10¢

An Erle Stanley Gardner Novelette

ARGOSY

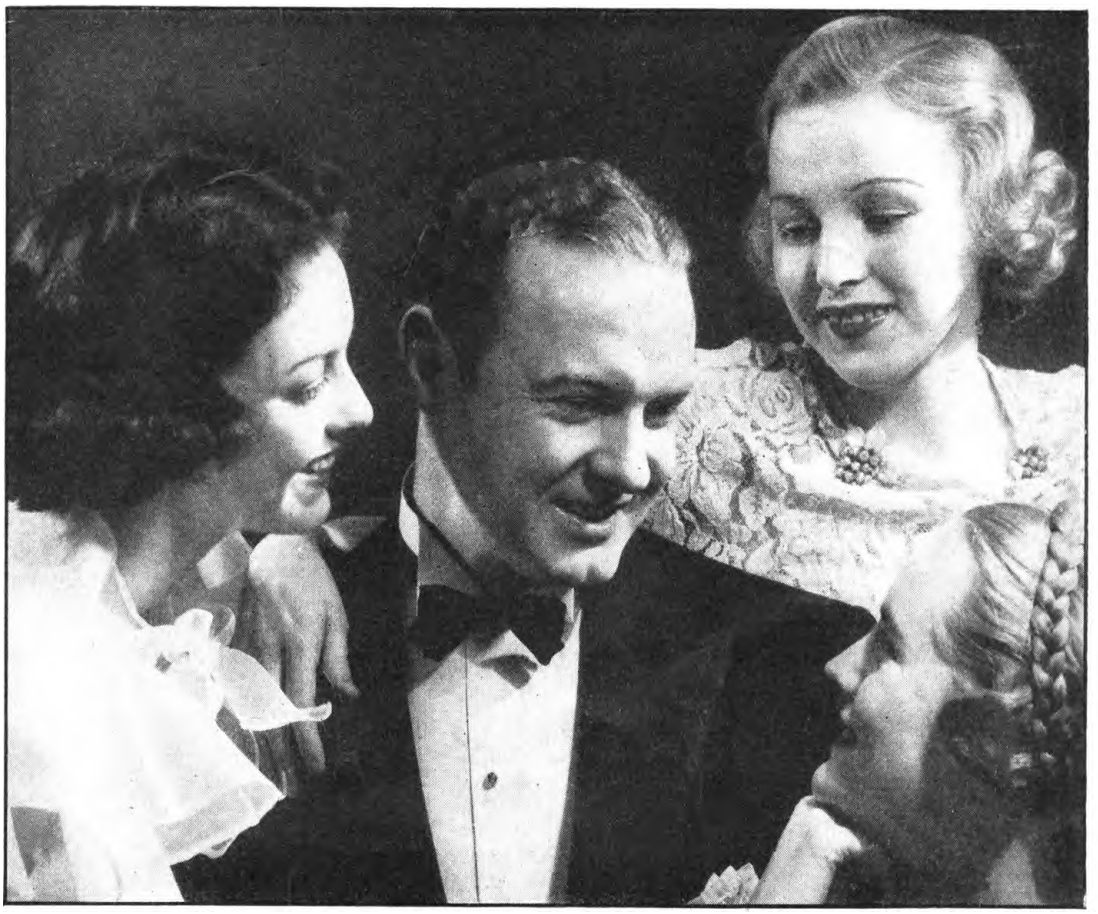
SEPT. 21

WEEKLY

Zorro

Returns
In a Novel by

Johnston McCulley



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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 258 CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 21, 1935 Number 5

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

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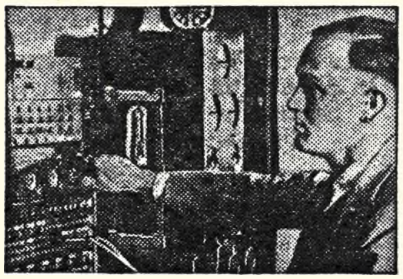

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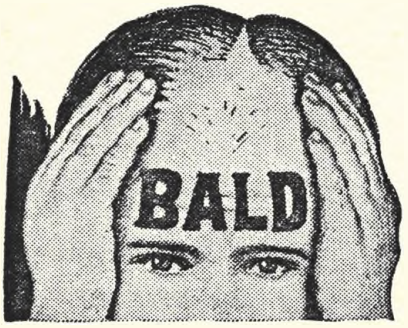

Science Finds Easy Way to Remove Germ In Superficial Layers of Scalp and Stimulate Dormant Roots to Promote Hair Growth

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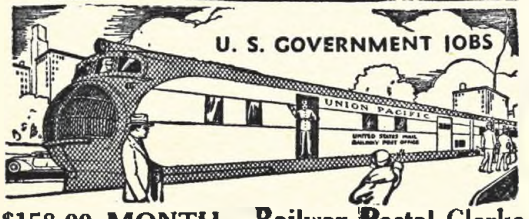

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30x5.00-20		2.85	1.05
32x5.00-22		3.65	1.05
27x6.25-17		2.90	1.15
28x5.25-18		2.90	1.15
29x5.25-19		2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20		2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21		3.25	1.15
27x5.50-17		3.25	1.15
28x5.50-18		3.25	1.15

BALLOON TIRES

Size	Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x5.50-19		3.35	1.15
30x5.50-20		3.35	1.15
x6.00-16		3.75	1.45
29x6.00-17		3.40	1.15
30x6.00-18		3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19		3.40	1.15
32x6.00-20		3.45	1.25
33x6.00-21		3.65	1.25
29x6.50-17		3.45	1.35
30x6.50-18		3.50	1.35
31x6.50-19		3.60	1.35
32x6.50-20		3.75	1.35
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33x4½	3.45	1.15
34x4½	3.45	1.15
30x5	3.65	1.35
33x5	3.75	1.45
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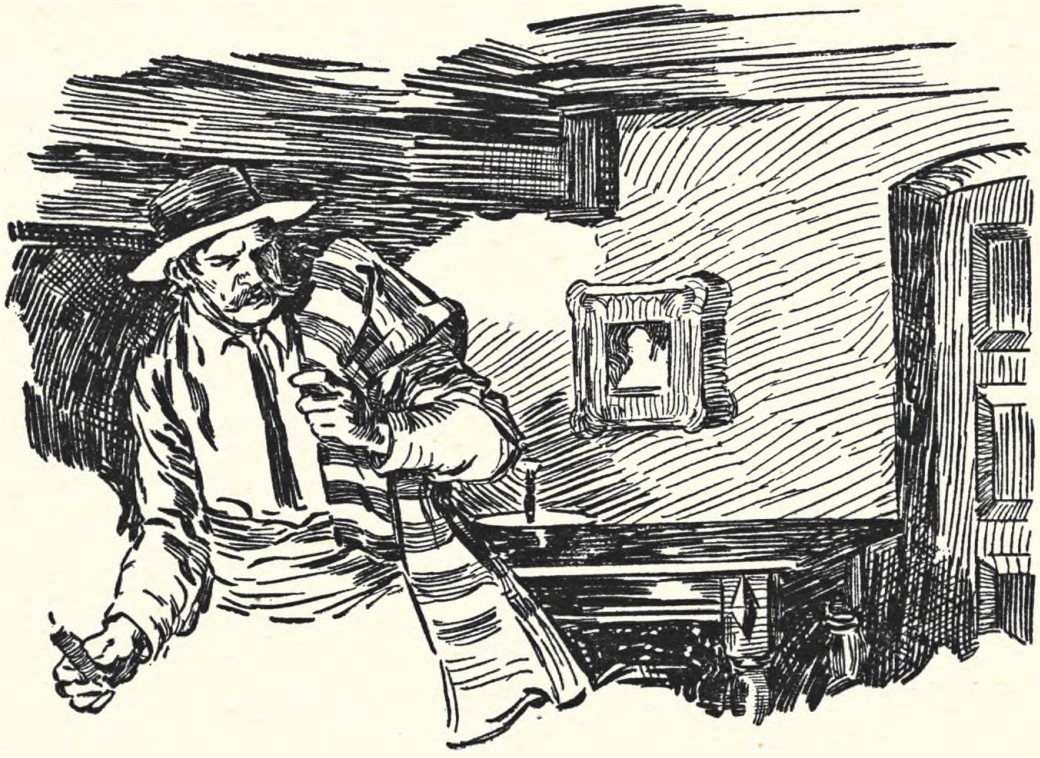


Mysterious Don Miguel

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "Zorro Deals with Treason," "Zorro Hunts a Jackal," etc.

CHAPTER I.

DON NAMELESS.

THE hourglass had run its course several times since the twinkling candles had ceased casting their erratic beams through the windows of the houses. The reeking torches had been extinguished in the adobe huts of the natives. The night watch had given his eerie call so often that now it was half stifled by a yawn, and, instead of the stentorian call of the early evening, was a thing with no ring of authority in it.

A bright moon streaked the tumbling waters of the bay. In from the distant sea wandered a soft breeze to stir the fronds of the palms around the little plaza in San Diego de Alcala, and to be welcomed by the weary troopers who stood their shift of guard at the *presidio*.

Before the hourglass had run its course t w i c e more, the pink dawn would come stealing in from the east and the business of another day would begin.

Droves of stock—cattle and horses and sheep—would be driven in for

The keen blade and quick wit of Señor Zorro were legend in Spanish California—and there was dire need for them now

"I anticipated this visit, senor," said Zorro

trading. Hides and tallow, jars of honey and preserved fruits would be brought in for barter. Heavy carts would come into the town along the dusty trails from many a *hacienda*.

At the mission up the valley, robed Franciscan brothers would be up and busy at their eternal work of changing gentile natives into neophytes, and of building up the mission empire their own Junipero Serra had founded. But, in the large main room of the inn at the corner of the plaza, were some who did not seem to realize that the night was far spent already.

They had neglected to eat the food the fat landlord had prepared for them long before. Their fine garments were damp with perspiration induced by excitement and the rich wine they had

taken, and their flushed faces wore strained expressions as they watched closely over a long table which had a huge candelabra at either end.

Pedro Pico, the professional gambler, was playing for high stakes again. He was also winning heavily and steadily, and certain of the young *caballeros* who bemeaned themselves by dicing with him were seeking to catch him in some act of clever crookedness, but could not.

Pedro Pico's lean and swarthy face was inscrutable as he played. His eyes were small and black and glittering. His white hands and tapering fingers were no less than things of beauty, adorned with precious jewels which scintillated in the light, as he manipulated either dice or the cards, as the others requested, but both to his own material advantage.

ABOUT a score of men were in the big, dimly lighted main room of the inn. Some were young *caballeros* who had ridden in from their fathers' estates for a night of sport in the town. Others were but common folk of San Diego de Alcâla. And there were several of uncertain standing, who had lately come off El Camino Real, the King's Highway which connected the missions in a chain, and who looked like rogues, and probably were.

" By the saints—!"

One dressed in fine raiment spoke as another cast of the dice went to his disadvantage, and retreated from the gaming table to wipe the perspiration from his face with a square of silk edged with lace.

" The saints, *señor,* have nothing to do with it," another whispered into his ear. " It is my private opinion that the Evil One has forsaken his usual abode and is with us here tonight in this land of California."

" Ha! It is impossible for one to slay the Devil, it is said, and yet—"

" Do not stain your blade by allowing it to drink foul blood," his friends advised quickly. " There is no law that one must play with the man."

" Yet one must play with somebody, and at times one likes to have dealings with a professional rogue, for the sake of the experience."

" Any robed Franciscan at the mission will tell you that a man must pay dearly for experience."

" And have I not paid dearly? Ha! A full purse of gold gone this night, and one the night before! At this rate I soon shall be beggared. It is beyond belief that one man can have so much good fortune, yet, if it is more than mere luck, we cannot probe his artifice."

The gaming continued. The fat landlord and his two native servants kept the wine mugs filled. Some of the men dozed on the benches. Others grew maudlin and spoke meaningless phrases. But Pedro Pico always remained sober and alert. The young *caballeros* continued losing to him, and in return got nothing but his flashing smile, and no man could tell whether that was of friendliness or derision.

There were no troopers from the *presidio* present at the inn tonight, for they were being held closely in barracks against a sudden alarm, as they had been for several nights past. There had been whisperings of an incipient Indian uprising, fomented by a certain and somewhat mysterious Don Miguel Mendez, regarding whom no man seemed to know much.

The torches spluttered in their niches in the walls, and cast their streaks of

uncertain light across the broad room, but the gaming table was well lighted by the two huge candelabra. Those in the place who were not too intoxicated had gathered to watch the high play. Among them was a certain Valentino Vargas, a person of evil visage and uncouth manners, who appeared to be the gambler's bosom friend.

Their interest was centered on the dicing. Hence, they did not observe it when, in out of the moon-drenched night, slipped a man who surveyed the scene and chuckled a bit, and then crept slowly and with much caution along the wall and through the shadows, until he was standing beneath the wall torch nearest the gambler's table. For a time he watched the game, and then:

"Attention, *señores!*"

His voice suddenly rang out, so that the echoes of it bounded back from the adobe walls and sounded up and down the big, low-ceilinged room.

THE gambling ceased abruptly. All in the room whirled to face him. Before them, standing against the wall with his arms folded across his breast, was a man who wore neither hat nor cloak. His blouse of black silk was open at the throat. He had a blade at his side, and a dagger in his girdle, and even a pistol in his sash. Over his face was a closely fitting mask of black, which concealed his features effectually.

"What—?" Pedro Pico began.

The gambler's lower jaw sagged and his eyes bulged in an expression of astonishment. His first thought was that here was some highwayman come to take what gold he might find on the gambling table.

"Your pardon, *señores,*" the masked visitor begged. "It is my wish to try a cast or two of the dice, and also my wish that my identity be concealed from you all. Have I your permission to advance to the table?"

Pedro Pico's eyes glittered evilly as he watched the masked man. This was not to be an affair of robbery, then. The gambler gathered his wits and made a grand gesture.

"All are welcome to play here, if they have the gold with which to play," he said.

"As to that, you need have no worry," the masked man replied.

The others fell back toward the lower end of the table. The masked man strode forward into the brighter light, moving with the natural grace of the cougar, and stopped directly across the table from Pedro Pico.

Valentino Vargas, the gambler's friend, lurched to his feet from the bench whereupon he had been sitting, a sneer on his lips as he swaggered forward.

"Ha! So here we have a man who fears to reveal his face," Valentino Vargas said.

"Some faces are better masked," the visitor replied. "Why do you not mask yours, *señor,* and spare the good people the sight of your evil countenance?"

Some of the men in the room laughed, and the evil countenance of which the masked man had spoken took on a tinge of purple as wrath surged through Valentino Vargas.

"How is this?" Vargas cried, enraged, as he allowed his hand to drop to the hilt of the blade he wore. "You seek to insult me, *señor?*"

"Peace, Valentino! You courted that rebuke," Pedro Pico barked at him quickly. "'Tis not a time for fighting." He made a sign that Vargas was to be quiet.

For this masked man was a mystery Pedro Pico certainly wished to solve. Perhaps this unusual visitor who had come out of the night was some man of high degree with an itch for dice and the cards, yet did not wish it known that he played with a common gambler in a public place. Pedro Pico had encountered many such in his career. A man of that ilk might have much gold which could be taken easily.

The young *caballeros* had backed away from the table, and were observing the masked man askance, holding themselves haughtily aloof. Now he turned and saluted them in a respectful manner.

"No man here need turn his back or depart because of my presence," he assured them. "Without speaking my name, I give you honorable oath that my blood is as good as that of any man here. Now, Señor Gambler, we begin."

HE tossed a fat pouch-purse down upon the table. He opened it and drew forth and threw out some pieces of gold, revealing that there were plenty more such in the purse. Pedro Pico's eyes glittered yet more at this frank display of wealth. He prepared to make the first cast of the dice at the masked man's gesture for him to do so.

Pedro Pico made his cast, and the masked stranger stepped closer to the table and picked up the box. Then he took the dice from Pedro Pico's hand, for the gambler had picked them up and offered them.

But, with the box held aloft, the masked man paused. He dropped the dice to the table without shaking and began a close inspection of the cubes. Those around the table bent forward, breathlessly and silently, to watch, sensing that something unusual was about to occur.

"Some queer things happen at times," the masked stranger said. "These dice are not those with which you made your cast, Señor Gambler."

"What is this?" Pedro Pico cried.

"The dice you cast—one had a tiny nick on a corner, which did not escape my eye. No doubt you have those dice cleverly concealed about your person now, having exchanged them for these. I do not doubt that you have been winning heavily during the night, *señor,* from those foolish enough to play with you."

Pedro Pico sprang to his feet. He bent across the table, his eyes aflame and his face suffused with rage. He was well aware of the dire necessity of making a swift defense against this charge of cheating.

"You dare insinuate—?" he began

"I insinuate nothing!" the masked man interrupted, speaking in stern voice. "I merely state facts. You are nothing more than a common cheat! I knew it when you made your cast. You are not even a clever cheat. I have heard rumors of your heavy winnings here in San Diego de Alcála, and came to learn the reason for them. The reason is now apparent."

"I'll slay you for this!" Pedro Pico cried.

The gambler had a sword with a jeweled hilt, in an engraved scabbard, which he always kept on the bench beside him while he was playing. Now he grasped the scabbard and whipped out the blade, and sprang aside and into the well-lighted space at the end of the table.

"I lower myself exceedingly to cross blades with such as you," the masked man declared. "But my fea-

tures are hidden, and I shall call myself Don Nameless, so my shame shall not be so great. I warn you, Señor Gambler, that I am expert with a blade. You still desire to fight with me? On guard, then, *señor!*"

CHAPTER II.

A MARK LEFT BEHIND.

AT the end of the table they clashed. The *caballeros* stood back gleefully, bending forward to watch with keen eyes this display of swordsmanship. The others got back against the adobe wall out of the way. A dishonest gambler was about to be sorely punished, they hoped.

That this mysterious Don Nameless was expert with a blade, as he had stated, could be told in an instant. He pressed Pedro Pico back until the gambler was in the shadows. He compelled him to retreat continually, played with him until big globules of perspiration popped out on Pedro Pico's swarthy face and the fear of immediate death shook him.

They circled toward the end of the table again, while the others retreated to give them room. Don Nameless was laughing lightly as he fought, like a man teasing a boy. Pedro Pico made a last desperate attempt to save his life, suddenly forcing the swordplay in a wild attack which had nothing in it of fencing science. But this man who called himself Don Nameless only laughed behind his mask again, and parried and fell back an instant. Then he began forcing the fighting furiously himself.

Back toward the adobe wall he drove Pedro Pico, having his way with the man. The gambler knew that he was lost. Each instant he expected the thrust which would let the life out of his body. His face became drawn and white, and his lips trembled.

Suddenly their hilts were locked. Their arms were held aloft as their breasts crashed together. So they stood face to face, breathing heavily, and each straining to gain the advantage.

"I'll slay you—slay you!" Pedro Pico cried wildly.

The answer of Don Nameless came in a whisper which nobody but Pedro Pico could hear:

"If you do, it may grieve Don Miguel."

Pedro Pico seemed to lose all strength suddenly. His eyes grew wide, but the masked man kept the hilts of their swords locked, and pretended to be exerting his strength, so the others in the room were misled.

"You—*you* are Don Miguel?" Pedro Pico whispered, as their faces were close together.

"Let us say a trusted man of his."

"Then, why did you expose me?"

"To give you a good excuse for quitting San Diego de Alcála immediately and in a natural manner. There is to be a meeting in the Canyon of the Cocopahs, near Reina de Los Angeles, the night of the full moon. Pass the word to others of whom you are sure, and see to it yourself."

None of the others in the room had heard this whispered conversation of the two men against the wall. They were watching for the deadlock to be broken, and wondering whether a quick thrust by this Don Nameless would end the duel when the break finally came. And now the duelists sprang apart and were back in the bright circle of light at the end of the table. But Pedro Pico suddenly threw up his left arm and lowered the point of his blade.

"Enough, *señor!*" he cried. "The

right of this affair is with you. I am lost if I continue."

It was the speech of a craven. Expressions of disgust came from those in the room, *caballeros* and common folk alike. Pedro Pico, his head hanging as though in shame, walked slowly back toward his table.

Men drew aside to let him pass, as though touch with him might contaminate them. Pedro Pico was hoping that he could gather the money from the table and depart, and get away without being set upon and beaten.

SOME men did start toward him angrily and threateningly, rumblings of rage coming from their throats as they thought of the money of which they had been robbed. But Don Nameless lifted a hand and called a halt.

"Allow the rogue to depart and take his stench with him," he ordered. "You knew that he was a professional gambler, hence played with him at your own peril. It is enough that he is now unmasked, and must leave San Diego de Alcála forever."

But Valentino Vargas sprang off the stool upon which he dropped in consternation at Pedro Pico's show of cowardice. That bogus struggle against the wall had misled him. He thought this Don Nameless a man of little strength, since even Pedro Pico had held the hilt of his blade locked for so long. Here was a chance, he thought, to avenge his friend and also acquire a reputation for himself.

Valentino Vargas was a heavy man, with a florid face and a huge black mustache, strong in his shoulders and arms. Beside this Don Nameless, who was small and agile, he looked like a human mountain.

"So you quit him, Pedro Pico?" he cried. "'Tis a pity. But I'll take up your quarrel. I am not craven. This pretty fellow who wears a mask—the shape of his body distresses me. I'll carve it more to my liking."

"I have no quarrel with you, fellow," Don Nameless said.

"Ha! No doubt you prefer not to have one, nevertheless one is now on your hands," Valentino Vargas replied. "Face a real man for once, *señor!* On guard!"

"As you will," Don Nameless replied. "Some men go about the earth seeking trouble."

Those in the room promptly forgot Pedro Pico now. They turned to watch this fresh quarrel, which gave promise of being something better than the last. The gambler quickly gathered up his property and crept around the walls and into the patio, to go to his own quarters in the inn.

Valentino Vargas strutted out into the light space at the end of the table. He whipped out his blade and ponderously set himself for combat. Don Nameless darted forward immediately, and they engaged.

Valentino Vargas was a much better swordsman than Pedro Pico by far, having more skill and also weight and strength. It occurred to those who watched that Don Nameless estimated him correctly as such, and was not rash in his attack.

But, having felt out his man, Don Nameless suddenly began to force the fighting, as though eager to finish it and be gone from the scene. The blades clashed and rang. The duelists swerved and danced, advanced and retreated, now out in the streak of bright light, and now back in the flickering shadows near the adobe wall.

"Fight, rogue!" Don Nameless taunted, as he pressed his adversary

cruelly. "I had no quarrel with you... you brought this upon yourself, rogue ...I could slay you easily...but perhaps I'll spare your life."

HE spoke all this haltingly, as they fought. He punctuated his phrases with swift and violent attacks. Valentino Vargas began tiring from the speed of the bout. This small and agile man was all around him, like a dozen adversaries. There was a strong rally on the part of Valentino Vargas for a moment, a retreat on the part of Don Nameless and an equally swift recovery.

Then something happened so swiftly that the *caballeros* watching were unable to tell afterward just how it had occurred. But the blade of Valentino Vargas was torn from his hand and whipped in a flashing arc through the air, to fall and clatter on the hard-beaten earth of the floor.

