:

I had the good luck to be born in Bath, Maine. In those days Bath was a great place for boys. We used to hang around the spar yard and lunch on board six-masted schooners, and go on piratical expeditions down the Kennebec River in a whale boat with an early model gas engine. I learned something about internal combustion motors in those days that has stood me in good stead ever since. I found out that if a gas engine doesn't wish to go, I can't do anything about it.

Being balked in my early desire to go to sea, I took to the woods instead and cruised timber in northern Quebec for five years before the war, emerging from the woods to go to Plattsburg. I went overseas with the artillery brigade of the Thirtieth Division. When we came back they gave us our discharges at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. Canada was a long way from there, and the black fly season would be just commencing on the St. Maurice, so I thought I'd stay down South and save carfare.

My wife got so she could beat me playing golf, so I bought her a horse to divert her attention. Then I bought myself a horse so I could keep her company. Then I bought thirty horses. Shortly after I bought the thirty horses they all began to eat. A good healthy horse can eat a dollar's worth of stuff every day. So one day my banker told me he thought I'd better sell the horses and let him have a little something toward catching up with the back interest on the feed bills.

We live on a twenty-acre farmette, populated with saddle-bred colts, wire-haired fox terriers, game chickens that lay only in the spring, bob-whites, opossums, rabbits and small boys. The chief crop is crabgrass and ragweed. The house needs painting and it would be a good thing if the neighbors would do something about the main driveway.

My pet hates are: waiting for anything to happen, witch burners, policemen, people that send American soldiers into battle under insufficiently baked officers, sweet potatoes and okra. My principal hobbies are: the races, flying, horses, terriers, long automobile trips, the army and macaroni au gratin. I have other hobbies, but the complete list would be too long to print.

GOOD news for the Lieutenant Hopper fans! "The Blood of Morgan," a two-part story of the marines in Nicaragua, by Lieutenant John Hopper, will soon appear in ARGOSY. It is his best yarn to date.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
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1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

I did not like_____

because_____

*Name*_____

*Street*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

1-19

Looking Ahead!

Far up into the wilds of Northern Canada next week's Argosy takes us, on the trail with an officer of the Mounted, in

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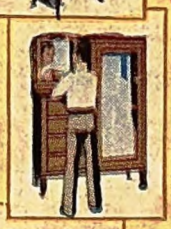

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