Don Nameless lunged, and the point of his blade darted forward like the tongue of a snake. Then he bounced backward like a rubber ball, and Valentino Vargas reeled against the wall, holding his left hand to his left cheek, from which blood was streaming.

The watchers marveled that Don Nameless had not slain, a thing he could have done easily. But he only gave a swift glance at the others in the room, as though to see whether they would make a move against him. None did, so he darted to the table, and grasped his purse and stowed it away.

He laughed a little, returned his blade to its scabbard, and retreated swiftly along the wall through the shadows, as those in the room surged toward him.

At the door he lifted a hand in salute.

"*Señores, á Dios!*" he cried.

Through the open door he hurried, to be swallowed by the moon-drenched night. The others in the place rushed out after him, except a few who remained with the wounded man. They heard the rapid drumfire of a horse's hoofs as Don Nameless swiftly rode away. Back to their ears on the night breeze came a taunting laugh.

Inside the inn, some men gathered around the wounded Valentino Vargas, who was cursing both Don Nameless and his wound. The young *caballeros* stood aloof and laughed at the man. The fat landlord came hurrying in with a basin filled with heated and scented water, and some soft cloths, and bathed Valentino Vargas' left cheek, where the tip of Don Nameless' sword had cut deeply enough to make a wound which surely would leave a scar.

One of the *caballeros* gave a cry of surprise and darted forward, and bent over to look.

His exclamation brought the others to his side.

"*Dios!*" he cried. "We have been blind! Look at this fellow's wound. Do you not see, and understand? It is in the form of a ragged letter Z, is it not? 'Tis the mark of Zorro! This Don Nameless, as he called himself—he was Señor Zorro! We have seen a master of fence at work—and have seen him leave his mark behind!"

CHAPTER III.

DON DIEGO ARRIVES.

IN Pedro Pico's room at the inn, as dawn was breaking, the gambler sat on the side of his couch, while Valentino Vargas strode back and forth before him.

"I cannot understand it," Vargas

was saying. " You say he spoke of Don Miguel?"

" He intimated he was Don Miguel's trusted man, and said there was to be a meeting—"

" You have said that before. He exposes you, fights with you, makes it easy for you to get out of the town—"

" Which I must do at once, before they have a mind to set upon me," Pedro Pico said, betraying nervousness.

" Then when I pick a fight with him, he makes this mark of Zorro on my cheek. Why did he not mention Don Miguel to me?"

" Perhaps you had angered him," Pedro Pico said. " And it is possible he did not have a chance, for you were fighting fiercely. He may have thought I would pass the word to you. Or, he may not have known you are in this affair."

" I have yet to meet a man who has seen this Don Miguel," Vargas said. " How this started, none seems to know. A few whisperings to adventurers of our kind, and the thing spread.

" Don Miguel Mendez—whoever he is—is fomenting an uprising. There will be loot for all white men he picks to help handle the Indians—"

" We were sought out," Pico interrupted.

" By a man sought out by somebody else, who had been sought out in turn. This Don Miguel certainly keeps to cover."

" Until everything is prepared, perhaps. He may be some man of high degree, irked by politics, who does not wish his identity known until it is time to strike. No doubt he will be at the meeting in the Canyon of the Cocopahs."

" And this Zorro—?" Vargas questioned.

" It is true you do not know of him, since you but lately arrived by ship from Mexico. This Señor Zorro made his appearance some time ago, and worked his will with the soldiery. He punished those who mistreated natives and monks—"

" Ah, I have heard, but did not know the name! So it was this Señor Zorro who mentioned Don Miguel to you, and also put his mark on me?"

" 'Tis a way he has—marking the letter Z on the cheeks of men with whom he fights but does not wish to slay."

" This Señor Zorro, it then appears, is in league with Don Miguel?"

" And why not, *señor,* my friend? Has he not always aided the natives? He may even be Don Miguel himself—who knows? And what difference does it make?"

" I have cast my lot with this Don Miguel," Vargas replied. " But this Señor Zorro is another matter. He has put his mark on me, and for that I shall surely kill him at our next meeting."

" You have tasted his blade once, as have I. What chance would you have in combat?"

" A pistol ball from behind a rock—" Vargas suggested. " It is in my mind that I shall have no rest until I slay the man. Now, what is it you intend to do?"

" I must get from the town," Pedro Pico declared. " I'll pack my valuable things and get my horse and ride, leaving my other property here. I'll make for Reina de Los Angeles, so as to be at the meeting the night of the full moon."

" We have other business," Vargas reminded him. " How about this Don

Felipe Ramón and his daughter, newly come by ship from Spain?"

DESPITE the situation, Pedro Pico laughed a bit.

Don Felipe Ramón, a grandee if ever there was one, had lately arrived with his fair daughter, Carmelita, and an old duenna, Señora Vallejo.

They were to journey to Reina de Los Angeles, to be the guests of Don Diego Vega and his father. It was whispered that Don Diego was to wed the fair Carmelita, if they took a fancy to each other.

But Don Felipe Ramón, carrying much wealth with him, feared highwaymen and bandits. He was waiting in the guest house at the mission up the valley, until Don Diego arrived. This Don Diego Vega, his father being at odds with those in political power, could not obtain an escort of troopers for his friends.

So some gentry of the road, of whom Valentino Vargas was one, waited now like hawks to pounce upon their prey.

If Don Felipe Ramón journeyed to Reina de Los Angeles without escort, somewhere along the way his entourage would be set upon, and he would be robbed gleefully.

"Don Diego Vega is expected soon," Pedro Pico said, "according to rumor. Perhaps he will bring an army of servants with him."

"Natives will run at the first discharge of a pistol," Vargas declared. "We fear only the soldiery, and they will not protect Don Diego or any of his friends. It will be rich picking, my friend. Go your way out of the town, and I'll remain and watch. Our four friends, in this enterprise with us, are watching also. Don Felipe Ramón cannot slip away, by day or by night. When he moves, we have his gold and jewels."

"If the native uprising comes—"

"All the better. It will be a cover for what we do. The natives will be blamed for it."

"You'll be at the meeting the night of the full moon?"

Valentino Vargas swore a great oath. "You may depend upon it. I desire to meet this Señor Zorro again."

"'Tis in my mind that you'd best avoid him."

"'Tis in my mind to slay him before I'm done, and that I'll do," Valentino Vargas declared.

"When I have at him again, he has marked his last man. I'll carve a letter V, not on his cheek, but in the heart of him! I'll make a mark of my own! I'll—"

He ceased speaking abruptly. There was a slight commotion in front of the inn.

Natives were yelping like so many curs, and the shrill voice of the fat landlord could be heard.

Pedro Pico sprang to his feet, his face livid, and reached for the pistol he had ready on a stool near by.

"They are coming for me," he mouthed. "I'll sell my life dearly."

"Peace, fool! It is but somebody arriving," Valentino Vargas said. "Somebody of quality, no doubt, with all that fuss being made. Let us see."

"I must get from the town."

"In due time. There is no need for haste. The *caballeros* you fleeced are sleeping off their wine, and the common louts will not bother you. Let us see."

They left the room and hurried across the patio, and to a doorway through which they could peer across

the big main room and out the front door.

A SPLENDID carriage had been brought to a stop in front of the inn. Cringing natives surrounded it, and a native servant was standing in the front of the carriage and threatening them with a whip. The vehicle was drawn by four splendid black horses. Two native outriders accompanied it.

The servile landlord struck natives aside and got to the step of the carriage, and bowed low. Then the occupant came from beneath the hood, and Pedro Pico and Valentino Vargas caught sight of him.

"What a fop!" Vargas said. "He acts as though he scarcely can hold himself together."

"Look at the coat of arms on the carriage," Pedro Pico whispered.

"I know it not."

"I do know it. This is Don Diego Vega arrived."

"That—*that*—is the scion of the house of Vega?" Valentino Vargas asked, gasping. "By the saints! So this is an example of noble blood! The fellow acts as though about to swoon. The sight of blood would sicken him. A needle such as the women use for embroidery would be more at home in his hand than a blade."

Don Diego Vega was conducted by the landlord from the carriage and into the inn, and the door was slammed in the face of the rabble of natives, all seeking alms.

Don Diego Vega brushed his nostrils with a scented handkerchief, and gave a little sigh. He sat upon the nearest bench, and one of the servants made haste to bring a mug of the best wine. As the landlord hovered near, rubbing his hands and giving his poor smile, Don Diego Vega drank sippingly, and sighed again.

"These be turbulent times," he said, in a thin voice.

"*Sí, señor!*"

"I rested at the *hacienda* of a friend, and came on before the dawn. It has been a long and tiresome journey from Reina de Los Angeles. But it was necessary. I have another carriage following, an empty one, but it is to go to the mission direct."

"*Sí, señor!*" the landlord agreed, not knowing what else to say, but feeling the need of saying something.

"I have come to meet Don Felipe Ramón and his daughter, as perhaps you know. They await me at the guest house at the mission. They, too, have had a long journey—all the way from Spain by ship, to make their new home here in California."

"*Sí, señor!*"

"You will fetch me some honey and such poor bread as you have in your inn."

"No meat, Don Diego?"

"A bit of bread and honey—that is enough. I seldom eat meat. Such food is for men of turbulent manners, men who brawl and try feats of strength and skill. I tend more to philosophy and the poets."

"*Sí, señor!*" the landlord agreed. "At once, Don Diego!"

The landlord clapped his hands and hissed at his servants, and hurried to his kitchen.

The servants quickly spread one of the tables with a fine cloth, and put several fine dishes upon it, and a bowl of fruit, and bowed low when Don Diego Vega went to the table and sat down.

One brought a basin filled with warm, scented water, and a cloth, and bathed Don Diego's white hands, as

though he had been a helpless infant, and dried them. Then Don Diego sighed again and relaxed, and awaited his bread and honey.

"By the saints!" Valentino Vargas muttered in the doorway. "So this is the man who has come to escort Don Felipe Ramón to Reina de Los Angeles! This man and a few native servants—not more than three or four at the most! The task we have set ourselves seems no task at all. What gold and jewels this Don Felipe Ramón carries belongs to us already."

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING A NUT.

HAVING refreshed himself with bread and honey and wine, Don Diego Vega tossed the fat landlord a coin and arose to depart. He held his scented kerchief to his nostrils as he walked slowly and languidly through the lane the landlord made for him in the midst of the natives waiting outside, and got into his carriage. He relaxed, and sighed.

The carriage had no driver, but two natives rode the horses of the lead team. Two outriders followed behind, natives whose arrogant manner demonstrated that they knew whom they served. In a cloud of dust the vehicle swept around the plaza and took the trail which ran up the valley to the mission.

While Don Diego Vega had been inside the inn, the second carriage had passed, swathed in dust cloths and empty, and it had two outriders also. This was to convey Don Felipe Ramón and his daughter and her duenna from San Diego de Alcála to Reina de Los Angeles, where the Vegas had a splendid *casa.*

The carriage slowed as the horses were brought down to a walk to ascend a sharp slope, and Don Diego extended a hand outside, and one of the outriders galloped up beside him.

"Bernardo," Don Diego said, "you will keep your eyes and ears open after the mission is reached. You will have my black horse ready always, and you will be watching closely for any signal from me. It is understood?"

Don Diego glanced up, and the man Bernardo nodded that it was understood. He could not speak, for he was dumb. He was the faithful servant of Don Diego Vega, and knew many secrets, yet could tell none. Nor would he have done so had he a tongue, but would have allowed that tongue to be cut out of his mouth first.

Bernardo retired to his regular position at Don Diego's gesture for him to do so, and the carriage reached the top of the hill, and the horses went forward at a gallop. So they came to the mission which Junipero Serra had founded, with its splendid adobe buildings, its chapel and patio and guest house and storehouses, and servants hurried forward to catch the bridles of the horses and help to hold them still.

Don Diego Vega descended from his carriage, his manner as languid as usual, to be met by a gray-haired old monk, who gave him an immediate blessing.

"I am Brother Marcus, my son. Let me make you welcome to San Diego de Alcála. Your friends await you in the guest house, and I'll conduct you there. Your horses will have careful attention."

Don Diego followed him across the patio and beneath the arches to the guest house. This Don Felipe Ramón was an old friend of his father's, a

boyhood friend in Spain, and Don Diego never had seen him.

AT his entrance, a dignified nobleman arose and stepped forward to meet him. Behind him a beautiful *señorita* sat on a bench, busy with her embroidery frame, a grim-faced duenna beside her. The glance of Don Diego strayed there an instant, and the little *señorita* blushed and bent lower over her embroidery, though that did not prevent her lifting her eyes.

"Don Diego, I would have known you for the son of my old friend anywhere," Don Felipe Ramón declared. "You are exactly like he was at your age."

"I thank you, Don Felipe. My father sends his regards, and directs me to escort you and the others to Reina de Los Angeles."

"Let me present my daughter, Carmelita, then we may talk."

Señorita Carmelita Ramón acknowledged the introduction with a smile and a blush, though she seemed perturbed because Don Diego made no great show of gallantry. At a sign from her father, she then retired with her duenna to another chamber, and Don Diego and Don Felipe sat on a bench in a corner of the room.

"This journey to Reina de Los Angeles—how far is it?" Don Felipe asked.

"About four or five days, *señor*."

"Through rough country, no doubt?"

"We make stop each evening at some *hacienda*, where you will be a welcome guest. It has been arranged."

"But as we travel during the day—they tell me bandits are abroad in this land."

"There are always such blackguards abroad," said Don Diego, "but I pray you be not alarmed because of them. I shall protect you, Don Felipe."

Don Felipe glanced at him, and the expression in his face seemed to say that he doubted it exceedingly. This Don Diego Vega was of good blood, but did not seem the sort to be able to protect anybody.

"You have armed servants?" Don Felipe asked.

"Two carriages, *señor*, with two riders and two outriders to each. The outriders carry pistols, but are afraid to use them because of the noise and flame they make. They probably would run if highwaymen descended upon us."

"By the saints, Don Diego! I carry gold and jewels with me," Don Felipe said, lowering his voice.

"I judged as much, *señor*. No doubt some of the highwaymen have judged likewise."

"An escort of soldiery, perhaps—?"

Don Diego smiled. "I am afraid not, but I shall try. My father is the outspoken foe of the present Governor, and His Excellency's soldiers would grin if we were robbed."

"What are we to do, Don Diego? Frankly, you did not seem to realize the peril. My gold, my jewels—my daughter! Are all to be subjected to danger?"

"Perhaps," said Don Diego, "there are influences working in our behalf. Be not alarmed, I pray you, Don Felipe. Let us be prepared to start tomorrow at dawn. I have been up most of the night, and require some rest. Do you and the *señorita* get good rest today also. This evening we shall meet to dine."

"If we reach your father's house in Reina de Los Angeles without having our throats cut, it will surprise me,"

Don Felipe said. " Why was I not content to remain in Spain?"

" Before we reach my father's house you will love this new land, Don Felipe."

" If I am not first sent to that land from which none returns," Don Felipe replied. " We meet, then, for the evening meal."

BROTHER MARCOS appeared, and conducted Don Diego to a room assigned for his use, and made him comfortable, and retired. But Don Diego Vega did not sleep. He had sent one of his men to the *presidio* with a note as they had approached the town, and now was awaiting a reply to it.

The reply came. A rider galloped up to the mission. In a stentorian voice he bade a native care for his horse. He strode into the patio with his head held high, spurs jingling and sword clanking, and addressed a monk who bowed before him.

" Where is this Don Diego Vega? I want speech with him."

" He has retired, *capitán.*"

" Show me his resting place."

Don Diego opened the door of his room and stepped out beneath one of the arches.

" I am here, *capitán,*" he called.

The officer strode toward him, scowling. He was a young man for the rank, and plainly aware of his station and importance. He saluted Don Diego in haphazard fashion, and entered the room.

" I received your message, and I am here," he said. " Though I fail to see why I should come running at your nod. I am Capitán Carlos Gonzales, at present stationed in San Diego de Alcála. But I have just received my transfer to Reina de Los Angeles, and may leave for my new post at any time."

" You know of the presence here of Don Felipe Ramón and his party?" Don Diego asked.

" I do."

" It is known to you also that I have come to conduct them to Reina de Los Angeles?"

" It is."

" These be turbulent times," said Don Diego. " There is continual danger of robbery on the highway. Don Felipe has gold and jewels, and a daughter. I request a suitable military escort, *capitán,* to insure the safety of the party."

" I regret, Don Diego, that such an escort cannot be furnished. The men are being held in barracks. There are rumors of another uprising of the natives. Some renegade whites, headed by a certain Don Miguel—"

" All the more reason for giving us protection," Don Diego interrupted. " I'm afraid, *capitán,* that I must insist."

" Insist?" Capitán Carlos Gonzales roared. " I say you cannot have an escort. If you object to my decision, take it up with His Excellency the Governor at Monterey."

Don Diego smiled faintly.

" It would be difficult for a Vega to get the Governor's ear. Since you are transferring to Reina de Los Angeles, at least we may have the pleasure of your companionship on the journey, may we not? A brave officer like yourself would be the equal of a dozen troopers in an emergency."

CAPITÁN GONZALES sensed the sarcasm, but held his temper in check. He arose and bowed. " I regret that I cannot accompany you," he said. " I have not decided on

the moment of my departure. When I go, I shall ride swiftly, with only an orderly. *Señor, á Dios!*"

"One moment," Don Diego begged. "I have asked for protection, and you have refused it. You can have no objection, then, if I take measures to protect myself and those I escort."

Now, Capitán Carlos Gonzales smiled.

"Protect yourself, by all means," he replied. "That is the right of every man."

"By all means, *señor?*"

"In any way you please. If highwaymen attack you, slay them. Use blade or pistol, San Diego. Read poetry to them. Tell them philosophy. Scare them off with big words. Wave your perfumed handkerchief at them, perhaps."

"It is an item of philosophy," Don Diego said, "that one cannot tell from the external appearance of a nut just what sort of a kernel is within. And I use a perfumed handkerchief, *señor,* because at times I find my nostrils offended with a stench."

"*Señor!*" Capitán Gonzales cried, angrily.

"I thank you for coming here in answer to my note. I regret your inability to furnish me a proper escort. And I thank you for your kind permission for me to protect myself *by all means.* When you are stationed in Reina de Los Angeles, *capitán,* call at the Vega *casa.*"

Surprise flashed into the *capitán's* face at this unexpected invitation.

"I thank you, Don Diego," he said. "We keep a loaf and a jug of wine always ready for wayfarers. Just ask at the servants' quarters."

"This passes endurance!" the *capitán* cried. "You presume on your weakness, Don Diego. For me to challenge and fight you for your words —it would be plain murder. I doubt if you know how to hold a blade."

"As you ride back to the *presidio,*" Don Diego suggested, "remember the item of philosophy about the nut."

CHAPTER V.

AT THE PRESIDIO.

DON DIEGO bathed in perfumed water and dressed in fine raiment that evening, Bernardo assisting him, and went to the big room where the dinner table was ready. He had some speech with Bernardo before leaving his room, and the native's eyes flashed when the speech was over, and he nodded that he understood.

The little *señorita* was very lovely, and Señora Vallejo, her duenna, very grim, and Don Felipe looked worried and concerned about the forthcoming journey. But Don Diego might have been at home in his father's house, according to his conduct.

Señorita Carmelita could not complain about his lack of gallantry now, and the blushes played continually over her face. Yet she found herself wishing that this Don Diego seemed more of a strong man at times, and less the fop.

He made light of the journey they were facing, and of its dangers, and Don Felipe judged it was to reassure the ladies. But, when they were finally alone, Don Diego talked the same.

"Do you not understand that we may face peril?" Don Felipe asked. "Do you expect us to travel for four or five days through rough country, packing along a fortune, and not be attacked by rogues? You say an escort is denied you. How, then, are we to be protected?"

"Do not, I pray, concern yourself," Don Diego said. "I feel sure we'll reach Reina de Los Angeles safely, and bring through your gold and jewels safely also."

Don Felipe was shaking his head when Don Diego departed for his own room. The lights were being extinguished around the mission. The monks had sought their humble cots, and only a few natives were wandering about the patio and the buildings.

Don Diego Vega closed his window and dropped the tapestry over it, and stripped off his fine raiment. He dressed simply in dark clothing, extinguished the candle, and for a time stood at the door, his ears attuned to catch sounds outside.

Presently, he slipped out. Keeping in the deep shadows, and moving almost as silently as a shadow himself, he went along the patio wall, around the corner of a storehouse, and was outside.

Two hundred yards away, in a little gully, Bernardo was waiting with a big black horse. Don Diego Vega worked swiftly at a change of garments. He buckled on a sword, put dagger in his girdle and pistol in his sash, and finally put a black mask over his face.

Don Diego Vega was gone for the time being. Señor Zorro was there in the gully with Bernardo and the black horse.

"Wait here, Bernardo, for my return."

He mounted and rode slowly away from the mission, and down the valley toward the town, keeping some distance from the main road but paralleling it. Over the brow of a hill, he approached the *presidio*.

Lights were gleaming in the barracks room, and he could hear some of the troopers roaring a drunken song. He dismounted in a dark depression a short distance behind the building and went on afoot, cautious and alert. From the shape of the building, he guessed the location of the officers' quarters. Soon he was crouching in the darkness beneath an open window.

Capitán Carlos Gonzales was talking to a certain Sergeant Juan Ruiz, he made out, and their conversation interested him.

"Such is the report, *capitán,*" the sergeant was saying. "The masked man cut a letter Z on the cheek of this rogue of a Valentino Vargas, a fellow it may be well to watch. Hence, some of the *caballeros* are certain that the masked man was Señor Zorro."

"Zorro!". Gonzales cried. "If the fellow is really in our district, we must be alert. His Excellency would be more pleased at capture of him than at anything else I may name."

"One thing I may say, if the *capitán* will allow it. There was a time when it was suspicioned that Zorro and this Don Diego Vega were the same. Zorro appears at the inn, and a few hours later Don Diego comes in his carriage—"

THE wild laughter of the *capitán* stopped him. Gonzales gave vent to a gale of merriment, and finally was able to speak again.

"I have heard of that," he said. "But—I have met and talked with Don Diego Vega. Zorro—he? It is a jest! That weak, puny *caballero* who reads poetry and talks of philosophy? The sight of blood would turn him ill. Think you he could do the deeds this Zorro has done? If Don Diego and Zorro are in this neighborhood at the same time, it is a coincidence, and nothing more."

"It is as the *capitán* says," Sergeant Juan Ruiz replied.

"If Zorro really is here, and we can capture him—! Keep your eyes open, sergeant, and your ears. Watch the natives, and have some of the men who play with the bronze wenches question them. This Zorro befriends natives, and no doubt they are concealing him."

"It is understood, *capitán.*"

"What a country! Zorro—and this mysterious Don Miguel with his infernal scheme for a native uprising! I shall be glad to get me to Reina de Los Angeles."

"When does the *capitán* depart?" the sergeant asked.

"My relieving officer should be here by dawn. Then, I may leave at any time."

"And your escort, *capitán?*"

"I am taking you with me, Sergeant Ruiz, and nobody else. You are a good man, and have served me well. In Reina de Los Angeles, there will be better advantages for you."

"I thank the *capitán.*"

"We'll take one good pack horse along. See to it, sergeant. Now, I'll make inspection, and then retire."

Crouching in the darkness outside the window, Señor Zorro heard them leave the room, heard the heavy door slam and their boots ringing on the stone floor as they strode away, and also the sergeant's stentorian bellow calling the men to attention for inspection.

Señor Zorro waited a moment, then vaulted through the open window, and found himself in the *capitán's* quarters. It was a spacious room, lavishly furnished. Señor Zorro made a hasty inspection of it, then sat on a bench in a corner, and drew his pistol from his sash and held it ready.

He could hear orders being barked in the barracks room, and weapons clashing, and the snappy voice of the officer and the harsh one of Sergeant Juan Ruiz as they made the inspection. Then came the thump of boot heels on the stone flooring of the corridor, and Señor Zorro got to his feet and stood against the wall, ready and waiting.

Capitán Gonzales opened the door and entered, closed the door and dropped the heavy bar into place quickly, without observing that he had a visitor. As he turned from the door, Señor Zorro stepped out from the corner, pistol levelled.

"Make a sound, and you die!" he said. "Put your hands to your shoulders, *capitán!*"

Capitán Gonzales was startled, but made no outcry. He saw the masked man there in the shadows, and caught sight of the pistol, and put the tips of his fingers on his shoulders, as he had been ordered to do.

"Sit down at your table, and place your palms upon it," Zorro ordered.

THE *capitán* complied, but his eyes were flashing angrily. He swept those eyes over Señor Zorro as the latter stepped out into the bright light and advanced to the table swiftly and noiselessly, to sit down across it from the *capitán,* still holding the pistol in a menacing position.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" Gonzales asked, in a low voice.

"I am Zorro!"

"You have courage to come to the *presidio.*"

"There is little danger, *capitán.*" The voice in which he spoke was not that of Don Diego Vega, but was deeper. "I desired to talk to you."

"About what?"

"Perhaps to make a little deal."

"You wish to surrender and throw yourself on the mercy of His Excellency?" the *capitán* asked. "I cannot accept such a surrender. Word has been sent to catch Señor Zorro and hang him, and there can be no mercy shown, though you walk in and deliver yourself."

"I have no intention of surrendering," Zorro said. "Nor do I intend being captured. It is not of myself I wish to speak. You are about to transfer to Reina de Los Angeles, I understand. I would put you in the way of promotion."

"In what manner—and why?"

"Have you not heard rumors of the uprising being fomented by Don Miguel? Suppose I fell you, *capitán,* where and when you and your troopers may capture, at one swoop, all those white renegades who have taken service under this Don Miguel."

Capitán Gonzales betrayed a lively interest. He bent forward, and his eyes glowed.

"You can do that, and will? Why? Ah, I see! Rogues have fallen out. You and this mysterious Don Miguel have quarreled, and you would betray him."

"I am not in league with him. But I do not care to see white renegades lead natives to the slaughter. I am the friend of the natives, as you know. I would stop this uprising before it can get a good beginning."

"What have you to tell me?" Gonzales asked.

"You know the Canyon of the Cocopahs, near Reina de Los Angeles? Very well! There is to be a meeting of the conspirators in the canyon, the night of the full moon. I know it for a certainty. Is that enough?"

"It is ample, if true," Gonzales said.

"What motive could I have in telling an untruth about it? I have explained my motive for telling you this much. I do not wish to see ignorant natives stirred to revolt, to be slain and punished as a result."

"And what reward do you ask for this information?" Gonzales wished to know.

"It shall be my reward when you capture the white renegades, or frighten and disperse them. And, would you catch some big fish in the net, as well as small fry?"

"How is this?"

SEÑOR ZORRO bent forward a little and lowered his voice yet more.

"Don Diego Vega is at the mission here. He is to escort to Reina de Los Angeles this Don Felipe Ramón and his party. No doubt, highwaymen may attack them, unless they are protected."

"I have been obliged to deny them escort."

"Indeed? It may be to your interest, *capitán,* to see that they reach Reina de Los Angeles safely. They should arrive a couple of nights before the full moon. Don Diego and his family do not have the love of the Governor, I understand. If, when you capture the big fish— But I need not explain everything to a man of your understanding."

"What?" Gonzales cried. "You mean to intimate that—? If this be true, I am a made man. If any of the Vegas are concerned in this affair, and can be caught at it—"

"And if a rich friend newly come from Spain brings gold with which to further the enterprise—" Zorro hinted.

"By the saints! I almost have a friendly feeling toward you, if this is true."

"Why should I tell you false? Where would be the profit? I am not asking that, as a reward, my own misdeeds be forgiven. Take me, *capitán,* if you can. I am but protecting natives who have not the wit to protect themselves."

"If I furnished an escort, and nothing comes of this, the Governor would demote me."

"Why furnish an escort, *capitán?* You are riding to Reina de Los Angeles, are you not? Alone?"

"My sergeant will be with me."

"The two of you would be escort enough," Señor Zorro pointed out. "I know your sergeant—a burly fighter. You are not without courage yourself. The party undoubtedly will spend each night at some *hacienda.* Surely, you and your sergeant can repel any attack by two or three highwaymen in the daytime."

"It is an idea!" Gonzales declared. "We'll ride with the party. I thank you, Señor Zorro! But I'll capture you the next minute, if I can, and see you hanged, for that is orders."

Señor Zorro arose and bowed but still held the pistol ready. He backed across the room slowly, going toward the open window.

"Do me the favor of standing, *capitán,* with the tips of your fingers on your shoulders again," he ordered.

The *capitán* complied once more.

"I have done you a favor," Zorro said, "and even now you are wishing you could get to pistol or blade and try to take me. You are ungrateful, *señor.* Ingratitude is a thing often punished, so beware!"

"We'll meet again, Zorro!"

"Undoubtedly—but you may not know me when we do," Señor Zorro replied.

He had reached the window, and now he chuckled a bit behind his mask as the *capitán* took a step toward him. He got one leg over the window sill, laughed again, and vaulted through.

Behind him, he heard the *capitán's* roar for the sergeant and troopers. Bending low, Señor Zorro raced along the adobe wall through the shadows, making for the dark depression in which he had left his horse. A pistol exploded behind him, as Gonzales fired through the window, but the ball sped wild. Señor Zorro laughed again, and ran on.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRIME THAT FAILED.

SHORTLY after dawn, Capitán Carlos Gonzales appeared at the mission, mounted for a journey, and behind him rode Sergeant Juan Ruiz. Because they intended accompanying Don Diego and his party, they had left the pack horse behind, the *capitán* leaving behind also orders for his property to be forwarded as soon as possible.

He was a most resplendent *capitán* as he dismounted and strode into the patio, drawing off his riding gauntlets. Don Diego's two carriages were prepared, and his natives ready for the trip. Don Felipe's baggage had been loaded into a cart to make the journey slowly, but a strongbox was in one of the carriages, being closely guarded by Bernardo and another man.

The party came from the guest house, old Brother Marcos leading them. The *señorita* clung to Señora Vallejo's arm, and Don Diego walked on her other side, chatting and smiling at her, and gesturing with his scented handkerchief.

Capitán Gonzales confronted them.

"Don Diego Vega, I have made a reconsideration," he announced. "Though I cannot furnish you an escort—since the troopers are being held in readiness if the natives start an uprising—yet I will escort you and your party myself, and have a sergeant with me."

"It is, indeed, a change of heart, and I thank you," Don Diego said.

He presented Don Felipe and Don Felipe presented his daughter and her duenna and the *capitán* bowed gallantly to the *señorita* and claimed her hand for a kiss. Don Diego used his handkerchief again, but this time to hide a smile.

"We are indeed glad of your assistance, *señor,*" Don Felipe said.

"There are many rogues abroad," Don Diego added. "These hints of a native uprising disturb me. Then, there are highwaymen and bandits. And, so I am told, that notorious Señor Zorro has been seen in the vicinity."

Capitán Gonzales reddened. "It is said he has been near," he admitted. "The troopers will have him soon, and make short work of him. There is a rope waiting."

Don Diego, it seemed, had made rather peculiar arrangements for the journey. Don Felipe and his daughter and Señora Vallejo were to ride in the first big carriage. The two riders would direct the four horses, and the two outriders would ride behind. Not content with that, Don Diego sent the two outriders belonging to his own carriage to ride ahead of the cavalcade, in the manner of scouts.

He would ride alone in the second carriage, and follow the first, he said, having with him only the two riders to direct the double team. It was Don Felipe and his valuables that must be protected. Don Diego, he declared, had no fear of being set upon as he rode behind. Moreover, it were the part of a gentleman for him to take the dust, instead of letting the others take it.

Down the valley they went, and to the town. Capitán Gonzales rode close to the first carriage, as Don Diego imagined he would do, trying to catch the *señorita's* eye, and the sergeant rode a few feet behind him.

They passed through the town and followed El Camino Real up into the hills. The sun grew high and the fog lifted, and it began growing hot. The carriages stopped at intervals, for their occupants to see the view, or to get out and walk a bit and stretch their cramped limbs.

EARLY that morning, word of the departure had been given to some at the inn, and Valentino Vargas had called for his horse, had made ready for the trail and had ridden forth along the dusty highway. A few miles from the town, he met three more men, who were waiting for him.

They galloped far ahead and took position among some rocks beside the trail, and there lay in wait. But, when the carriages approached, Vargas swore mightily.

"Soldiers are with them," he said. "The *capitán* and a sergeant. Juan Ruiz is the equal of us all in combat, and his superior is no weakling, I have heard. They will be well armed. We cannot attack here."

They left the rocks and rode ahead again, gaining rapidly on the carriages.

"They will stop at the Pulido *hacienda* for the night," Valentino Vargas judged. "Pedro Pico will be waiting there, according to our plan. Perhaps we can strike during the night,

or when the backs of these two soldiers are turned."

So they rode on, toward the Pulido *hacienda,* a place which extended hospitality to any who asked for it. At times, they stopped on some crest and looked behind, watching the lifting dust clouds which told where the carriages traveled.

It was almost sunset when they came to the *hacienda* and asked permission to spend the night. Pedro Pico already was there, eating and drinking wine. The news of his infamy had not reached the *hacienda,* else he would have been denied food and drink.

Valentino Vargas and the three were shown to a long, low adobe building, which was a sort of guest house for inferiors, and made themselves at home. Pedro Pico came to them as they ate.

"The carriages are arriving," he whispered. "A score of native servants are rushing out to care for the guests. One of the outriders galloped forward with news of their coming."

"Let us see that these native servants of Don Diego have ample wine," Vargas suggested. "It will be well if their brains are addled tomorrow, in case we do not commit our fault tonight."

The master of the Pulido estate met his guests and conducted them into the big house, and soon candles were gleaming through all the windows, and the great table was set, with fine linen and crystal glass and gleaming silver, and heaped high with food.

Leaving the others in the guest house, Valentino Vargas and Pedro Pico passed slowly under the palms in the gloom, and neared a window through which they could peer into the big room of the house and watch the scene.

"If we can learn where the strongbox is kept for the night, perhaps we can obtain it," Vargas whispered. "We can have our horses in readiness, and hurry into the hills as soon as we have the gold and jewels. We can be gone before any can saddle and overtake us."

"How about the soldiers?" Pedro Pico asked.

"The *capitán* will spend the night inside the *casa,* and the big sergeant possibly will be in the guest house. We must beware the sergeant, for he is no fool. But he will be tired, and eager to get to sleep. As soon as he snores, we will get busy. Counting you, we are five."

HIDING in the shadows, they watched closely. Lights burned suddenly in the window of a room on the second floor, and they saw two of Don Diego's servants enter it, carrying something which they put down against the wall.

"*Dios!* It is the strong box," Vargas said. "That window will be easy of access. That strong vine which runs up the wall—a man can climb it. What could be better, Pedro Pico? One man can climb the vine and get the box and toss it out—then we'll be away, and divide the loot."

"Why divide it so many ways?" Pedro Pico asked.

"How is this?"

"Why not the two of us do this thing ourselves, and divide the loot in halves? I can get our horses ready and hide them under the trees. You can throw the others off guard, saying you are slipping out to reconnoiter while they watch the sergeant—"

"And I can go up the vine and get the box," Vargas finished for him, "and toss it down to you. And, if you

try to make away with it alone—"

"You may trust me, my friend," Pedro Pico said.

"If you played me false, I'd find you, if it took me a lifetime," Vargas hissed. "So be it! The thing is done."

They wandered back to the guest house. The sergeant had gone there, but was outside eating his evening meal, and Vargas called the other three men to him.

"Pedro Pico will go about his business, seeming to have no interest in us," he whispered. "I'll slip out and see what I can learn, and you three remain here and act in a manner natural until the big sergeant is snoring."

He slipped out again with Pedro Pico, and the latter went to get their horses and make them ready for the trail. Valentino Vargas crouched in the shadows and watched the window. The candles were still gleaming in the room. He caught sight of old Don Felipe Ramón once, and then nobody came near the window.

In time, the candles were extinguished. Pedro Pico came slipping to him through the shadows, saying that the horses were tethered a short distance away. Stretched on the ground, they waited until the big house was dark, until travelers weary from a journey should be wrapped in sleep.

"Now!" Valentino Vargas said.

They crept to the wall of the house, and Vargas tested the vine, which bore his weight. With Pedro waiting below, he began the ascent, going slowly and testing the vine repeatedly. He came presently to the open window, and was quiet a moment, listening, clinging to the vine until his arms ached. He could hear low snores.

Through the window he went, and stood panting against the wall. The couch, he made out, was on the opposite side of the room. A streak of moonlight came through, and revealed a bundle of bedclothing, beneath which was a sleeper, Valentino Vargas thought.

He could not see the box in the moonlight, nor could he find it as he felt along the wall. It would be necessary, he decided, to use stern measures, to make a light, arouse the sleeper, threaten him and get the box, which possibly might be under the couch.

In a corner, Valentino Vargas took a bit of candle from a pocket of his jacket, drew out flint and steel, and struck. Soon, the wick caught, and the tiny flame sprang up. Shielding the flame with a hand, Valentino Vargas started toward the couch.

"Stand!" a voice warned, softly.

Vargas stood as though stricken. The voice had come from behind him.

"Turn slowly, and do not let the candle go out, unless you wish to die!"

Valentino Vargas turned, his heart hammering at his ribs, trying to think how he could make his escape through the window and down the vine. Some man had been left there as guard, he supposed.

The light of the candle penetrated to the corner, and Valentino Vargas's eyes bulged. Standing there with levelled pistol was Señor Zorro.

CHAPTER VII.

FUTILE SEARCH.

"YOU, *señor?*" Vargas mouthed, almost dropping the candle in his astonishment.

"Speak in low tones," Señor Zorro advised. "What are you doing here? Why did you climb up the vine and get through the window?"

"As to that, what do you here yourself?" Vargas countered. "Are you, perhaps, a welcome guest in the house of the Pulidos?"

"You came to steal," Zorro accused. "Did you not?"

"And I presume you yourself came just to pass the time of day? It appears, Señor Zorro, that we are on the same errand."

"Perhaps not, my burly friend. I did not come to steal the gold and jewels belonging to Don Felipe Ramón, and I am quite sure you did. I anticipated this visit, *señor*, though I did not know what man would make it."

"Is it that I must halve the takings with you?" Vargas asked. If he could decoy this Zorro to the ground, where Pedro Pico could give aid, he might be outwitted, Vargas thought.

"There will be no takings," Zorro told him. "The strong box of Don Felipe is not to be touched."

"How is this? When did Señor Zorro become so considerate of other people's property?"

"You are slightly in error," Zorro told him. "I am not a thief. I never have stolen. I defend the oppressed and sometimes punish dishonest men and boasters—such as yourself."

Vargas remembered the mark on his left cheek. Despite the menace of the pistol, he hissed a threat.

"I'll kill you for what you did to me, Zorro! When I get the opportunity—"

"As to that, the future will tell us," Zorro interrupted. "Just now, I have something to say to you, and you may pass the word to any others who have eyes on Don Felipe's gold and jewels. They are not to be touched. Don Miguel would not like it."

"Don Miguel? What has he to do with this Don Felipe?"

"You may learn that at the meeting in the Canyon of the Cocopahs. Don Felipe is under the protection of Don Miguel, and all interested will do well to remember it. The gold and jewels are destined for a purpose."

Valentino Vargas had retreated to the window, but Zorro followed him, keeping the distance the same.

"Are you not afraid of being caught?" Vargas asked. "Who is sleeping on the couch?"

"Nobody, *señor*. 'Tis but a roll of bedding shaped to resemble a human body. I, myself, did the snoring when I saw you climbing the vine. Do you descend the vine now, and be gone."

"We'll meet again, Zorro."

"Undoubtedly," Zorro said. "Remember, *señor*, I have eyes in the back of my head, and I am as good with a pistol as I am with a blade."

"For the mark you made on my cheek, I intend to kill you!"

"A man's intentions are many, but not always does he carry them out," Zorro observed. "Begone!"

He stepped forward and pressed Valentino Vargas back into the moonlight. Vargas extinguished the candle and got through the window, and made a rapid descent. He met Pedro Pico in the darkness.

"He is in that room—Zorro," he whispered. "He confronted me. He said Don Felipe Ramón's property must not be touched, that it is an order from Don Miguel."

"What is the meaning of that?"

"I know not. Don Miguel or no Don Miguel, we try to get the gold and jewels," Vargas declared. "It is a swifter way to wealth than participating in an uprising for the sake of loot. As for this Zorro, come with me. I'll inform the sergeant, and he will be captured."

"If we inform, and he is caught, there may be a reward."

"Precisely," Vargas replied. "Also, I shall have the pleasure of seeing the fellow's face, and of watching it turn black when they hang him. Let us make haste."

THEY left the horses where they were, and hurried to the guest house, and Valentino Vargas shook Sergeant Juan Ruiz until he came awake, cursing because his sleep had been broken.

"Señor Sergeant, awake!" Vargas whispered. "Zorro is here! My friend and I watched him climb up a vine and enter the house through a window. He can be taken, if you make haste."

Sergeant Juan Ruiz sprang off the cot and reached for the clothing he had discarded.

"You are sure, fellow?" he demanded, as he struggled into his boots.

"Did not the rogue mark my face at the inn?" Vargas demanded. "Did he not gamble with Pico here, and denounce him for a cheat? We know him, my sergeant. He went up the vine and into an open window—"

"Enough!" The sergeant buckled on his blade and reached for his pistol. He aroused the others in the guest house and bade them dress and arm quickly. He darted to the adobe huts and aroused some of the field servants, and ordered them to surround the house.

Then, Sergeant Juan Ruiz pounded on the big front door of the *casa*, bellowing for everybody to awake. Valentino Vargas and Pedro Pico kept back in the shadows, ready to escape if anything went wrong, yet eager to be present if Señor Zorro was led from the house a captive.

Inside, lights gleamed, and the big front door was opened. Sergeant Ruiz darted inside, howling for his *capitán*. He aroused the entire household. Frightened servants, half clad, came tumbling down the stairs and into the big room from their quarters in the rear. The master of the house appeared, and Don Felipe Ramón, and Capitán Gonzales with blade in one hand and pistol in the other.

"Sergeant, what is this uproar?" the *capitán* demanded.

"Zorro is in the house! He was seen climbing a vine and getting through a window. There can be no mistake. I have the house surrounded, *capitán*."

Capitán Gonzales had faith in his subordinate, and he knew what capture of Zorro would mean for him personally. He strengthened the cordon around the house, then began a search of the interior. By this time, the ladies of the household were awake, and badly frightened, and Señor Pulido was doing his best to quiet their fears.

More candles were lit, and the search began, a methodical search which started on the lower floor and soon spread to the upper. Not a spot was missed. Pistols held ready, the *capitán* and the sergeant led the others.

BUT no Zorro was found. So, at last, they came to the room through which he was supposed to have entered the house, and pounded on the door.

"Is this room occupied?" Capitán Gonzales asked.

"Don Diego Vega sleeps there," Señor Pulido replied. "He has with him his mute servant, Bernardo."

The *capitán* pounded on the door again, and they heard the heavy bar being withdrawn, and the door was

opened. The giant native, Bernardo, stood there, a bludgeon in his hand and an expression of ferocity in his face. Behind him, wrapped in a silk dressing gown, yawning and rubbing the sleep from his eyes, was Don Diego Vega.

"Has the native uprising begun?" Don Diego asked, in a voice seemingly half choked with sleep.

"Lights!" Gonzales roared. "Search the room!"

"For what?" Don Diego demanded.

"Señor Zorro was seen climbing the vine and entering your window," Gonzales said.

"Nonsense! Bernardo would have heard him. Moreover, my throat is not cut. And Don Felipe's strong box, which I undertook to guard, is safe there at the end of the couch. Somebody has been dreaming, *capitán.*"

Gonzales' face grew red. The others were commencing to regard him with reproach. Señor Pulido was muttering something about dumb officers.

"Sergeant Ruiz!" Gonzales thundered. "What mean you by this false alarm? You have aroused everybody. You have made a fool of me!"

"Two men in the guest house told me they had seen the rogue climb the vine and enter the window."

"Find them, and hold them until morning, and I'll deal with them," Gonzales thundered. "My friends, I regret this occurrence. My sergeant has been overzealous. He shall be properly punished, I assure you."

Sergeant Juan Ruiz had not waited to hear that. He had dashed down the wide stairs and out the front door, and was howling for Valentino Vargas and Pedro Pico. But that pair had heard of the futile search, and knew what the outcome would be as far as they were concerned. They did not tarry to face the sergeant's wrath. There was a clatter of hoofbeats, and they were away, galloping up El Camino Real.

The din subsided, and Don Diego Vega closed and barred the door. In the candlelight, he looked at Bernardo, and grinned, and Bernardo grinned in reply, knowing there would be no rebuke to him for doing so.

"It is well they did not search beneath the couch," Don Diego said, softly.

For the costume of Señor Zorro was beneath the couch, and Zorro's weapons and mask also, and now Bernardo swiftly made them all into a bundle, to be carried away at dawn.

And it had been no bedclothing in the shape of a human on the couch when Valentino Vargas had been in the room, but Bernardo himself, and all the time he had held a pistol trained on that same Valentino Vargas, for use in case the unbelievable happened and Señor Zorro had been caught at a disadvantage.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRAWL ON THE BEACH.

THEY were away at dawn, traveling as before, Don Felipe's carriage leading and that of Don Diego following a short distance behind.

That evening they stopped at another *hacienda,* where they were honored guests, and a *fiesta* was given in their honor, and natives danced and ate and drank and sang their queer songs. Sitting beneath the arches in the patio, the guests watched, and Don Diego saw Señorita Carmelita's face flushed and eyes sparkling.

"You like our land?" he asked.

"I love it already, *señor.*"

"Give not all your love to the coun-

try," he whispered, as he bent toward her. "Save some for perhaps another purpose."

She flashed him a quick look, and dimpled and blushed, then turned her head swiftly and pretended to be watching the dancers again. Señora Vallejo pretended to be deaf and blind, for she had been informed by Don Felipe that it would be better so.

"Another day of journeying, and still another, and we shall be at San Juan Capistrano," Don Diego said. "There is a mission! It is an estate, no less. My good friend, Brother Luis, will be there. If ever I wed, I wish him to perform the ceremony."

"You are thinking of marriage?" Carmelita asked.

"I did not think much of it until recently," he replied boldly. "Not until I made this trip to San Diego de Alcala."

He was leaning back in his seat, brushing his nostrils with the scented handkerchief, still very much the fop. He had been reciting poetry to her earlier in the evening.

Carmelita wished that this noble scion of the Vegas were more a man. She knew well that it was hoped she would wed with him. His family was all that could be desired, and they were wealthy in this new land of California. There was no question about that. But Señorita Carmelita had some romantic dreams, and she wished for lover and husband a man of spirit, at whom she could look up with pride.

She sighed, and he bent closer to her still, and she caught the perfume from his silken handkerchief.

"Shall we take a stroll in the moonlight?" Don Diego asked.

"Señora Vallejo gets a pain in her leg when she goes out in the mist or dew."

"Can we not stroll where she can see us from here?"

"Perhaps some other evening, Don Diego."

"You do not like me," he accused.

"How could it be otherwise, *señor?* You are courtesy itself. And our fathers are lifelong friends."

"You would have me some different, perhaps?"

"Well — perhaps," she admitted. "A girl has dreams."

"I understand, *señorita.* You would like me better if I rode spirited steeds, and drank and gambled and fought each time I fancied myself insulted. You would have me play a guitar beneath your window—"

"I would have you be a *caballero* in fact as well as in blood," she interrupted boldly, getting to her feet and motioning to Señora Vallejo. "You will kindly excuse me now, Don Diego? I must have some rest."

HIS eyes were twinkling as he bowed to her and stood aside to let her pass and enter the house. Don Felipe observed it, and sat down beside him when Don Diego resumed his seat.

"It would please me, Don Diego, and I am sure it would please your father also, if you and Carmelita liked each other," Don Felipe said.

"She would have me more a man, I think."

"It surprises me, Don Diego—not that I desire to criticize, understand—that you are not of a more turbulent spirit. Your own father, when he was your age—ah, what a man! What an adventurous spirit! It led him to this new land with his bride."

"Allow me to repeat to you, Don Felipe, an item of philosophy," Don Diego said. "It is an item I love. It

is impossible to tell, by the exterior appearance of a nut, what sort of a kernel is inside."

Don Felipe Ramón glanced at him furtively, cleared his throat, and arose.

"I think," said he, "that I shall retire. We have another day of dusty journeying before us."

Don Diego arose and bowed, and his eyes were twinkling again as Don Felipe departed.

The following evening they made another stop at a *hacienda,* where another *fiesta* had been prepared for them, and the little *señorita,* though polite and courteous, kept slightly aloof. And on the next day they got an early start for San Juan Capistrano, where they intended to make a stop. There had been no attack along the way. Capitán Gonzales and a chastened Sergeant Juan Ruiz had ridden beside the Ramón carriage, and fondly believed it was their presence that kept highwaymen at a distance.

Capitán Gonzales made the most of his opportunities. He sensed that all was not well between Don Diego Vega and the *señorita.* This Carmelita Ramón appealed to him, and, also, her father had brought wealth from Spain.

Capitán Gonzales, a handsome sort of fellow about whom the women had flocked in San Francisco de Asis and Monterey, believed that he had a way with women. What if he could win the heart and hand of Carmelita Ramón and marry into family and money?

So he paid what court he could and fancied he was making some headway, though it was evident that Señora Vallejo did not fancy him, and Don Felipe was only coldly polite.

Now they were traveling within a short distance of the tumbling sea, and the rushing wind cooled them and blew the dust aside. Over a hill they went, and around a curve in the highway, and saw the mission of San Juan Capistrano before them, with its groups of adobe buildings surrounding it, and crowds of natives going about their work.

Brother Luis welcomed them cordially, but beamed upon Don Diego Vega. The natives, too, crowded around him, not for alms, but as though greeting a benefactor. Don Diego Vega was getting to territory where he was known, not only as himself but also as that Señor Zorro who rode to right wrongs, though this secret was well locked within their breasts.

THEY were ushered into the guest house and given quarters, and a meal was spread for them. The horses were taken away to receive proper care.

Don Diego cleansed himself, Bernardo fetching warm water and perfuming it for him.

"Señor Zorro has been called the Curse of Capistrano," Don Diego said, speaking softly. "This is supposed to be his home. It would not surprise me if he made an appearance here."

Bernardo grinned and bobbed his head.

"At any rate, it would be well that, should he so desire it, he find his horse ready, and his clothing also, in the arroyo behind the huts of the natives any time tonight."

Bernardo bobbed his head again.

"I go now to stroll in the patio, and possibly down to the ocean's shore to take the breeze. You need not attend me."

Don Diego had taken some time with his toilet. When he emerged, he found

that others had entertained the idea of a stroll on the beach. Don Felipe Ramón had gone there with his daughter and her duenna, and they were walking back and forth, looking out at the sea.

Capitán Gonzales was in the patio, and approached.

"You are perhaps thinking of a stroll, Don Diego?" he asked.

"Perhaps—alone."

Gonzales' face flamed.

"There are times, Don Diego, when you speak in a tone almost insulting. Perhaps you do not fancy the soldiery. Perhaps you do not favor a reign of law and order."

"The present Governor and his soldiery are not exponents of law and order."

"Is this treason?" Gonzales demanded. "I am one of His Excellency's officers, and cannot endure such talk."

"You are at liberty, *señor,* to take your ears where they cannot hear it."

"Those who deal in treason may flourish for a time, but, in the end, they stretch a rope. This mysterious Don Miguel, and this Señor Zorro, for instance—their end soon will come."

"It does not interest me," Don Diego complained.

"If you are thinking of taking a stroll on the beach with the little *señorita,* spare yourself the trouble. I asked to stroll with the party, and she said she wished to be alone."

"Perhaps you do not have a way with the ladies," Don Diego told him.

"Have I not? More of a way with them, I dare say, than a poet and philosopher. The little *señorita* is not the sort, I think, to prefer one who is not a man of red blood as well as blue."

"One of blue blood," Don Diego informed him, "does not discuss a lady so frankly."

He left Gonzales fuming and fumbling at the hilt of his sword, and walked on. Down toward the tumbling water he went, where the rollers were breaking on the rocks. Don Felipe and his daughter and Señora Vallejo were just starting to pass around the huge rocks to continue along the beach.

As he started to follow them around the rocks, he heard the *señorita* scream.

Don Diego ran forward as swiftly as he could through the heavy sand. He rounded the rocks, and came upon a scene.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Bunched Knuckles

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Author of "Strong Medicine," "No Quarter," etc.

"I'm not a policeman," said Jax Bowman, "I'm an adventurer"—and he used his own tactics in fighting a murder gang

CHAPTER I.

THE TYPEWRITER CLUE.

BIG JIM GROOD looked up in surprise, as a sunburned young man in the early thirties entered his office with quick, springy steps.

"Hell," Grood said, with the bluntness of a man who had spent years on the metropolitan police force, "I thought you were down in Florida catching swordfish."

Jax Bowman smiled. "I was, but I couldn't get any kick out of it."

Big Jim Grood swung around in the swivel chair. His right hand, a battered mass of bony knuckles, shot out to squeeze the right hand of the younger man. "What do you mean, 'no kick in it'?" he asked.

Bowman was going to go out fighting

The bronzed features of the young millionaire twisted into a grin. "A while back," he said, "when you came to me with that idea of financing a central bureau of crime detection, I thought the idea was worth a trial, but that was about all. Now I'm getting all enthused over it. Nothing else gives me any kick."

Cutting deliberately sighted down the revolver

"That's because you decided to smash the crooks after solving mysteries," Grood answered. "It ain't the detection you get the thrill out of, it's the action. When you got the idea of putting on black masks, with white rings painted around the eyes, and busting up organized underworld, *I* thought *you* were crazy. I still don't see why we have to have such goofy masks."

Bowman laughed, and said, "It's the psychology of the thing. The criminal mind is afraid of the unknown and it's afraid of the bizarre. They know too much about the politicians who can control police organizations, about the

shyster lawyers and jury bribing detectives, to feel any fear of ordinary justice. But this mask idea gets on their nerves. The fact they can't find out anything about this new enemy is a powerful psychological factor in adding to their fear."

Grood said, "Well, if you came back from fishing to get action, Miss Marchand was giving me a sketch of some funny stuff this morning."

The smile faded from Jax Bowman's face. His eyes became cold, hard, and scintillating. He pressed a button on the desk.

"Let's have her in," he said.

Rhoda Marchand was swift and efficient in her motions. She entered the door, smiled at Jax Bowman, said, "Did you have a pleasant trip, chief?" and was pulling newspaper clippings from a briefcase before Bowman had an opportunity to answer.

"I presume," she said, "you're interested in the two murders that I called to Mr. Grood's attention this morning."

"Were they murders?"

Rhoda Marchand spread out the newspaper clippings on the table.

SINCE the time Jax Bowman had taken over a suite of offices, on the doors of which appeared no name, installed a complicated system of filing equipment, subscribed to press clipping bureaus, and placed Rhoda Marchand in charge of the office personnel, she had developed encyclopedic knowledge of crime.

Every day hundreds of newspaper clippings were sent to her desk. These clippings dealt with isolated crimes. It was the duty of Rhoda Marchand to read them, index them according to a mode-of-operation formula, and constantly sift through the records for the purpose of picking out various crimes which had a similarity in the means of execution.

The police of Idaho, for instance, might encounter what to them seemed an isolated crime, but Rhoda Marchand's photographic memory would send her to her files, where she would soon ascertain that an exactly similar crime had been perpetrated, perhaps several weeks ago, in San Francisco, while another in Denver might well have been the work of the same criminal. These clippings would then be pinned together and sent to the eccentric millionaire who had, at the instigation of Big Jim Grood, organized the most unique philanthropy which any man of money had ever been called upon to support.

Jax Bowman gave extensively to organized charity; but he gave only of money. Aside from the details of his business, the only philanthropy which claimed any of his time was that strange activity instituted at the suggestion of the big ex-police captain, the tracking down of those criminals whose widespread scope of operation made them virtually immune from local police.

"Anything peculiar about the murders, Jim?" Bowman asked.

Jim Grood was of the old school. He believed that there was more respect for law in a night-stick, or in a pair of smashing knuckles, than in the courts of justice. His creed was action. Reading was not one of the things at which he was good, so he merely pushed the clipping across to Bowman. Bowman glanced at Rhoda.

SPEAKING clearly, in clean-cut forceful sentences, she gave the details: "A peculiar method of murder," she said. "The first body

was dropped from an airplane, in the Imperial Valley of California, close to the Mexican border. It was dropped near a highway, where it was certain to be discovered. An envelope had been pinned to an inside pocket. In the envelope was a paper, on which appeared a typewritten message, telling police that they would find upon investigation the body to be that of Esther Milbank, who had last resided at 6298 Center Avenue, Denver, Colorado; that some two years ago she had disappeared from Denver; that her mother, who was now dead, had requested Denver police to locate her, but the girl had taken an assumed name and had never been found by the police; that she had recently been working in the Black Cat Dance Hall at Mexicali, under the name of Trixie."

Jax Bowman's eyes showed his keen interest.

"Any known motive for the murder?"

"No."

"There was, perhaps, some jealousy?"

"Perhaps," Rhoda Marchand agreed. "If so, the police haven't discovered it."

"You say the body was dropped from a plane?"

"Yes."

"Killed by the fall?"

"Either that, or the young woman had been struck on the head before being thrown out. The plane was probably not over one hundred feet above the desert. A motorist told the police at El Centro he had been driving over the road the night before and had heard a plane flying very low. He said it passed over him like a big bird blotting out the stars. He thought at first it was going to scrape the top of his automobile. Then, as it roared away, he realized it must have been more than a hundred feet above the ground; but that's close enough when an airplane goes over."

"Any description of the plane?"

"No. You see, the man saw it through the windshield of his automobile as a shadowy object against the sky. He can't tell whether it was a monoplane or a biplane."

"Interesting," said Bowman, "and you've something else along the same line?"

"Yes. Esther Milbank's body was found two weeks ago."

Bowman nodded, "I remember reading something about it."

"Yesterday," Rhoda Marchand went on, "the body of a man was found in a cheap rooming house near the Black Belt in Chicago. The man apparently had committed suicide by stabbing himself in the heart with a knife. His right hand was clutched around the hilt of the knife."

Bowman stared at her thoughtfully. "How does this tie up with the Esther Milbank murder?" he asked.

"The man left behind a statement," she said. "The statement was in typewriting." With swift efficiency her nimble fingers picked up one of the newspaper clippings. She read in a clear and distinct but very rapid voice: "My name is Arthur Brecton. I lived at 1747 South Melton Street, Los Angeles. I am an embezzler. I embezzled twenty-five thousand dollars from the Betterbilt Building & Loan Company when money was pouring in. I didn't intend to steal it. I only borrowed it to invest, but when the depression caused a shrinkage in value, the investigation by the State auditors left me no alternative except to skip out. I have been going under the name of Charles James Montague, but that

isn't my real name. The twenty-five thousand is all gone. Most of it was gone before I ran away."

"Any signature to that note?" Big Jim Grood asked.

"No, it was just a typewritten note the police found near the body."

JAX BOWMAN stared at his efficient secretary in frowning concentration.

"What we are interested in," he said, "are crimes that show a common motive, a *modus operandi,* which indicates them to be the work of one or more criminals following a common purpose. Just how do you figure there is any relationship between these two crimes?"

Miss Marchand's voice was as smoothly efficient as the voice of a nurse in an operating room. "You see," she explained, "there were facsimiles of the typewritten statements published in the newspapers in both instances. I happened to check them over and noticed that both were written on the same typewriter. See where the 'e' is turned slightly to one side and the 'r' has a dent in the bottom? Then the 's' has a peculiar tilt. The 'a' is out of alignment. Here are facsimiles of both notes."

Jax Bowman gave a low whistle. "By George," he exclaimed, "you're right!"

Big Jim Grood said impatiently, "Aw, forget it. That handwriting expert stuff doesn't get you anywhere."

"It does in this instance," Jax Bowman said. "Typewriting is even more distinctive than handwriting, and where a machine has been used for some time and the type is out of alignment, it's readily possible to make a positive identification of different specimens of writing turned out by them. Those two notes were written on the same machine."

"Well," Grood said, "what if they were?"

Jax Bowman's face was alive with interest. His eyes were like those of a cat watching a bird. It was at such moments that the latent talent of the man was brought out. The challenge of crime detection aroused his interest, speeded up his mental processes.

Rhoda Marchand, recognizing the symptoms, reached for her pen.

"Make a file for this case," Bowman said, his words quick and incisive "Make general notes on crime motivation as follows: Statement prepared on identical typewriter found on bodies widely separated; therefore, statements must either have been prepared in advance, or typewriter must have been moved from place to place—probably the latter theory is correct. Therefore, typewriter is a portable — typewritten statement left on supposed suicide is not the general type of statement a suicide would leave. There is no explanation for his act—no apology to the world—no attempt to enlist sympathy —both statements have this in common: they take extraordinary precautions to ascertain that the body of the deceased will be identified. The object of this is not to secure a proper burial, because in the one instance it proves the deceased to have been a felon and in the other instance the girl, who left no relatives, is branded with the stigma of having been a dance hall girl."

Bowman hesitated a moment, then said, "That's all to put on that statement at present."

HE turned to Grood and asked, "Jim, do you know any crook who pilots an airplane?"

Grood said thoughtfully, "Yes—

three or four of them who are out of stir and one or two who are in."

"Make a list of them," Bowman said, "and we'll have private detective agencies check up on their present locations and where they've been for the past few weeks."

He turned to Rhoda Marchand and said, "Rhoda, get a force of men at work tracing the family connections of these two people. Also collect newspaper advertisements asking for missing heirs of various estates. Cover all the principal cities."

Jim Grood frowned and said, "What makes you think this is something in connection with an estate, chief?"

"Simply this," Bowman replied. "There have been extraordinary pains taken to show the authorities the real identities of the dead persons. I can't understand why that should have been done, unless there are some legal rights affected by it. You'll notice that the murderer seemed greatly interested in enabling authorities to make an absolute identification of the bodies of his victims. I can't help but think that the motive is tied up with that identification."

Jim Grood nodded slow acquiescence. "There may be something to that," he admitted.

"If it should turn out that these persons are remotely related to each other, there'll be a lot to it," Bowman answered grimly.

"In which event," Grood said, grinning, "we'll be beating the police to it."

"Anything else?" Rhoda Marchand asked with crisp efficiency.

"Yes," Bowman told her. "If it should turn out that these people were related, no matter how distantly, I want you to find the common ancestor and then trace every other relative. I don't care how much money we have to spend. Put a hundred research workers on it, if necessary."

She nodded and left the office.

Jax Bowman, grinning, walked across the room to a wall safe. He thumbed the combination, opened the steel door and, with a solemnity which made something of a ritual of it, took out a brace of .45 automatics, and two black masks with round holes cut for the eyes and white rings painted around the holes, giving to the masks a hideous appearance of unwinking vigilance.

"This," he said, "beats jiggling a line in the water, waiting for swordfish to strike."

CHAPTER II.

NEXT VICTIM.

THE mysterious offices occupied by Jax Bowman and Big Jim Grood clattered with feverish activity. Messages streamed in and out over the wires. Private detective agencies in different cities flung all available men into hurried investigation. And it was significant of this organization which Bowman had worked out, that, so far as the detective agencies knew, no two of them were working for the same client.

Rhoda Marchand worked frantically, tabulating and classifying the various information received.

Within twenty-four hours she was able to assemble a complete report and then the wires flashed messages to the various detective agencies, instructing them to cease work.

It was the type of service which only a multi-millionaire could have commanded. Within a space of hours, trained investigators had covered the entire country with swift activity.

From information which they had been able to furnish, cablegrams had been sent to foreign countries. In some instances, there had even been transoceanic telephone conversations. Then, as suddenly as this had started, the investigation had ceased, its cessation brought about partially because Bowman feared to alarm the men whom he sought, should the search be too long continued, and partially because, from the information which had been received, Bowman was able to make several logical deductions.

With Rhoda Marchand's report in his hands, Bowman sought out Big Jim Grood.

"The hunch was right," he said. "We traced back the families of the victims, and find they had one common ancestor, George Cutler Proctor. Proctor died in England. He left a large estate. It's been tied up in administration, while counselors were looking for Sidney Proctor, who was on an exploring trip into the upper Amazon.

"Some three weeks ago, a man who claimed he was the sole survivor of the expedition appeared in Manaos. He told a story of incredible hardships, of gold, of hostile natives, of a surprise attack and a massacre."

Jim Grood knitted his eyebrows in puzzled thought, as he wrestled with the mental problem. "Let's see if I get this straight," he said. "Old man Proctor left a lot of money and the money went to Sidney."

"That's right."

"Then if Sidney dies, why doesn't it go to Sidney's heirs?"

"Because Sidney didn't leave any wife, children, brothers or sisters."

"Any more of Proctor's heirs besides the two who got bumped?" Jim Grood inquired.

"Two. One is named Phyllis Proctor. She lives in the Brentwood Apartments in San Francisco. Then there another chap named Harry Cutting. He's an older man, somewhere in the late forties. He was in business in Cleveland. The business failed and Cutting went through bankruptcy. The creditors claimed a fraud had been practised, but they were never able to prove anything. Cutting vanished. No one knows what became of him."

"He may be dead," Grood suggested.

"Perhaps," Bowman agreed, "but let's figure this thing from a business viewpoint. *If* those two murders were committed because someone wanted two of the Proctor heirs out of the way, the murderer must have been some person who would profit by the death. That person probably isn't Phyllis Proctor, since she would have shared equally with the two who were killed. Harry Cutting, on the other hand, wouldn't have shared in the estate at all while any of the other three were alive."

"But look here," Grood objected. "Suppose Cutting *is* back of this thing. When he comes to claim his inheritance, lawyers are going to start chasing down the records to find out what happened to the other heirs. If it turns out that three of them got bumped off within a few weeks of each other, and all under similar circumstances, it's going to put Cutting's neck in a noose."

BOWMAN nodded. "That," he said, "is true, except that you must remember there's no similarity whatever in the circumstances except for the typewritten notes. Within a few weeks the typewritten note left by Arthur Brecton will have been

forgotten. Remember, his death looked like a suicide, rather than a murder."

"Then how about Phyllis?"

"If Phyllis should die, it will doubtless be by some entirely different means. She may die in an automobile accident, or something of that sort."

"But how about a typewritten note in her case?"

"There may not be any," Bowman said. "Phyllis Proctor is going under her right name. She's living in San Francisco and working as a stenographer—that is, she had been working up until a few weeks ago. Apparently she's out of a job at present. If she should die, there would be no difficulty whatever establishing her identity. The other two were, for various reasons, using assumed names."

Grood nodded slowly.

"Moreover," Bowman said, "the murderer undoubtedly intends to dispose of the other heirs and then sit tight until he's either discovered by professional searchers, or feels that the time is ripe to make a disclosure. The estate's on ice."

"Then Phyllis is the next on the list of victims?"

"If my theory is correct," Bowman said.

"Could we go to San Francisco and just stick around to protect her?" Grood asked dubiously.

"That might make complications," Jax Bowman pointed out, "which we would do well to avoid."

"How about simply finding Harry Cutting and beating him to the punch?"

"That's even more difficult. In the first place Cutting probably is working through some clever crook. He may be keeping in the background where he can have an alibi for each one of the murders. He'll be under cover in any event."

Jim Grood doubled his right hand, squeezed it with his left hand until he cracked the knuckles, one by one, a habit which he had when he was thinking.

"Well," he said, "what's the dope? We can't sit back here and fool around."

Bowman nodded. "How'd you like to be an impostor?" he asked.

"A what?"

"An impostor."

"What would I do?"

"You would, for the moment, become Sidney Proctor."

"You mean the guy who was killed up the Amazon?"

"That's right."

"What would that do?"

"It would put the murderers on the spot. With Sidney Proctor alive, Harry Cutting would stand no chance whatever of inheriting, so he'd be desperate enough to try and kill Sidney Proctor."

"You mean I'm to pose as Sidney Proctor and this guy will try to bump me?"

Bowman nodded.

BIG JIM GROOD shifted his left knuckles through the palm of his right hand, cracked them slowly, one by one, and grinned. "Aw, hell," he said, "you're so *goo-o-o-o-d* to me."

Bowman chuckled.

"How are we going to arrange it so I don't get arrested for being an impostor before we smoke Cutting out into the open?"

"I think I can arrange it," Bowman said. "It happens that I have a friend who is returning from a cruise to the South Sea Islands in a yacht. You might be aboard that yacht when it docks."

"Do I swim?" Grood asked.

"Not while there are hydroplanes we can charter," Bowman said.

Big Jim sighed. "Listen," he said, "can't *you* be Sidney Proctor instead of me?"

"Not very well," Bowman said, frowning. "I'm too well known. Remember the newspapers will be publishing pictures of the lost explorer who has returned to life. What's the matter, Jim, you aren't getting cold feet, are you?"

Big Jim Grood lurched from the chair to his feet.

"Cold feet," he said belligerently. "Say, what the hell are you talking about? Do you think I'm getting yellow because I'm going to bait a death trap?"

"Well, then, what is the matter?" Bowman demanded.

Grood grinned sheepishly, looked for the moment like a schoolboy trying to keep from making a confession. "Aw, I hate to tell you, chief," he said.

There was anxiety in Bowman's voice. "What is it, Jim?"

Big Jim Grood sighed. "It's that damned yacht business," he said. "I always get seasick."

BIG JIM GROOD made one last attempt to change Bowman's mind as he watched the engines of a big amphibian warming up.

Banks of fog were just breaking up and the sunlight was gleaming through, sparkling upon the waters of the bay. To the west was the Golden Gate of San Francisco, beyond which lay the broad expanse of the Pacific. The towers of the new bridge construction thrust themselves up from the bay like giant red fingers clutching at the dispersing fog.

"There's two things I don't like to travel in," Big Jim Grood grumbled. "One of them's an airplane and the other's a boat."

"You'll like this yacht," Bowman said; "it's a beauty."

Big Jim Grood frowned at the placid waters of the bay, looked over at the big amphibian and spat contemptuously.

"Suppose you can't locate this yacht?" he asked.

"Nothing to it," Bowman said. "I've been in touch with them by radio. They know we're coming. They're laying off the Farallons in a position that's been accurately checked and radioed. We can fly right to them."

Grood continued his grumbling protest. "Now listen, chief, it's the wrong way to go about this. This ain't the kind of a mystery where we don't know who's back of it. This is a cinch. All we've got to do is to tip off Phyllis Proctor, locate Harry Cutting and start checking up on this aviator I've been telling you about."

"You mean the ex-convict?" Bowman asked.

"Yeah—this Howard Ashe. You can gamble a hundred to one that he's mixed up in the thing. Two months ago he was just an ex-con hanging around on the fringes, looking for a chance to break in. Thirty days ago he shows up with his pockets full of dough and buys an airplane. Hell, there's nothing to it. We can bust this case wide open by using the good old police methods."

Bowman shook his head decisively. "I'm not a policeman," he said; "I'm an adventurer."

"You want to get results, don't you?"

"Certainly I want to get results, but I want to get them so there's some adventure in it. It's like fishing for swordfish; you could use a gun, a har-

poon, a big line and a winch, but it's more fun to use light tackle."

Jim Grood nodded emphatically. "Yeah," he said, "more fun because you're taking a chance on the fish getting away. That's just what's likely to happen in this case — the fish are going to get away."

The mechanic nodded his head to Bowman. Bowman laughed, tucked his fingers under Jim Grood's arm and said, "In we go, Jim; it'll soon be over."

"Yeah," Grood remarked dryly, "that's what I'm afraid of."

He braced himself against the current of wind thrown back by the propellers, wormed his way through the open door of the cabin. Bowman followed him, took his place at the control. The mechanic slammed the door shut.

"How much flying experience did you say you'd had?" Grood shouted above the roar of the motors.

Jax Bowman grinned. "Enough to get you there and get myself back," he remarked, as he gunned the right motor, then throttled back, gunned the left and waved his hand to the mechanics.

THE mechanics jerked the blocks out from under the wheels. Bowman opened the throttles. The big plane roared down the runway and slanted into a smooth take-off. When the ship was well out over the bay, Bowman worked the mechanism which drew up the landing wheels and converted the ship into a hydroplane. The motors roared a smooth song of power. San Francisco stretched out below them, glistening buildings reflecting the sunlight which filtered through the fog. Ahead of them lay the dark forest of the Presidio; over to the left the long narrow stretch of Golden Gate Park. Out by the Cliff House and Sutro Baths, where the surf was thundering against the rocks on which sea lions basked, there was a thick wall of fog.

Bowman tilted the plane to climb above the fog. Jim Grood, the safety belt strapped across his thighs, gripped the sides of his chair until the skin showed white over his big, battered knuckles.

The plane roared higher. Suddenly, as it swept over the area where the fog was disintegrating, it struck an air bump. For a moment everything seemed to stop, while the plane settled —then suddenly it bounded up into the air, wobbled drunkenly, then continued on its course, only to strike another air bump.

Bowman, at the controls, keeping the ship as nearly on an even keel as possible, turned to grin reassuringly at Big Jim Grood.

The big ex-cop had his eyes closed —his lips were tightly clenched.

A moment more and they were over the bumpy area. Fog reached out and closed about them, shutting out the light. Moisture misted the windows of the enclosed cabin; then, as though it had been a projectile shot from a gun, the plane zoomed up above the fog and into bright sunlight.

It was smooth flying here. Jim Grood ventured to open his eyes, saw the clear blue of the sky, looked down a couple of hundred feet to the top of the fog bank, a brilliant, dazzling white under the rays of the sun. The shadow cast by the big plane scudded over the uneven floor of white clouds like some huge bird.

The plane flew steadily until the fog became patches of isolated white clouds, below which could be seen the

blue ocean, looking almost dead-black. Bowman carefully calculated his position, swung the plane in a wide circle, then throttled down the motors. The nose of the plane tilted sharply downward as it swept toward the ocean in a long circle. Big Jim Grood, looking down the slanting wing of the plane, saw a tiny speck of white resting upon the dark surface of the ocean.

Once more he closed his eyes and clenched his jaw, his lips a thin, straight line.

The plane spiraled down to the ocean, straightened out, to skim over the water like a flying gull; then, with a splash of spray, it struck the top of a wave, plowed for a moment through water, and came to a stop. A small boat put out from the yacht.

Bowman opened the cabin door, slapped Big Jim Grood reassuringly on the back, lowered Grood's bag to the men in the boat. A moment later Grood himself was seated in the bobbing skiff. Jax Bowman shouted greetings to the yachtsman, then pointed to the yacht which had ceased to be merely a white speck upon the ocean, but now showed as a trim, serviceable craft, looming against the skyline.

"This will beat the old police methods, Jim," he said. "Take a look at her. Isn't she a beauty?"

Jim Grood, looking rather green around the gills, turned to look and nodded his head mechanically. There was no enthusiasm in his eyes.

Bowman waved farewells, gunned the motors into revolution, made a smooth take-off, spiraled up into the air and, as he made his first turn, looked down at the skiff. Something that he saw made him reach for his binoculars and adjust them to his eyes.

Big Jim Grood, his head over the side of the small boat, was being violently ill.

CHAPTER III.

PHYLLIS PROCTOR.

THE arrival of the White Nomad, the palatial yacht which had come up from the Galapagos Islands after cruising about the west coast of Mexico, attracted some attention. Waterfront reporters dropped down to get a story, and heard one which sent them scurrying for telephones.

The owner of the yacht reported picking up a castaway on one of the deserted islands. The man had been cast ashore when a small fishing boat on which he had taken passage had been wrecked in a storm. But this shipwreck, which would have been a tragic adventure to most men, was to this individual but an incident in a life which had fairly bristled with dangerous adventure. He was, it seemed, none other than Sidney Proctor, whose death had been recently reported in the press when a companion had reached civilization to report the disaster which had overtaken the exploring expedition.

Sidney Proctor gave a brief statement to some of the reporters, but he was rather taciturn and noncommittal, and he objected to being photographed. He went from the yacht directly to the Palace Hotel.

Among those who met the yacht on its arrival in the early morning was Jax Bowman, the multi-millionaire, who had traveled incognito to San Francisco. Bowman was a close friend of Franklin Stanza, the owner of the yacht, and Stanza introduced Jax Bowman to Sidney Proctor, and, since the introduction took place in the presence

of newspaper men, Stanza kept his countenance gravely serious as he performed the introduction.

Big Jim Grood, masquerading as the rescued explorer, crushed Bowman's hand in a mighty grip.

"Have a pleasant voyage?" Bowman asked, with an attempt at facetiousness as he winced from the pain of the crushing grip.

"Swell," Jim Grood said, increasing the pressure of his mighty hand. "I lost a few pounds, but that was to be expected."

"You evidently didn't lose any strength," Bowman said, wiggling the fingers of his hand, as though to test them for broken bones.

"I lost everything else," Jim Grood muttered in an undertone.

Jim Grood registered at the Palace Hotel under the name of Sidney Proctor. He kept to his room, refused to give any further interviews, and refused to be photographed. Jax Bowman had a room on the same floor. He was, he explained to reporters, taking a pleasure trip, but managed to convey the impression he might be interested in purchasing a ranch which could be reached by airplane and on which there was good hunting and fishing.

Having cast out his bait, Jax Bowman sat back to await results.

His telephone rang within half an hour after the newspapers had hit the streets. Big Jim Grood's voice was cautious: "Coast clear?" he asked.

"Yes," Bowman said.

"Leave your door open, then; I'm coming down."

A moment later Bowman heard the sound of his confederate's steps in the corridor, then the knob twisted and Big Jim Grood pushed his way into the room.

"Phyllis just called up," he said.

"Phyllis?" Bowman asked.

"Yes, Phyllis Proctor. Say, chief, there's just a chance we may have guessed this thing wrong. Phyllis Proctor may be the one that's back of this killing."

Jax Bowman frowned thoughtfully. "That's hardly likely," he said, "but I'm surprised that she rang you up. I thought the murderer would be the one to get in touch with you."

"Perhaps," Grood said grimly, "the murderer has."

"What did she say?"

"Said she was Phyllis Proctor; that we had some relatives in common, and she'd like to run in for a chat."

"What did you tell her?"

"Told her I wasn't seeing anyone."

Bowman nodded thoughtfully.

"Think I'd better see her?" Grood asked.

"Did she leave her number?"

"Yes, she left a number where I could call her. I've got it written down on the pad by the telephone. I forgot to tear off the sheet to bring it in here."

JAX BOWMAN started pacing the floor. "It doesn't stand to reason," he said, "that a young woman would be back of these crimes. And it doesn't seem logical that Phyllis would kill off the others merely in order to increase her share in the estate."

"Why not? Women do just about as much killing as men," Grood said with that skepticism which comes to one who has seen life in the raw.

"But," Jax Bowman protested, "we don't want to pull this White Ring stuff on a woman."

"We're fighting crooks, ain't we?" Grood countered.

"Yes, we're fighting crooks, but not making war on women."

Jim Grood said impatiently, "I tell

you, chief, this is one case where the old police methods would work to advantage. Let's get this jane in and start sweating her. Let's make a direct accusation and see what she says—"

"No," Bowman interrupted, "we can't do that. In the first place, I don't want to let it get out that I'm interested in crime. In the second place, you're not on the force any more; you haven't any official standing, particularly in San Francisco."

"If we uncovered the murderer," Grood said, "we could get by with anything. The boys would be tickled to death to have someone solve the case and hand them the solution."

"No," Bowman said. "Go back and ring up Phyllis. Tell her that you'll make an exception in her case, and talk with her. Pretend that you know nothing whatever about an estate or any inheritance. See if she brings the subject up. Find out what she has to say, but don't get rough with her."

"You don't suppose she's seen pictures of the real Sidney Proctor?"

"That's a chance we'll have to take. Remember, *if* she's mixed up in those murders, she isn't going to run to the police and brand you as an impostor, even if she knows you to be one. She'll do that when you come forward to claim a part of the estate."

Grood turned toward the door.

"And watch your step," Bowman counseled. "Don't fall for a pretty face."

Big Jim Grood gave a hoarse chuckle. "Me!" he exclaimed scornfully "Fall for a pretty face when it's on a crook? No chance—I've seen too many of them."

He closed the door behind him and Bowman heard the indignant pound of his heels on the carpeted corridor.

A few moments later there was a knock at Bowman's door. He opened it, to stare into a pair of twinkling brown eyes set in an attractive face, while red lips twisted upward in confirmation of the smile in her eyes.

She was not over twenty-four or five at the most. To her, life was nothing serious; only a game to be played, the unbounded vitality of her youth making any false guesses seem merely minor matters.

"This," she said, "is going to be a frightful imposition."

Jax Bowman felt the magnetism of the trim figure, was conscious of her exceptional beauty.

"Come in," he said, "and let's see if it is."

She entered his room with hesitation. There was in her manner the assurance of one who knows her way around, who has sufficient poise and ability to depend upon her own judgment, rather than upon the dictates of convention.

She dropped into a chair, crossed her knees, surveyed the trim ankles which protruded below her skirt with approval and said, "Give me a cigarette and I'll get the agony over with as quickly as possible."

BOWMAN suspected her identity even as he handed her the cigarette case and was turning over in his mind the best method of handling the situation. He dared not let her feel that his association with the spurious Sidney Proctor was too intimate. At any cost, Big Jim Grood must be left isolated—bait for a death trap.

"What is it?" Bowman asked, holding a match to her cigarette.

"I'm Phyllis Proctor," she told him. "Does that mean anything to you?"

He seated himself in an easy chair,

lit his own cigarette, and remarked noncommittally, "An attractive name, and, apparently, an attractive personality."

She ducked her head in a bow. "Thank you, kind sir."

He laughed.

"I'm related," she said, "to Sidney Proctor."

Bowman kept his face expressionless, as though the statement meant but little to him.

"I simply *must* see him. We have some matters in common that we should discuss."

"Why don't you knock on his door, then? I understand he's in the hotel."

She shook her head decisively. "No, there's too much involved to meet him that way, unless he's the type who would respond to that sort of informality."

"What makes you think he isn't?"

"I've talked with him on the telephone."

"And he doesn't seem responsive?" Bowman asked.

"Not in the least."

Bowman made clucking noises with his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "If we only had television perfected it would have been a different story, I'm sure."

Her face lost its smile.

"Quit complimenting me," he said, "and let's get down to brass tacks. I know you're frightfully busy and this is an imposition, but I thought you could help me."

"How?"

"I want you to introduce me to Mr. Proctor."

"But I hardly know him myself."

She stared at the toe of her shoe, which was restlessly moving in little nervous circles. "It certainly is queer," she said. "You'd think people who had been on the boat with him for days at a time would know him quite well."

"But I wasn't on the boat with him. I only met him when I went down to greet Franklin Stanza, the owner of the yacht."

"I know," she said, "but Mr. Stanza avoided the issue when I tried to get an introduction, and finally, when I forced matters, said that I'd have to get your okay."

Bowman frowned. That wasn't the sort of information he'd wanted Stanza to give out. On the other hand, he could appreciate Stanza's predicament. A very pretty girl, most insistent in her demands. Stanza, who was quite susceptible to feminine beauty, had found himself at a loss what to do and had finally referred her to Bowman. Well, in some ways Stanza couldn't be blamed. In any event, the fat was in the fire.

"You," Bowman said, "must have been moving fast to do all of this checking up after the newspapers reported Mr. Proctor's arrival."

"I'm a fast worker," she admitted, grinning at him through cigarette smoke, "and I didn't get it from the newspapers, but over the radio news flashes."

"Why," asked Bowman, "did Mr. Stanza say you'd have to get *my* consent?"

"I'm certain I don't know." Her eyes raised disconcertingly to his face. "Do you?" she added.

JAX BOWMAN sparred for time. "Was there any reason for an immediate meeting?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind telling me what it was?"

She hesitated a moment, then said, "I'm going to be frank with you. I

have reason to believe the man who is in this hotel claiming to be Sidney Proctor is an impostor."

Jax Bowman became rigidly motionless, with concentrated attention. "Yes?" he asked tonelessly.

"Yes," she said.

"What makes you think so? Do you know him personally?"

"No, but my attorney tells me he's seen photographs of the real Sidney Proctor, and that he glimpsed this man's face in the hotel lobby, and that he is *not* the real Sidney Proctor."

Jax Bowman did some rapid thinking.

"Your attorney?" he asked.

"Yes. You're a wealthy man, Mr. Bowman. Money means nothing to you; your fortune puts you beyond greed, even if I didn't realize instinctively I could trust you."

Bowman said nothing, but sat waiting, his mind racing rapidly.

"Probably you're wondering why I needed an attorney," she went on. "All right; I'm going to tell you the whole story: I didn't know it until recently, but I am one of the heirs to the estate of George Cutler Proctor. It's a very large estate. I don't know too much about the other heirs. My attorney, however, knows all about them."

"How did you get this attorney?" Bowman asked.

"I didn't," she said, laughing. "He got me. He's one of those lawyers who make a specialty of checking up on large estates, finding heirs and signing them up on a commission basis."

"You signed up with this man?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I ask on what commission?"

"He's to receive half of what I get, for his services in calling the matter to my attention and making proof that I'm an heir at law."

"An outrageous contract," Bowman remarked. "You shouldn't have signed it."

"But please remember," she pleaded, "that I didn't know anything whatever about an estate. I'd never heard of George Cutler Proctor. *I* certainly would never have traced the estate."

"No, but the estate would eventually have traced you."

"Well," she said, "the contract is signed, and that's that. But it seems that if the real Sidney Proctor *is* alive, then I don't take anything, because he's a closer heir than I am. I don't understand the legal points involved, but my attorney does."

"Where's your lawyer now?"

"Downstairs, waiting in a car."

"Waiting for you to bring Sidney Proctor out?"

"Yes. He wants me to bring the man who *claims* to be Sidney Proctor down to the car if possible."

"And your lawyer then intends to denounce him as an impostor?"

"If the meeting, face to face, convinces him Proctor is an impostor, yes."

"Well," Bowman said, "I'll do whatever I can. I'll see if Mr. Proctor is in his room."

He crossed to the telephone, held the receiver to his ear and said, "Please ring Mr. Sidney Proctor."

A moment later he heard Grood's gruff voice on the telephone saying, "Hello."

BOWMAN said, "He doesn't seem to be in the room, Miss Proctor. I can hear the operator ringing, but I don't get any answer. I'll hold the phone and wait for a few moments. . . . You say your attorney is in an

automobile downstairs, and that he says Mr. Proctor is an impostor?"

"Yes," she said.

Bowman heard Big Jim Grood's voice rumbling over the wire. "I get you, chief," he said.

"Then perhaps I'd better step downstairs and talk with your lawyer personally."

"Oh, if you only would!" she exclaimed. "But are you sure Mr. Proctor isn't in his room? I felt certain he was."

"So was I," Bowman said. "I saw him in the corridor a moment ago. However, he must have stepped out." He waited a moment, then said, "Thank you, operator," and hung up.

"No," he said, "Mr. Proctor doesn't answer."

"If you wouldn't mind stepping down to meet my attorney—" she said.

"It would be a pleasure," Bowman assured her. And the words came from his heart. Very evidently their suspicions of Harry Cutting were unfounded. This mysterious "attorney" who had signed Phyllis up for one half of her inheritance was quite probably the guiding force back of the murders which had been committed. Bowman wanted very much to meet this man, to ask him for his card, to note the license number of the automobile he was driving. Later on the White Rings might pay the man an official visit.

Jax Bowman got to his feet, took his hat and light coat from the closet.

"At your service," he observed.

She ground out the end of her cigarette in the ash tray, got to her feet, came close to him, and placed slender, tapering fingers on his arm. "It's *so* nice of you," she smiled gratefully.

"Not at all," Bowman remarked. "It's really a pleasure."

He opened the door, escorted her to the elevator. They descended to the lobby and crossed to the street exit.

"Where's your lawyer waiting?" Bowman asked.

She nodded toward a sedan parked across the street. "He has the curtains drawn," she said, "because he wanted to see the man who claims to be Sidney Proctor without himself being seen. Come on over and I'll introduce you."

Jax Bowman managed to walk around the rear of the car so that he could note the license number. Just as he had finished fixing it in his memory, the car door opened. The girl said, "Mr. Bowman agreed to come down and meet you. Isn't that splendid of him?"

A man's voice from the interior of the car boomed enthusiastic agreement.

She stood to one side, smiling. Bowman stepped forward, caught a glimpse of flashing teeth smiling from a swarthy countenance, saw a right hand outstretched in greeting.

"This is my lawyer," said the girl, "Mr. Smith, Mr. Bowman."

Bowman leaned forward to grasp the outstretched hand. As the fingers gripped his, the smile faded from the man's face. Bowman sensed the menace of motion. He twisted his head, saw Phyllis Proctor swinging a very businesslike blackjack.

He tried to jerk free, but the man in the car held his hand. The blackjack swung to his temple. As things became sickeningly black, he felt his knees turn to jelly, realized that the "lawyer" was pulling him into the car.

He heard the motor hum into life, felt the car lurch forward, struggled to shake off the black nausea which gripped him, raised himself on his

hands—and received another crashing blow on the head.

Jax Bowman became entirely oblivious of his surroundings.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO PRISONERS.

JAX BOWMAN regained consciousness to the tune of a throbbing motor which pulsed through his aching head as though the explosions were taking place within the interior of his brain instead of within the cylinders of the motor.

Gradually, he managed to fit events into a coherent whole, to find himself bound about the wrists and ankles, lying on the floor of a single-motored cabin plane. He was jammed against one end of the cabin in such a position that it was difficult for him to move. His head was under a chair. Such view of the interior of the cabin as he was able to get was through the rungs of the chair. He could see a very neat pair of ankles, terminating in well-shod feet, and bitterness assailed him as he realized he had no sooner finished warning Big Jim Grood against falling for a pretty face than he himself had walked into the trap against which he had warned his partner.

Bowman had no means of knowing how long he had been unconscious, or how far from San Francisco the plane had traveled. He tried to observe the splotches of sunlight on the floor of the plane for the purpose of determining direction. He had tentatively decided the plane was flying slightly east of north when the motor was throttled down. The plane inclined sharply downward toward a landing.

Bowman, his flying senses functioning automatically, estimated the rate of descent, and decided that the plane had been traveling very high — something over ten thousand feet. As the wheels jolted to a landing, he decided that the pilot was not particularly expert.

Then the jolting of the plane as it taxied toward a hangar sent a series of pains through his aching head which kept him from thinking at all. He lay on the floor of the cabin in agony, and heaved a great sigh of relief as the plane swung in a circle and the motor stopped. The cabin door opened. A man's voice said, "You shouldn't have made that report over the telephone, Howard."

The man who had been piloting the plane said, in a sulky voice, "How the hell was I to let you know? Did you want me to try telepathy?"

It was the voice of the man who had posed as the lawyer.

The first man had no answer to that. He spoke to the girl. "You put it over all right, Lottie."

"I'll say I put it over," she said. And Bowman noticed once more that lilting note of reckless youth in her voice.

Hands grasped his ankles. He was pulled out from the corner of the cabin.

"Get a blindfold," someone said. And Bowman saw hands with a bandage. But before the bandage shut out his vision, he saw the face of the first speaker — a lean, bony face, with a prominent jaw, high cheek bones and a long, thin nose, with pinched nostrils. The eyes were close-set and alert. Then the bandage shut out Bowman's vision.

A knife cut the ropes around his ankles. He tried to walk, but his feet were numb. After the first few staggering steps circulation started to re-

turn with an agony of sensation as might have been caused had his legs been used as pin cushions.

"Give him a kick, Howard," the man with the bony face said.

"Aw, give him a break, Harry," the girl interposed. "He's a good scout."

"Good scout, is he?" Harry retorted. "Then what the hell was he doing horning into our game?"

The girl had no answer ready.

"WELL," remarked Howard, he who had posed as the attorney, "he's just what I wanted Santa Claus to bring me for Christmas. He's worth so many millions he can't count 'em. We can make a million-dollar ransom on this—"

"Shut up," interrupted Harry. "We're not going to mix into any kidnaping racket. It's too damn dangerous We can get away with murder if we don't try a shake-down. Remember, he's seen our faces."

"Anyone can see my face for a million bucks any time," grumbled the aviator.

"All right, shut up!" Harry ordered. "We'll talk it over later. This guy's ears are open, even if his eyes are covered."

"We could seal up his mouth too—after we got the million," Howard said.

Bowman was walking with less difficulty now. He felt a hand grasp his elbow, "Going up steps," Howard's voice said.

He climbed three steps, crossed a wooden porch. A door slammed shut behind him. He smelled the musty interior of a house, apparently one which had been unoccupied for some time. Then he was pushed into a room. He felt hands fumbling at the knot in the blindfold. Then the bandage was whipped off. A door closed. A bolt shot home.

Bowman's eyes surveyed a darkened room. Boards were nailed over the windows. Light came from cracks in the boards. The air of the room was stuffy, ventilation being furnished only by wooden shutters in a peaked gable at the far end. There was no ceiling in the room and it was unplastered. Cobwebbed rafters showed dimly. The walls consisted of bare boards, to which clung occasional remnants of what had once been wall paper. The floor was rough. At one time it had been painted, a drab slate color; but the paint had, for the most part, worn through. A table, two chairs, and an iron bed were in the room. The bed had once been enameled white. Now the enamel was chipped and blackened. A sagging spring was covered with a mattress.

A young woman, seated in one of the chairs, stared at Bowman with wide blue eyes from behind businesslike tortoise-shell spectacles. Her face was filled with character, but too bony to be called beautiful. Her chin was prominent, her lips full, yet shapely.

She struggled to her feet. Bowman saw that her wrists were tied in front of her.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"The name," he said, "is Bowman. And you, I suppose, are Phyllis Proctor?"

She nodded. "You came to rescue me?" she asked.

He smiled bitterly.

"How long have you been here?" he asked, when she had realized the eloquent significance of his smile.

"Two days."

"Do you," he asked, "know what their plans are?"

It was a cruel question, but one

which it was necessary for him to ask.

She shook her head. "I haven't any idea. They can't hold me for ransom because I haven't anything, and I haven't any relatives."

"How did they get you here?"

"I answered an ad in the paper, an ad asking for a young woman with stenographic qualifications which were almost identical with my own. The ad might have been written with me in mind."

"It probably was," he told her dryly. "Do you know where you are?"

"No."

"How were you taken here, by plane or automobile?"

"In an automobile."

"Do you know where it is—what direction from San Francisco?"

"No. I was blindfolded."

JAX BOWMAN turned to stare about the room. He wanted to make his further questions as few as possible, lest his very questions should show her the hopelessness of their situation and the ultimate fate which awaited them.

"They give you any liberty at all?" he asked.

"Once every three or four hours they come in, untie me, let me walk around. They seem to be waiting for something. I don't know what it is."

Bowman walked to the windows. They were boarded up on the inside. The boards were held in place with nails hammered into the wood with the neat precision of professional carpentering.

"Have you any idea what it is they're waiting for?" Phyllis Proctor asked.

Bowman shook his head and said "Pity they wouldn't loosen up and give us a deck of cards and free our hands. There's no damage we could do in here. We couldn't rip those boards off with our bare hands."

"I was thinking," she said, "that a person might be able to swing a chair and smash those boards in."

Bowman nodded moodily, and said, "But I don't know what good it would do. They'd hear the crash of glass and the splintering boards. The place looks to me to be rather isolated. It's far enough removed from all neighbors so that the landing and departure of planes doesn't attract attention. They seem to have things all their own way."

He suddenly thought of something, moved over toward her. "You can manipulate your fingers a little bit," he said. "See if you can feel in my left hip pocket. There's a jack-knife there—unless they've taken it from me."

She explored his pockets, each in turn, shaking her head moodily after each pocket had been searched.

"I'm afraid they've taken everything," she said. "No, wait a minute, I can hear the ticking of a watch. Here's your watch. They left that."

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Twenty minutes past two."

Bowman frowned thoughtfully. Regardless of what these men had been waiting for originally, he felt certain they were now waiting only for one thing—darkness.

Bowman walked to the door. He placed his ear against the thin panels and could hear voices on the other side. He turned to flash the girl a warning glance, then dropped to his knees, placed his ear to the keyhole. He was able to overhear snatches of conversation.

"Acid on the control wires . . . leave the plane out there . . . try to escape in it. . . . Then we start pur-

suit . . . he'll start doing stunts . . . Plane crash . . . both bodies can be identified . . . nothing to show plane tampered with."

"No. That's . . . too many chances. Nix on the plane stuff . . . automobile accident . . . not so much danger of fire . . . over a cliff . . . high speed . . . curves . . . block the road . . ."

A CHAIR scraped. Feet came toward the door. Jax Bowman moved hastily away, was seated on the edge of the bed when the bolt shot back and Howard's grinning face appeared in the doorway.

"How you coming, buddy?" he asked.

"How about some playing cards?" Bowman inquired. "We'd like to pass the time. And what do you intend to do with us?"

"Just want to keep you out of mischief. Nix on the playing cards. You can't play cards with your hands tied."

"You mean you're going to keep our hands tied all the time?"

"And how."

"But I've got to have my arms free some of the time. I can't . . ."

"Oh, you'll be given a little chance to walk around when the time comes. I hope you like canned beans. That's going to be your chow tonight. Come on, sister, we're going to take you out for a little walk."

He crossed the room to the girl, took her arm and piloted her from the room. Bowman found that by lying on the bed on his face he was able to relieve the tension of the rope on his wrists. Slumber overtook him, a slumber which was not so much the result of fatigue as a partial unconsciousness, an after-effect of the blows he had received on his head.

Bowman awoke late in the afternoon. Phyllis Proctor, her wrists bound as before, was seated in the chair watching him.

"Feel rested?" she asked.

Bowman struggled to a sitting position, wanted to rub his eyes and couldn't. He made tasting noises with his mouth. His tongue felt thick and coated. He knew that his eyes were swollen and bloodshot. His head felt dull, but the splitting headache was gone.

He tried a smile. "Learn anything new?" he asked.

She said calmly, "Yes, they're planning to kill us tonight."

Bowman stared at her. "How do you know?" he asked.

"I've been listening at the door, the same as you did."

She was silent for a moment, and, through the panels of the door, Jax Bowman could hear the steady clack of a typewriter. Was this, he wondered, the portable machine on which the death messages had been typed? And, if so, was it now engaged in chattering out some note which was to be found upon his body?

"Scared?" the girl asked.

Bowman laughed. "How about you?" he inquired.

"I can take it," she said, "and take it with a grin—if I have to."

He studied her in silent admiration.

"They searched your baggage in the hotel," she went on, "and found a mask with white rings around the eyes. That frightened the avaitor to death. He's Howard Ashe, an ex-convict. It seems that crooks have been hunted down by people wearing these white-ringed masks. I picked up quite a bit from their conversation."

Bowman made no comment, surveyed the gathering twilight of the room.

"Do you suppose," he asked, "you could get the watch out of my pocket once more and see what time it is? Your wrists are tied in front of you, mine behind my back."

She came to him. Her bound wrists were pressed against his vest as her fingers worked the watch from his pocket.

"Five thirty," Bowman said, and then suddenly, as he stared at the watch, he laughed.

"What's the joke?" she inquired.

"I'm afraid," he said, "I've been rather stupid. I could have had you out of here before this."

Her raised eyebrows asked a silent question.

"Put the watch down on the floor," Bowman said.

CHAPTER V.

VENGEANCE.

SHE placed the watch on the floor. Bowman placed his foot on the back of the watch, exerted a slow, steady pressure, until he heard a snapping sound. Then he removed his foot. The crystal was broken into several pieces.

Bowman had no need to speak. The girl grasped his idea instantly. She bent forward, picked up one of the bits of thin, sharp glass and held it in her fingers. Bowman turned around so that his bound arms were within reach of her fingers. He felt the sharp edge of the glass sawing through his bonds, then, after a moment, he was free. It took him but a few seconds to untie the girl.

"Now," he said, "let's move that table and the chairs over to that far corner of the room. I think I can stand on them and reach the rafters. Then I can pull the slats out of that ventilator. We can make a rope out of the blankets and lower you down to the ground."

She nodded, and said, almost casually, "Be careful when you pick up your end of the table. Don't let it drag on the floor; they might hear it."

Bowman laughed at the matter-of-fact efficiency of the young woman. "I can tell you one thing," he said, "if we get out of here okay, you've got a first-class stenographic job awaiting you."

They moved the table to a place beneath one of the rafters. They placed a chair on it. Bowman climbed from the table to the chair and was able to reach the rafter. He swung himself up to the rafter and from there was able to reach the slats in the ventilator. The air here was close and musty. His clutching fingers were covered with must and cobwebs, but the slats responded to the pressure he exerted. One of them came loose in his hand. He said to Phyllis Proctor, "Catch."

She held out her hands and neatly caught the slat as he dropped it.

The other three slats followed in quick succession. Jax Bowman inhaled the fresh air, peered out through the oblong hole.

He saw the cabin plane in which he had arrived. The motor was clicking over at idling speed.

He turned and spoke to the girl. "Get those blankets," he said, "and quickly. They're getting the plane warmed up. That means they're planning to take us somewhere."

She rushed toward the bed. Bowman saw a man walk from the plane toward the house, heard a door in the house open. A man shouted, "Okay, ready at any time you are."

Phyllis Proctor said in a voice which

quavered slightly with excitement, "They're coming."

Bowman heard the noise of the bolt being shot back.

There were solid planks along the side of the room, against the slope of the roof. These planks gave Bowman a runway. Swiftly, he moved along them toward the door. If he could reach a position of vantage directly over the door, he might be able to jump down upon whoever entered the room.

BOWMAN realized he was going to be too late. He had covered but slightly more than half of the distance when the door pushed open. The bony-faced individual who had been called Harry, and whom Bowman surmised was Harry Cutting, entered the room. It took a moment for his eyes to accustom themselves to the semi-darkness. He stood staring at the chair on the table at the end of the room, raised his eyes to the broken ventilator. His hand streaked to his hip.

"Where's Bowman?" he demanded, apparently not noticing that the girl's hands were free.

Bowman crouched motionless. There was a moment of tense silence. Bowman wondered if she could keep from giving an involuntary glance upward. Could she keep from showing signs of hysterical panic?

In that moment of silence, Bowman heard distinctly the roar of an airplane's motor. He surmised that the cabin plane which had been warming up must have taken off.

Phyllis Proctor met the man's gaze with calm insolence.

"He tore out the lattice work," she said "That left him a means of escape."

"And he left you here?" the man demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"How long ago?" he asked, moving toward her.

"Really," she said calmly, "I can't tell. You see, we broke his watch in order to get some sharp glass from the crystal."

The man cursed. An airplane motor roared from the ground, apparently coming directly toward the house. Cutting jabbed his revolver toward her chest.

"You," he said, "might as well get yours now as later."

Bowman jumped.

Cutting heard the slight scraping motion made by Bowman's feet as they left the wood. He whirled to look up. Bowman saw his white, distorted face, saw him swing the gun around.

Bowman had never realized a man could fall so slowly. He felt he was barely drifting through the air. His knees were held together out in front of him. He seemed to be living in some dreadful nightmare in which there was urgent need for speed, but everything moved with the slowness of slow motion pictures.

He saw the man's face twisting in an agony of effort as he strove to get the gun around and, at the same time, to avoid the impact. Bowman saw flame belch from the muzzle of the gun, realized that the bullet had missed him. Then his left knee struck Cutting's chest a glancing blow.

Cutting went over backwards. Bowman tried to get his feet under him, and failed. He flung out an arm, caught Cutting's shoulder. He lit partially on Cutting's body, partially on his left shoulder. The impact stunned him. Cutting scrambled to his feet. He still held the gun. Bowman, half dazed,

lunged forward, tried to catch Cutting's ankle with his right hand, and missed it. Phyllis Proctor picked up a chair.

The house reverberated to the roar of shots. It took Bowman a second or two to realize that these were not shots thundering at him from Cutting's gun.

CUTTING, his face showing alarm, backed toward the door, sighted deliberately down the revolver. Bowman started to stagger to his feet. Cutting's bullet might stop him, but he was going to go out fighting. Phyllis Proctor flung the chair. Cutting dodged it, but wasted a precious half second in doing so.

The door burst open. Bowman's eyes shifted to the figure which plunged through the doorway. It was a startling vision. The upper part of the man's face was covered by a mask. Around the eyeholes of the mask were two white circles, giving to the eyes a hideous appearance of malevolent vigilance.

Cutting yelled, shifted the gun and fired in a blind panic.

Big Jim Grood's right fist shot out.

Bowman heard the smashing impact of those bunched knuckles on Cutting's jaw, saw Cutting's head jerk back as though it had connected with a battering ram. His knees wobbled. His body sagged toward the floor. Grood's left fist whipped around in an uppercut, blasted the man backwards.

Bowman heard the roar of a plane taking off from the ground.

"Ashe!" he yelled at Grood. "He's the aviator! Did you get him?"

Jim Grood shook his head, the weird appearance of the mask being emphasized by the motion.

Together, the two men rushed to the door of the house.

Bowman saw a long meadow, smooth and grassy, with a fringe of trees bordering it. The cabin plane in which he had been brought to the place was just clearing the tops of those trees, headed toward the setting sun. A two-seated biplane, evidently the one in which Jim Grood had arrived, was standing near the house, the motor still idling. Sprawled on the ground, under one of the wings, lay a crumpled figure in helmet and goggles.

Big Jim Grood ran forward, shouting curses. Jax Bowman sprinted past him, climbed to the pilot's seat, gave a hasty glance at the gasoline and temperature gauges, jerked open the throttle of the plane. He felt it gather momentum, felt jolts as the wheels ran along the ground. He estimated the distance to the edge of the field, the height of the trees, took the plane from the ground and zoomed it upward.

Tangled branches clutched at the still spinning wheels, then dropped rapidly behind. The plane climbed steadily upward. Bowman banked into a turn and looked for the plane ahead.

It was winging toward the sunset like a frightened quail fleeing from a hawk.

Bowman opened his throttle wide.

THE instinctive sense of a flier led him to check his landmarks. He saw a valley dotted with patches of meadow land, interspersed with oaks, hills that were dark green with redwoods, off to the right a high mountain, to the left, the smooth ribbon of a cement highway.

He gave the plane every bit of speed it possessed.

He knew now that he had the faster plane, that Howard Ashe knew he was being pursued. The cabin plane ahead strove to get elevation, and failed, then

tried for speed as it flattened into a long, straight sprint. But Bowman had the elevation, had speed to spare. He came roaring down upon the cabin plane, judging his distance to a nicety. He shot past the front of the plane, his landing gear barely missing the tip of the other's propeller.

Ashe dove frantically downward, then tried to zoom up, but Bowman, kicking over the rudder, swinging the stick into a banking turn, was directly over Ashe when Ashe tried to bring the other plane up. Ashe went into a power dive and Bowman came roaring down on his tail. Once more Ashe tried to straighten, and once more lacked the nerve to come up into the menace of that other ship which seemed ready to crash down on his propeller.

He banked into turn and, in a moment, was in a tight tailspin.

Jax Bowman gave a swift look at the ground, was startled to find how close it was, to see the menace of the tree tops. He pulled back on his stick. The plane came screaming out of the dive, skimmed over the tree tops like a gull sailing just over the curl of a breaker.

Bowman zoomed upward, banked into a turn, looked back just in time to see the other plane hit a tree. Tree and plane became a confused snarl of exploding wood, fabric and metal. A moment later, the sound of a terrific crash reached Bowman's ears.

He straightened his plane, judged his position by the mountains, and started back.

BIG JIM GROOD laboriously finished typing out the message, which he pinned to Harry Cutting's coat. Cutting's hands, arms, ankles and legs were bound with neat efficiency.

Bowman taxied into a landing. Big Jim Grood, minus the mask, came out to greet him.

"Everything okay?" Grood asked.

Bowman nodded. "I think," he said, "the battle was half won before I started. Word of these White Ring masks has been getting around the under world, and Ashe was so frightened he didn't even have nerve enough to pilot his plane properly. How's the girl?"

"Okay."

"And the aviator who was sprawled out there on the ground?"

"Just a tap on the head," Grood said. "That's Steve Balcom, an old buddy of mine. I hunted him up when I found I needed a plane."

"How did you get here?"

"Cinch," Grood said laconically. "I recognized the moll as soon as you came out of the hotel room. She was Trixie Durane. She's a cute little trick at that. I sent her to the reformatory as a delinquent six years ago. She'd been playing around with a forger named Hornblower. I located Hornblower. He didn't want to talk at first, but I persuaded him to come through. He drew me a map showing the place up here."

"What happened to Trixie?" Bowman asked.

"I *could* have winged her," Big Jim Grood admitted reluctantly. "She ran like a deer. She was the first to beat it when we landed. I think she knew what was up."

"And you let her go?"

"I was thinking it over," Grood admitted. "You said we didn't make war on women. I don't know what I'd have done. But as it turned out, I didn't have to do anything. Your friend, Ashe, did it for me."

"Did what?" Bowman asked.

Grood shrugged his big shoulders. "I guess he was afraid she was going to talk, and be a witness against him," he said. "She was running pretty fast, but Ashe had something that caught up with her."

Bowman looked about him at the gathering twilight.

"Look here," he said, "you've got to get in touch with the police and explain this situation. I'm afraid it's going to mark the end of our incognito. The—"

"Forget it," Big Jim Grood said. "I told you the cops would be tickled to death to have a solution handed to 'em on a silver platter, and wouldn't care too much about how they got it. I've been talking with the boys in San Francisco on long distance. They don't know who I am, but I spilled a mouthful to 'em. And I typed out a statement that I left on Harry Cutting's coat. It'll explain a lot of things; and the boys can match up the typewriter with the machine that wrote those two murder notes."

"Then," Bowman said slowly, "what's holding us back?"

"Nothing on earth," Jim Grood remarked, grinning, "unless you wanted to stick around to give me some more talk about cop methods not being any good."

Jax Bowman grinned at the bulky ex-police captain who had worked his way up from pavement pounding.

"Tell me, Jim, how did you make Hornblower talk?"

Big Jim Grood said nothing, but doubled up his huge right hand and surveyed the battle-scarred fist with that look of fond pride which a golfer bestows upon his favorite driver after it has clicked out a three-hundred-yard drive.

THE END

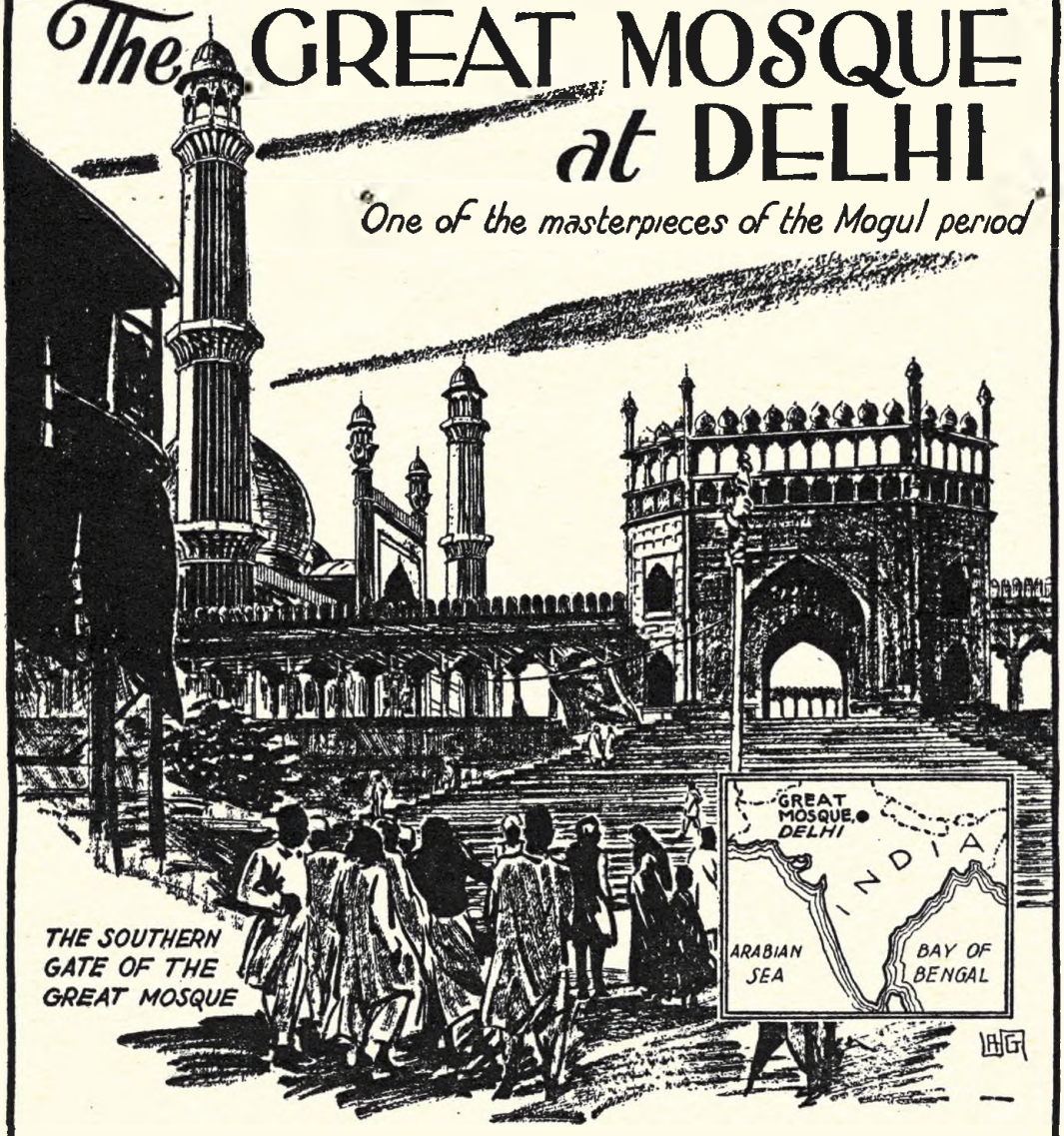
A Kneel, a Kick, and a Spurn

THE arms of the Isle of Man consist of three legs in armor, flexed at the knee. The symbolism is that the Isle of Man "kneels to England, kicks at Scotland and spurns Ireland."

—*Joseph Russell.*

The GREAT MOSQUE at DELHI

One of the masterpieces of the Mogul period



THE SOUTHERN GATE OF THE GREAT MOSQUE

THE Great Mosque at Delhi is the second largest Mohammedan place of worship in the world. Planned in 1631 by Shan Jehan in honor of his daughter, it took five thousand men laboring constantly for six years to complete the edifice. With the exception of the Taj Mahal, it is the finest architectural achievement in India.

Built of pure white marble and red sandstone, the Great Mosque is raised on a platform with wide flights of steps leading up to the arcaded cloisters which surround it. In the main courtyard is a huge pool where devout Mohammedans bathe their feet. This courtyard is 325 feet square, inlaid with marble and precious stones.

This mosque is perhaps not the most beautiful place of worship in India, but it shelters a supreme treasure, an actual red hair from the beard of the Prophet. That alone makes the mosque one of the holiest of Mohammedan shrines.

In 1857 during the Indian Mutiny, the rebels fortified themselves against siege in the Great Mosque, but the damage from their fighting was perfectly restored by the British Government and by the munificence of native rulers.

Swim for Your Supper

By EDWARD BETTER

The prize for the Lake Ontario swim was $50,000—so what could be simpler, thought Max Stein, than winning $50,000 by framing the race?

"IT'S costing me money," Max'l announced.

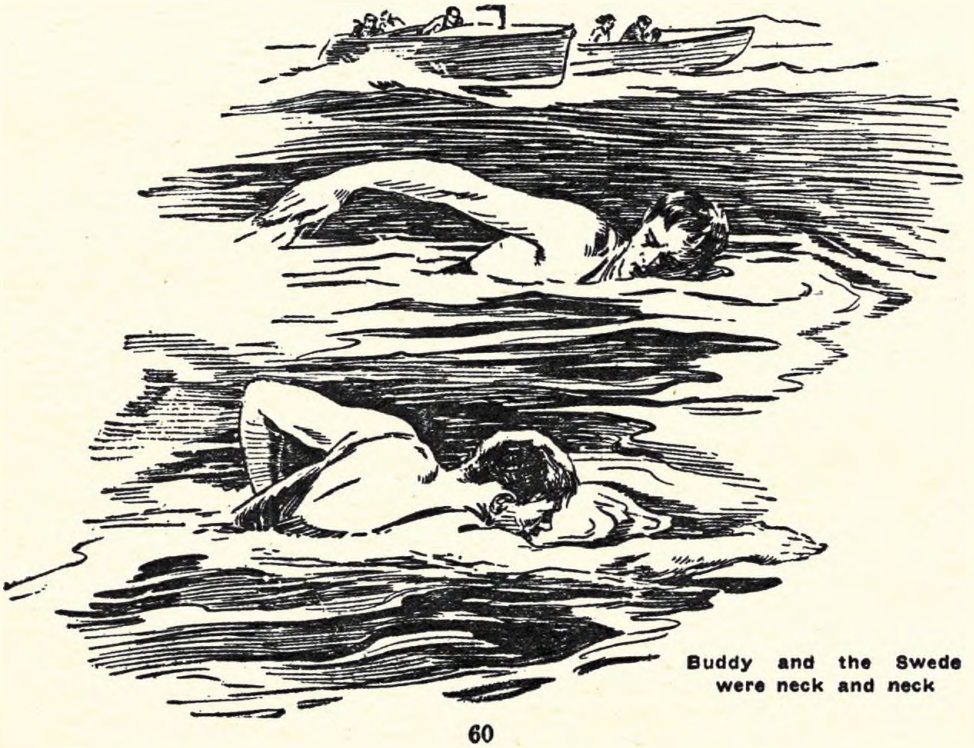
Singularly enough, this remarkable utterance fetched no response. The walls stood quite still, and the photographs upon them gave back the same coy, fleshy smiles. Max'l leaned back in his swivel chair with a certain expansiveness, and looked over to where Bennie slouched in his everlasting drowse.

" Bennie," Max'l repeated in a louder voice, " it's costing me money." This time the remark seemed to bring Bennie back into consciousness. He opened his eyes.

"Yeah. Yeah," Bennie said. Bennie's voice is something you would not care to hear on a dark road. Just from the sound of it you would say that Bennie had never had a happy thought.

Max'l wheeled around in his chair and faced in the general direction of a door which proclaimed to an uninterested world: *Max Stein, Sports Promoter.*

" Look," Max'l said after a moment of what might have been mistaken for



Buddy and the Swede were neck and neck

a thought. "Look. I am paying good money for my bums to give the customers a show, ain't I? So what? So when they ain't got no bouts I should give 'em change to get some eats and to keep in outa the rain. And what does it get me? Does anybody come to see their fights? Listen, Bennie, it's costing me money."

"If you got it all figured," Bennie complained drowsily, "what are ya puttin' a fly in my shirt for?"

"That's what we was comin' to." Max'l picked up a newspaper from his desk. "It says by the papers, Bennie, that a guy who publishes the scandal sheet is givin' out fifty grand for the first guy what swims a lake."

"Can't a guy catch some shut-eye around here? It says lots of things in papers, Max'l."

"Now I ask myself why can't one of my bums win this here swim? It ain't every day we can pick up fifty grand like that." Max'l shot his companion a look which asked for a deserved compliment.

BENNIE spat into a cuspidor. "Max'l, is it the heat that got into your head? Our bums are fighters, and what's besides, they got enough swimmers in this lake already. What lake is it anyway?"

"Lake Ontario," Max'l said as if to clinch the argument.

"Lake Ontario! Jeeze! What do you think that is, a swimmin' hole? You ain't done so bad in the fight racket. Suppose you stick around a little while yet."

A grimace spread over Max'l's face. "Don't I know? How much do you think a fix will cost?"

Bennie let go a groan. It seemed too much for him.

"What's more," Max'l continued, "we could both stand a rest from this heat. A good rest would do you fine, Bennie."

Bennie hollered: "Me? What do I want with fresh air? You go swim the lake yourself. You go up there and get one of your mugs drowned but leave me out of it."

"That's what's botherin' me." Max'l waved a pudgy hand at Bennie. "Who should we get for the stunt?" Max'l turned back to his desk, scratching a pad with a heavy pencil. Over on the other side of the room, Bennie took out a cigarette. Except for the scratching of the pad, there was no sound in the sooty little four-square. "Umm," said Max'l, clearing his throat after a few moments, "how about this feller—"

The opening of a door cut the sentence short. A tall young man with curly brown hair and laughing brown eyes walked into the room. In Max'l's little book, he is described: Buddy Saunders, heavyweight, 195, age twenty-six, no right hand. Of course Buddy had a right hand, but for Max'l's purposes, he might just as well been without one. It was known to one and all that Buddy would have had trouble knocking out a sixty-year-old welterweight with his right mitten.

"Say, Max'l," Buddy said after greetings had been exchanged, "when are you goin' to make me a champ? I'm tired of broadening out my rear-end. I want to do something. You know, Max'l, I got what it takes."

Max'l put on his special dumb manner which he had for bill collectors. He mumbled something about how bad things are. Then a sudden flash came into his eyes, and he strode over to where Bennie sat and whispered into his ear. To Buddy they appeared like some ancient conspirators, hatching

something between them. Max'l turned around suddenly.

"Can you swim, kid?" he asked.

Buddy nodded: "You bet. I got a couple of medals in school. I can swim great. But compared with my boxing I'm like a drowning man. I can box a hundred times better than I can swim. Listen, Max'l, when are you going to get me a bout?"

Bennie got up and put his arm on Buddy's shoulder. "Look here, kid," he said slowly, "I hate to say it, but you'll fit the part. You are it."

LAKE ONTARIO didn't strike Buddy as a particularly bad sort of place. It meant a change, at least, from the humdrum routine of taking out one silly doll after another, with hot-stuffy movies in between. It meant a chance to fill Max'l's ear, and filling the boss's ear might mean a good fight one of these days. But Lake Ontario didn't really mean anything until Eva Richardson happened along.

Eva happened at the hotel bar with a "Long Whistle" in her hand. With her free hand she waved majestically at the bartender, punctuating her talk with the movements of her fingers; long, capable fingers which looked as firm as they were feminine.

The room was crowded with a variety of men. Short, long, fuzzy, bitten; swimmers in the contest, hangers-on, publicity men, journalists, holiday seekers; men of every trade and description. But Eva was not paying any attention to them; Eva talked to the bartender, helping her words with her supple fingers.

Just at that point Buddy came in, his face a little whisky-reddened. He took one look at Eva standing out from the cluster of convivial bar-flies and a shiver ran through his frame such as it had never been shivered before. Buddy did not hesitate; after four old-fashions, Buddy never hesitated.

"Hello," Buddy said, his voice musical. Buddy's voice always had a certain lilt, but alcohol did wonders with his vocal cords. "Hello, m'lady. I am wondering why such a pretty doll is not with some nice gent. Let me introduce myself as a nice gent. I assure you that dolls heretofore have always considered me a nice gent. For instance, there was Beatrice, who manicured at the Ritz, and Fran, who shepherded at Wellesley and—"

Eva did not look up from her drink. "Go chase yourself, Mister Nicegent."

"Is that a nice way for a lady to talk?" Buddy asked.

"Listen, Mr. Nicegent, I'm no lady, I'm a reporter. And besides—" Eva pointed one of her shapely fingers at a blond young man sitting mournfully over his food at a near-by table, "that is one of the reasons why I am here at the bar. I crave complete absence of male company."

"The sorrowful story of the lady with the beautiful hands," Buddy commented. Eva looked down at her hands and then smiled up at Buddy, secretly pleased.

"Not so sorrowful," she said. "I'll take you into my confidence, sir. He's just a fish out of the Social Register."

"Oh." He had no idea of what her words signified, and his tone and manner said as much. "Two drinks, Captain," Buddy ordered the bartender, trying to think of what to say next.

AS the drinks were served, Eva said: "Thanks. It's not a sad story, really. But tell me, would you like a stuffed shirt to trail you all around the country?"

"Who, me?" Buddy asked.

Eva shook her head in the direction of the blond young man. "That," she said rather scornfully, "that is J. Montgomery Calhoun, blue-blood natator, upper-cut gentry Adonis of the swim. By which I mean, a washout."

"And you?" Buddy asked solemnly over the edge of his glass, even though his eyes twinkled.

"I am but a poor working gal, alas." Eva pretended a haggard and drooping expression. "I am but a poor and hard-working sob-sister for the daily *Ledger,* and am now engaged in getting the human interest angle of the Ontario swim."

"Tch, tch, tch!" Buddy clucked soothingly. "The idea being, I suppose, that when the honorable Jay Montgomery wins the swim you will cease being a poor but honest gal and become his lawful wedded wife?"

"Never was a truer word spoken, sir. Or as the saying is, many a true word is said in jest. Ah me, ah indeedie!"

"And as the saying is, one confidence deserves another." Buddy looked over at the bartender and another round of drinks was set up. "I was about to confide in you, m'lady. Would you care to lend an ear to a gent in distress?"

"Business is business," she replied. "I am paid to hear such sad stories. I should like to hear your story very much. What is your name?"

"Buddy Saunders, I want you to meet—pardon, miss, I didn't quite catch the name?" Buddy made a wide, sweeping bow, knocking over one of the glasses.

"Quite cavalier but a little wet," Eva laughed. She did not look quite the efficient sob-sister now, and her laugh was that of a young woman who is both healthy and happy. "The name is Eva Richardson," she added. "But tell me, Buddy, are you in this swim too?"

"I am the man who will win this contest. Can't miss. And besides, I am the future heavyweight champion of the world, Eva Richardson." Buddy stuck out his chest a little. Eva could not help raising an eyebrow. "I am a pretty right guy," Buddy continued. "It won't be long now before I'll have them kissing the canvas. But, Eva, that is not the tearful part of the story. You see, I really don't want to win this swimming contest at all. I'm just in it to satisfy my manager." Buddy put a finger in the neighborhood of his temple, and twisted it in the air. "Daft. Screw-loose. He's gonna make a champion into a long-distance swimmer. Pity 'em for their gross stupidity, and pity me as a victim."

Eva said, "Well, ain't that something," and turned back to her drink.

Buddy smiled down at her with confidence. "Well," he boomed, "how about us being a very sad couple taking a walk in the moonlight?"

Eva's eyes found his. There was an unexpected edge to her voice now. "Three's a crowd and you and yourself are too delightful for any interruption. Besides, you'll break training rules. Better run along up to bed and dream of what a bright boy you are." There was some quality in Eva's voice that did not allow of any contradiction. It was neither anger nor outraged dignity, but something of self-respect and pride.

"O.K.," Buddy said with as much grace as he could muster under the circumstances. He wandered into the crowd. When he reached the door, Buddy turned around to get another glimpse of her slender figure.

"You palooka," Buddy thought savagely, "you haven't got a chance; she's way above your class."

"SIT down, son," Max'l invited cheerfully. "We got business to talk over." Buddy came into the room and took a seat. He decided against asking the boss about a good fight. He would let Max'l talk tonight, and later he'd get his own innings. Anyway, Max'l wanted to talk and Buddy, after receiving only the briefest responses from Eva during the two weeks that had intervened since the fiasco at the bar, did not.

"It figures this way," Max'l began. "There's a referee to every swimmer. This here referee just sits in his launch and keeps his lamps on the guy he's been told off to watch. Now, Bennie and me has struck up an acquaintance with the one that's going to watch your feet. Let's say he's an old friend. Get the way it figures?" Max'l leaned back in his chair and grimaced. "I wish the fight game could borrow this rule book they got here," he added, with a heartfelt sigh.

"I see the way it figures," Buddy said. "So what?"

"Let the kid have the whole hog, Max'l," Bennie interposed from his position on the couch. "You can never tell how innocent some guys are. I once knew a feller who believed in California sunshine."

"Looka here, Buddy," Max'l continued warmly. "It's a pipe. This fellow what's gonna keep his lamps set for you is a very O.K. citizen. He has a very proper respect for what a dollar will buy. He says to me, 'Mr. Stein, I would not do this for my own mother but you are different.' He comes to a nice gentleman's understanding with me. It's like this. At the start of the race we take an outside lane. Clayton, the referee, will come along with us. You start out easy-like and keep going wide. Then when we drop the rest of the mob, we sling you a rope and drag you three-quarters of the way across. By that time you are 'way out ahead and all you have to do is finish from there. Sweet and simple. A masterpiece, a Stein masterpiece."

Max'l clucked like a happy hen when he finished his explanation, and his already voluminous girth expanded a few notches.

There was something inescapably touching in Max'l's smile as he contemplated his own handiwork.

"That's great," Buddy countered, "but are you afraid that I can't win this swim all by myself? I would have gone in for swimming if I didn't know I was tailor-made to be the heavyweight champ. The trouble with you, Max'l, is that you just haven't got any faith in me. It's just the same with my boxing."

Said Bennie, "I hear from the boys talking down in the lobby that you ain't such a bad fish at that. They say you got plenty of power. But if I was you I wouldn't get myself too well known around here. Just play dumb."

MAX'L stared at Buddy intently. "That's right, kid," he cautioned. "You got to play dead while we're in this burg. Stay away from the bar and stop chewing the rag with strangers. You don't need any publicity around here. A build-up is our poison right now."

"And I get the rumble that you eye this reporter dame all over the joint. We ain't runnin' no love colony up here. And writin' women are poison, too. They always reminds me of women drivers, somehow." Bennie spoke

up at the ceiling. "Love ain't no life-saver," he remarked sourly.

Buddy spoke up sharply: "What is this, a Sunday-school class? I get the drift. But you don't understand how I feel about that girl. It's just your background, I suppose." Buddy's eyes flamed for a moment, then slowly the laughter and the light appeared in them again.

"Aw, lay off, Bennie," Max'l remonstrated. "It won't hurt him just so long as he keeps it quiet. We don't want anybody butting into our affairs, Buddy, that's all."

Bennie came to a sitting position. "And let me tell you this, Max'l, I wish this so-and-so business was finished. I don't like it. Honest to God, Max'l, this fresh air is gonna kill me yet."

A FEW nights later Buddy threw himself down on the little park bench, completely disgusted with himself. Shucks, Buddy was thinking, if I hadn't been so dumb I might of had a chance that night with Eva. I must be off my keel. Buddy, fella, she did smile at you. And yesterday she was very nice to you in the restaurant.

The park was bathed in moonlight, and a tropical wind hush-hushed in the tree-tops. There was that deep laxity of climate, and the fragrant smell of lake waters, which make for both love and for melancholy. The night beauty had only the latter effect on Buddy.

"Aw, nuts," Buddy muttered to himself for the thousandth time, "day after tomorrow there'll be the swim. After that I'll never see her again." This only produced a worse case of jitters, and Buddy put his head in his hands, staring dolorously at the ground under his feet.

It was because of this sharply riveted stare that Buddy did not take note of the slim figure in front of him. He stared until the visible and tangible set of ankles registered definitely on his optic nerve. Then, slowly, as one in a dream, Buddy raised his face to look into Eva's eyes.

"Hello, Buddy," Eva said as if she had known him all her life. "I've been looking for you."

Buddy answered with conviction: "I'm awfully sorry about that dumb crack I made that night over those drinks. I thought that we could be good friends anyway."

"Sure," Eva said, and there was a depth of understanding in her voice. Eva stood there with the moonlight draped around her as if she were a manikin in translucent ermine. Buddy thought that he had never seen anything so beautiful. There was a heavy pause, as if Buddy had spoken his thoughts aloud. It was Eva who found her voice first.

"I had been waiting for you to speak to me like that. But you were so formal. I'm really not as hard as I sound sometimes. Tonight I decided to hunt you out. I saw your grind yesterday in the lake, and I waved to you."

"You waved?" Buddy asked incredulously.

"Yes. And I might add that there is a moon out tonight, and we might walk."

"What an egg I turned out to be." Buddy stood up. They walked down the path at a leisurely pace. Buddy had a feeling that he ought to say something but his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth.

"And now, darling," Eva wanted to know, "what were you going to say to me in the moonlight? I've been dying to find out."

"I guess I was going to sell myself, Eva. Generally speaking, I would

have retailed my virtues and then we'd have had the usual kiss fadeout."

Eva said: "And now that I've repented about having shown you your proper station?"

"How about skipping the sales talk and getting around to the fadeout?"

"I'm glad," said Eva, turning her face up to his, "that we agree on the essentials."

"You looked grand in the water," Eva said a little later. "Do you really think that you can win this swim?"

"Don't you worry about a little thing like that. I can win this contest any time I want. Now that I'm in it, do you think anybody can stop me? And that goes for your Jay Calhoun."

"But, Buddy, they have some of the best swimmers in the world here," Eva protested. "And I do so want you to win. Even if you don't come from Virginia's First Family."

Buddy laughed. "My family were the pride of Brooklyn's grocery men for as long back as—"

A loud voice calling "Eva, Eva," left his ancestry hanging in midair. Down the path they could see the figure of a man on the run.

"It's Jay Calhoun," Eva spoke hurriedly, "let's duck." Buddy shook his head.

"How about being like Horatio," he said, "and defending the bridge."

Eva laughed. "He's angry tonight. We had a fight about you."

JAY CALHOUN did arrive, angry. His sartorial elegance heaved jerkily from his recent exertions. He looked first at Eva and then looked down over his nose at Buddy.

"Listen, you mug," he said most inelegantly, "don't you know enough to keep out of places where you're not wanted."

Eva said acidly: "Oh, my dear, the brute in you! And really, Jay, I do resent being referred to as 'places.'" Buddy simply stood there watching the blond young swank gape at both of them in astonishment. Watching him, Buddy made a sudden decision against politeness. He could feel Eva's smile backing him up.

"Couldn't you just trot yourself off and keep your dignity?" Buddy suggested.

Jay shot him a swift look of hatred. He spun around, his right hand flicking Buddy's chin. Buddy remained as he was, his mind hesitating, then he led with that right hand over which he had prayed so long and so earnestly. The punch landed solidly, and Jay Calhoun was a stuffed shirt lying on a cinder path. Cold.

Buddy gazed at his recumbent rival for a brief second, then he broke out into a jig.

"Eva! Eva! Guess what?" he cried in high glee. He took her into his arms and spun her around lightly.

Eva recovered her composure. "Oh, good gracious, Buddy. What's all this dancing for?"

"Darling! My right hand is working! I never was able to knock down a flea with it, not even if I had a horseshoe in my glove. Eva, don't you see, I've got a knock-out punch. Maybe it's love that did it! Eva, will you marry me?"

"This is rather sudden," she said. "I'm really glad you konked Jay that way, though, the arrogant pig. I've been praying for years for somebody to do that to him." Eva bent down over the prostrate figure of Jay Calhoun. "I won't be able to answer your marriage proposal until after the race. Go on back to the hotel, Buddy," she ordered in that tone of hers which could not

be denied. "I'll bring this around, if you haven't killed him. And listen, Buddy. I'm going to give you a break for this noble work," Eva added. "You wait and see."

"A break, what do you mean?" Buddy asked.

"A favor that you'll never forget as long as you live," Eva answered enigmatically. "Go on back, now. I'll see you at the race." She blew him a kiss, and Buddy, secretly disturbed, walked the distance to the hotel without turning around once.

THE morning of the world famous swim drew them all out of their beds. They were all drawn into the hotel lobby. Sleepy eyed, and their clothes set off awkwardly, they came to hear and to see. They stood in groups, then wandered apart, then once again returned to huddle together. The thought of the fifty thousand dollars that would go to the winner of the swim, the anticipation of the merciless grind in the lake, brought them to a fever pitch. They stood whispering, betting, making prophecies. The tourists, the hopers, the nuts, gathered around. They were like little fish skirting a new and mountainous whale spray; wary, timid, and thoroughly excited.

Max'l and Bennie came out of the elevator, mothering Buddy between them. Buddy was dressed in a blazing yellow robe, the one he always used at his fights. He looked vigorous and healthy between them. Bennie faced the tumultuous crowd in the lobby.

"Oh, Max'l, my heart bleeds. I ain't seen such a *klatch* of sucker money since they moved the Garden up to Fiftieth Street."

"Listen, Bennie, for the last time I'm telling you we don't take any bets. How do you know this kid of ours won't drown or somethin'?" Max'l asked sternly.

Bennie said: "Yeah. Yeah. And I suppose the referee goes out and gets himself joined up with the Salvation Army last night."

Max'l turned around and lowered his voice: "All right, you are sick already. But I put three grand on the kid last night."

The trio pushed their way into the crowd. "I'd win this thing hands down anyway," Buddy whispered; "even if it wasn't a fix, I'd win it."

Around them the crowd seemed to fade back as if making way for royalty. Max'l's eyes shot up in amazement at this strange behavior.

"I told you to lay off that yellow outfit. You'll have the dames tearing you limb from limb in a minute," he said to Buddy.

As they proceeded to the door, people in the crowd began to whisper. There were hurried pointings at Buddy. They nudged one another and gaped frankly. It reminded Buddy of a crowd outside a theater on opening night. Buddy lengthened his stride, and lifted his head with right regal composure.

On the beach Max'l took out his handkerchief and wiped zealously at a damp forehead. "Jeeze!" he exclaimed, "that bunch of apes is enough to keep a man in doctor bills. A citizen would think that those lunkheads had something on us."

Max'l took a deep breath of good Ontario air although his lungs wheezed a little in the process.

"Ah," Max'l said. "Ah."

It was Bennie who noticed them coming. He had glanced over his shoulder, and there, not ten paces behind, was the hotel mob following

steadily on their tracks. They marched along wholly unconscious of the jitters they were throwing into the trio ahead of them. Bennie thrust out his hand and caught Max'l by the sleeve.

"Black Maria," he ejaculated, "it's a pinch."

They all stared at each other suspiciously for a moment. Then Buddy, with regained poise, said airily: "Let's keep going. We haven't done anything yet. Maybe they are going this way."

"Maybe," said Bennie in perfect imitation of a Bronx cheer, "maybe they think you are Grand Vizier and we are your harem."

WHEN they got down to the shore a man came up. He had a camera on a tripod in his hand.

"Are you Buddy Saunders?" the cameraman asked.

Buddy nodded his head in the grand manner, as if he were truly one of the mighty. The stranger snapped a couple of poses, thanked Buddy and went off. Max'l and Bennie walked down and climbed into a rowboat without saying anything. They were obviously both in a state bordering hysteria. From where Buddy stood, roped off with the rest of the contestants, he caught the boss's wink, which was more like a prayer than a reassurance.

A whistle shrilled. Buddy took off his robe, lined up at the rope. He slapped the fellow standing next to him on the back with lese majesty. He felt his body stiffen, nevertheless, and his stomach stirred unexpectedly. A girl in sport-clothes hurried up to him.

"Hello," she said, and Buddy saw that it was Eva. He squeezed her hand while she said, "Well, Buddy, how do you like it?" Buddy had one eye on the judge holding a pistol high up in the air.

"I'm going great," he replied. "What else is there to like?"

The tiny report of the pistol shot splintered the calm morning air, echoing gravely. The three hundred men raced forward to the water. "I'll tell you about it in the water," Eva shouted after Buddy.

Max'l and Bennie had not gone three hundred yards from the shore when they noticed the flock of boats persistently keeping pace with them. The referee came over and asked meaningly: "What's the parade for? Something wrong?"

"Search me," Max'l said hoarsely. He let Buddy swim abreast of the small skiff. "Listen, kid," he warned, "no monkey business. The whole darned country is watching you. Did you eat an elephant or somethin'?"

The determined chug-chug of an outboard motor sounded close by.

"Hi, there!" called a fine feminine voice. Buddy lifted one hand out of the water and dangled it in greeting. "Well, Buddy, how do you like it?" she called across.

Max'l's face colored, a storm of anger rising there. "Does he like what, girlie?" he bellowed.

"My story," Eva said. "Didn't you folks read it?"

Buddy shook his head in the water. Bennie restrained Max'l from leaping out of the tiny vessel.

Eva continued cheerfully: "You should have read it. I tell you it's my masterpiece. It's all about a boy who was paralyzed in his childhood and who grew up to be an all-around athlete. I called the boy Buddy Saunders. It got front page play with your picture this morning. The editor says he's going to give me a raise."

An almost abrupt silence greeted her speech.

"What's the matter?" Eva demanded of Max'l and Bennie. "Didn't I give your boy a swell build up? Look at this crowd. I ought to charge you for it."

In the little boat, Bennie said: "Listen, Max'l, who are you to object when Cupid's arrow goes astray?"

Buddy pulled up to Eva's boat. "I'll win this race yet," he told her grimly. "Even if you did spoil my career, sweetheart."

Then Buddy struck out, his feet beating out a strong and powerful white wake.

"Look at that man go!" somebody in the crowd shouted. "He'll take this race if he can keep it up!"

AT noon they fed Buddy some grapes from the end of a fishing rod. Eva came back from a reconnoitering trip.

"Buddy, you're up with the leaders," she reported. "Jay is in second position and there's a Swede out in front. The rest of the field is dropping out."

Buddy kept on going. He could feel the terrible strain, feel his muscles swishing through the water. He had lost all sense of distance. Up ahead was Eva's face, and he could hear her words. But Buddy was thinking of only one thing. Suppose he should lose, how would his grand talk seem to her after that?

The crowd now had been silenced. They sat by quietly watching for the slightest weakness in the performer, really hoping for him to crack under the punishment. Newspaper talk, some of them said. Must be a lot of bunk.

At the ten mile mark the referee became nervous. He advised Max'l to take his swimmer from the water.

"Looka here," Max'l said in his harshest tones, "I've been watching my boys from the ringside for twenty years. I'll throw in the sponge when it comes to it. Now you go back to your own cage and leave me be. I got a winner on my hands."

Eva leaned close to Buddy. "You've pulled ahead of Jay," she said intensely. "Now there's only a Swede to beat. He's only a few hundred yards ahead of you."

Buddy came to a full stop, catching his breath. "Eva darling," he said, "there's something I want to know. Will it make so much difference. Tired. Maybe I can't win. I'm not so good as I said."

"Don't exert yourself talking such nonsense," Eva parried. "Of course you're going to win. You told me so." Eva sat back in the boat and began to entertain Buddy with episodes from her life. She told him about her childhood on an Indiana farm, how her father became a Congressman. Underneath, Eva thought, "I hope he can keep it up. He will, too. I love that confidence, and I could rip myself to pieces for having gotten in the way of his career somehow."

There was a terrifyingly loud cheer as Buddy drew abreast of the leader. Then a long, slow battle started. The other man was obviously on his last energy reserve. His face was drawn with weakness. But he kept going with dogged resolve.

For five hundred yards the duel continued, and the people in all the boats around began to cheer.

ALMOST eight hours after the swim had started, the beach came into view. The fifteen mile grind had come to its conclusion. On the shore a gang of people were racing up and down, yelling wildly.

Eva bent down. "Buddy, it's not

more than two hundred yards to the altar. Please, Buddy, you're out ahead now."

In the rowboat, Max'l stood up, his collar and tie undone, his shirt damp.

"Come on, kid. Go at 'em!" he shouted.

Bennie sat smoking a cigarette, musing over Max'l's unusual fervor. "When we get back to the city," he said mournfully, "I am going to a nice, peaceful subway station for a rest." But even Bennie was touched by the growing bedlam of many voices. Now high, now coming in low fitful gasps of sound.

Eva said: "Hit it up now—or Jay Montgomery Calhoun'll get me."

Buddy smiled wanly. He hit it up. His feet and arms moved with machine-like precision.

"My God!" Max'l cheered. "He's putting on speed!"

The shout of many lusty lungs tore at the lake stillness as Buddy stood up in the water, wading waist high onto the shore. The crowd pulled at him madly. A radio announcer grappled with him. Buddy smiled, the old conquistador smile.

"Say something to the American public," he was told by a man who pushed a microphone into his hands.

Buddy's chest rose and fell rhythmically under his wrappings. His talk came in puffs: "This is Buddy Saunders talking, folks. Buddy Saunders who has had the honor to win a great race. A great race won by a great American. And it doesn't come from eating spinach either. You've got to be good to win this race, and let me tell you I'm all of that!"

There was a good deal more fuss. Newsreel cameras, officials, autograph hunters, newspapermen milled around him. And Buddy handled them right.

"Where is the English Channel they talk about?" Buddy said into the sound cameras. Buddy received the fifty thousand dollar check with a flip, "Too bad you didn't make it out to my name instead of to bearer."

It was some time later that Buddy finally pushed his way to where Max'l and Bennie stood with Eva.

Buddy said: "Well, darling?"

"You know, Buddy," Eva said, "I'll always love you for your modesty."

Buddy muttered an "Aw" and leaned down and kissed her. They held that for a few seconds and Buddy came out of it, saying, "I'm all wet." And they both laughed with unreasonable gayety.

Max'l coughed discreetly.

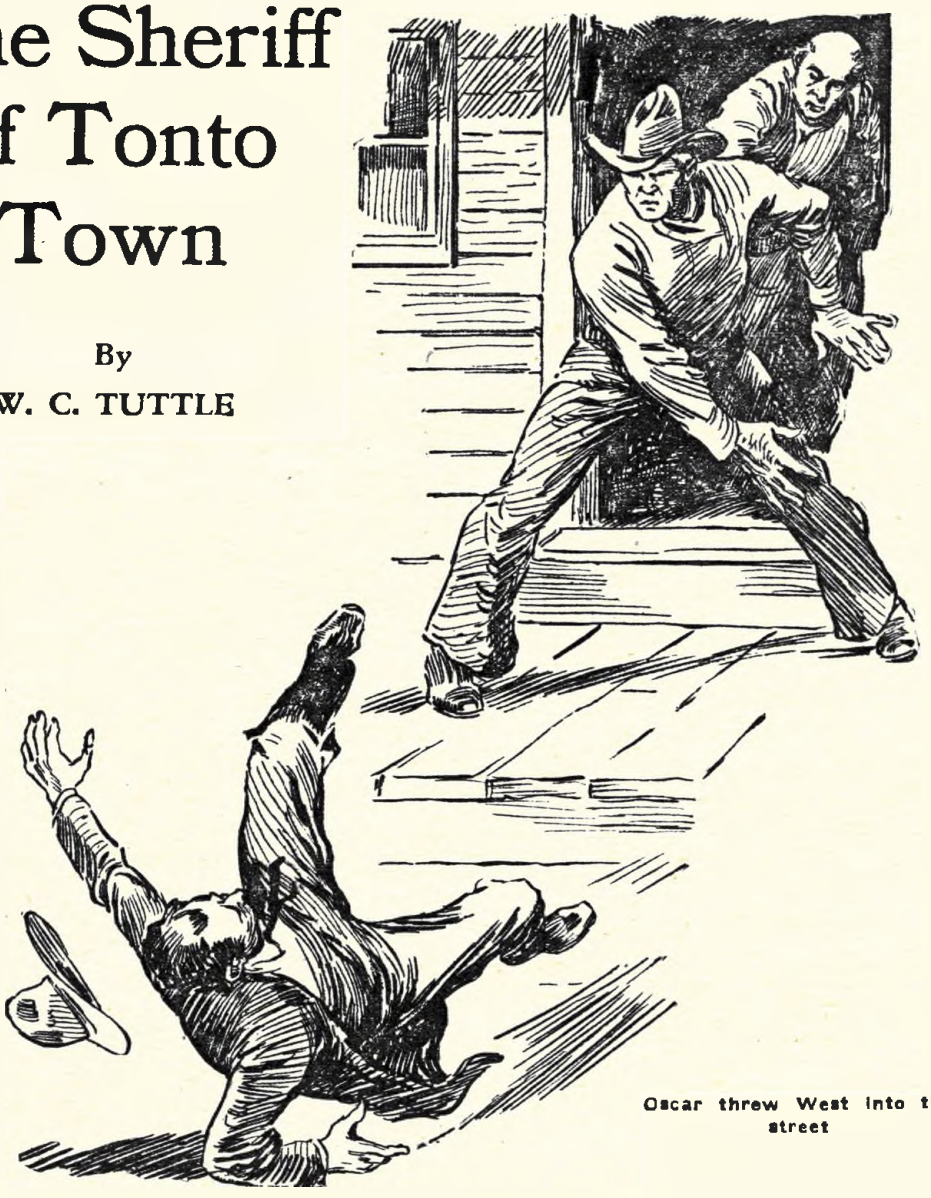
"Hey there, Max'l," Buddy inquired loudly, "are you going to get me a decent fight as our wedding present?"

Bennie said sourly: "I'm giving even money that he'll be running you at the next Kentucky Derby."

THE END

The Sheriff of Tonto Town

By
W. C. TUTTLE



Oscar threw West into the street

Maintaining law and order in a Western town is no job for a lazy man, Henry decides—especially when the town doesn't want law and order

THE STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

IN the early days in Arizona, three partners discovered a million-dollar mine, which they called the Three Partners. Parke Neal and Tom Silver sent Jack West, the third partner, out to register it. He registered it under his own name, and started a feud between Neal and Silver.

Twenty years later, Parke Neal staggered into Tonto City, a dying man, claiming he had just discovered a new mine

more valuable than the Three Partners. He died before he could give its location, but he did state that he bequeathed it to Lola, the girl who sang and dealt faro in the Tonto Saloon. She had staked him.

Tom Silver, his face disfigured by a dynamite blast, found Neal just before the latter died, and learned that it was Jack West, and not Neal, who had stolen Silver's wife. West was now owner of the Tonto Saloon, and a wealthy man.

Henry Harrison Conroy, vaudeville actor, who had gone west and been elected sheriff of Tonto County, and his deputy, Judge Van Treece, an old lawyer who liked whisky too well, were trying to preserve the law in Wild Horse Valley, and they found their hands full. Henry was in love with the Widow Harper, who ran a millinery store. Leila Harper, her daughter, was engaged to Danny Regan, foreman of Henry's J Bar C ranch. Doc Sargent, head gambler for Jack West, wanted to marry Leila. Nick Borden, a mysterious newcomer, promised trouble for Henry.

CHAPTER VI.

JAILER'S WOE.

JACK WEST drove in from Scorpion Bend that night and arrived in Tonto City about midnight. Doc Sargent turned his game over to another gambler and went into conference with his boss.

"What about that millinery store?" asked West abruptly.

"Twenty thousand dollars," replied Doc. West snorted aloud.

"Mrs. Harper turned the deal over to the sheriff," explained Doc, "and the damn fool made me that price."

"Is the man crazy, Doc? Twenty thousand! Why, the place ain't worth five hundred."

"Two hundred," said Doc. "That's what Conroy said; but the price is still twenty thousand dollars. You could get another building and open—"

"You fool!" snapped West. "I don't want the business."

"I see-e-e," murmured Doc wisely. "You want those two women to get out of Tonto City."

"And that's as far as you need to see, Doc."

"All right," smiled Doc. "But I was wondering if *they* happen to know what you want. That's a pretty stiff price, West."

West glowered, chewing savagely on his cigar.

"What else is wrong around here?" he asked roughly.

"Oh, I guess everything is all right. Business is fine. I suppose you know that Nick Borden bought the Smoke Tree Mine."

"Nick Borden? Is that—you say he bought the Smoke Tree?"

Doc Savage nodded. "That's what he announced in here. He set 'em up to the house, in celebration of a rich strike."

"In the Smoke Tree? Hell, there ain't an ounce of gold in that whole hill. I had experts go over it with a fine-tooth comb."

"Even an expert can be mistaken, I suppose," remarked Doc.

"That's possible; but improbable. Nick Borden owns it, does he?"

"Yes, he bought it from the Rice brothers. I don't know what he paid—he didn't say."

"You bet he didn't! Do yuh know if anybody has been tryin' to find Parke Neal's prospect?"

"Haven't heard a thing about it. Everybody seems to think that Neal was dynamite-crazy; imagined he'd struck it rich."

"I'll put a couple of the boys on that job. They should be able to trace the prospect down. Somebody must have known where he was workin'. I wonder if he told Lola where the mine was located."

"I don't believe he did."

"Has yore friend Regan been in since I socked him?"

"No, he's kept away from here," laughed Doc. "Are you goin' back tonight?"

"I reckon I'll stay here tonight, and have a talk with that fool sheriff in the mornin'. Another thing, Doc; don't forget that I'll give a thousand dollars for that newspaper clippin'—and no questions asked."

"Well, you don't think I've got it, do you?" asked Doc indignantly.

"You're still alive, Doc," replied West. "That answers yore question."

"And no questions asked," mused Doc, after West had left the office. "The man who claimed the reward wouldn't live long. I believe that little clipping is worth many times that amount—and Doc Sargent is going to collect—sometime."

JACK WEST strolled through the gambling room, and entered the honky tonk. Possibly fifty men were in there, drinking and listening to the very rough brand of vaudeville. Lola sang her song, and came back from the stage, meeting West near the door.

"Yore voice was beautiful tonight, Lola," he told her.

"I suppose it is improving," she said. "Whiskey fumes and tobacco smoke are wonderful for the voice."

"Yeah, I reckon it is a little thick in here."

West studied her closely for several moments, his eyes narrowed.

"Doc Sargent wanted to marry you once, didn't he, Lola?"

"Something like that," she replied. "What about it?"

"He's still crazy about yuh, ain't he?"

Lola laughed softly as she rested her chin on her hands, paste-jewels glinting in the lamplight when she leaned her elbows on the green table-top.

"I'm afraid Doc is very fickle," she said. "Just now he is crazy about that Harper girl, the daughter of the milliner."

West's eyes widened. "He is, eh? The Harper girl. I don't suppose you care, eh?"

"I'd hate to see him get her—for her sake."

"Lola," said West quietly, "I'm goin' to make you a proposition. Yo're the kind who can keep a shut mouth. A few days ago I lost a newspaper clippin'—lost it in the office, I'm sure. Doc was there when I lost it. I don't care how you do it—I want results—and I want to know if Doc has that clippin'. If he has, and I can get it, I'll give you five thousand dollars."

Lola looked curiously at Jack West.

"Doc is your boss gambler, and manager of this place; don't you trust him?"

"Lola, a man who has bucked the games that I've bucked don't trust neither man nor woman. Will yuh help me? You could use five thousand dollars, I reckon."

"I think I could," she replied thoughtfully. "I've never had that much money in my life, and never expect to have that much. It seems to me that if Doc has that clipping, he'd be willing to *find* it for five thousand dollars."

"There are things that you don't understand, Lola. If I *knew* Doc had that clippin', I'd kill Doc. He knows it—and that's why he'll never find it."

Her brows lifted slightly as she said:

"At that rate, I'd be afraid to handle it myself."

"I don't ask you to handle it, Lola.

All I'm askin' you to do is to find out if Doc has it—or had it. Use your own way to get this information — and you'll get the money—in good American gold."

"I see. I don't have to recover the clipping. All I have to do is to find out if Doc has it."

"That's all. If he's got it cached, I don't care whether I get it or not—as long as nobody else does."

West offered to buy Lola a drink, but she declined, because she never drank.

"You're a queer one," West told her. "But I'm glad you don't drink. Play the game with me, kid, and some day you may be runnin' this place."

THE early morning activities of Tonto City had started when Josephine Swensen and Oscar Johnson, squeezed together in the rather small seat of a top buggy, drove into town. They were on their way back from the regular Friday night dance at Scorpion Bend.

Josephine was over six feet tall, and would weigh about a hundred and eighty. She was well past the thirty milestone of life. Her hair was a stringy blond, her face large, with prominent cheek-bones, little blue eyes and a large nose. Her small hat, with one huge rooster-feather sticking straight up the back, was poised over one eye as they drove up to the front of the Tonto Hotel.

Henry and Judge, on their way to the office, stopped to see the arrival of their jailer and his lady-love. Josephine got out, unassisted, turned, grasped the top of the front wheel of the buggy, and talked earnestly to Oscar, who sat there, looking straight ahead. Then she turned around and walked stiffly, haughtily, into the hotel.

Oscar merely turned his eyes and watched her enter the lobby. Then, without any warning, he emitted a shrill war-whoop, which could be heard all over Tonto City. The frightened horse leaped wildly, fairly jerking all four wheels of the buggy off the ground, and broke into a swift gallop down the street.

Less than two blocks beyond the hotel was the livery stable, with its broad plank incline which led up to the wide doorway. The equipage whirled past Judge and Henry, and Judge gasped:

"My God, he's only got one line!"

But apparently one line was sufficient, and luckily it was the right line. The running horse was yanked to the right, the buggy skidded sideways, almost overturning, and the runaway shot up that plank incline at top speed, the buggy rebounding so high at the top that the top of the buggy hit the cross timbers.

There was a heavy crash, the squeal of a frightened horse, followed by minor crashes and thumps.

"If he isn't killed—" gasped Judge.

But Oscar appeared at the doorway, as unconcerned as ever. He dusted the palms of his hands on his thighs, turned his head slightly as he spoke to someone in the stable.

"Yah, su-u-ure," he said. "Ay alvays have good time."

"Killed!" snorted Henry. "Judge, when Gabriel blows his horn, someone will have to shoot Oscar, in order to make it unanimous."

"I can believe it, Henry. The man is impervious to harm."

THEY joined Oscar at the office door, and he grinned foolishly at them. Following them in, he sank down on his cot and proceeded to re-

move a pair of pointed-toe shoes, which were at least one size too small. Sighing with relief, he sank back and heaved a deep sigh, which seemed to come from the very depths of his soul.

"Yosephine and me have bruk oop," he stated.

"Again?" said Henry.

"Yah, su-u-ure. She say das is de end of everyt'ing, because she say Ay hu-meel-iated her too damn many times."

"It seems that you simply cannot be a gentleman," said Judge.

"Yentleman?"

"Yes, Oscar," interposed Henry. "You never treat Josephine as a gentleman should treat a lady. You are entirely lacking in the finer instincts. You are entirely too much of a swashbuckler."

"Ay am yust a Svede; and Ay am no swishbockler, Ay ta'l you. And Ay am yust as much of a yentleman as I ever vars."

"Granted," said Henry. "Just as much, Oscar. But what happened to humiliate Josephine?"

Oscar scratched his head violently for several moments.

"Ay am not yust sure. Ve had ha'al of a good time—Ay did. A big Svede from Silver City vants to dance oll de time with Yosephine, and Ay got mad as ha'al. He is oll dressed oop in a fancy suit. It got hot as ha'al in de dance hall, and de Svede took off his coat.

"Ay said to Yosephine, 'Don't forget who brought you ha'ar,' and she says, 'Ay am doing my best.'

"Va'l, Ay vent out and took a couple drinks, and come back. She is dancing with the Svede again; so Ay vent out on de floor, and Ay valk oop behind dem. Ay grab de Svede by de vaist of his fancy pants, and Ay says, 'Coom ha're to me!' and Ay storts for de stairs. Ay vars going to throw dis Svede down de stairs, and ven Ay got to de stairs, oll I've got is pair pants."

Henry leaned over his desk, choking violently, while Judge hammered him on the back with both hands, tears running down his cheeks.

"I suspect he had on red flannels, too," gasped Henry.

"Yah, su-u-ure," agreed Oscar, "but most of dem came off with dem pants. Oll he had left vars his shirt and his boots."

"And you don't know what humiliated Josephine," panted Henry.

"Ay am not sure. Ay guess it vars because Ay bruk up de dance."

"Well, did you give the pants back to their owner?" asked Judge.

"Yah, su-ure. Ay can't vare 'em. Anyvay Ay vant my pants all in one piece."

Oscar spat copiously and looked inquiringly at Henry.

"Is dere any of de prune yuice left?" he asked.

"Back there in one of the cells, Oscar," replied Henry hoarsely.

Oscar surged off the cot and went into the jail corridor, closing the door behind him.

"And so," said Henry, his eyes flooded with tears, "endeth the chapter entitled, 'The Love of Josephine and Oscar.'"

Judge nodded, being quite unable to talk for the moment. A step at the front door caused them to turn. It was Jack West, looking very severe.

"WELCOME to the sheriff's office, Mr. West," greeted Judge huskily. "You have met Mr. Conroy, the sheriff, have you not?"

West's smile was slightly sarcastic, as he nodded briefly.

"I just dropped in to have a word with Mr. Conroy," he said.

Henry leaned forward in his chair, looking Jack West over, from boots to sombrero. West flushed slightly under the scrutiny.

"Somethin's w r o n g with my clothes?" he asked curiously.

"No," replied Henry, "I was merely wondering where you carry your brass knuckles, Mr. West."

"Just wonderin', eh?"

"Naturally. In my opinion they are about the lowest type of fighting weapons; and I would have you know, sir, that this office does not approve of their use in Tonto City."

Judge looked aghast at Henry Harrison Conroy. West shoved his hands in his pockets, and stood there, swaying on his feet, his lips closed tightly, as he looked at Henry.

"Yuh don't, eh?" he said harshly. "Well, it just happens that I don't care what you like, Conroy; and I didn't come here to listen to your likes and dislikes."

"I merely wanted you to understand our attitude in the matter," said Henry. "No offense, I hope."

"That don't interest me even a little bit. Right now I'm interested in buyin' some of the business places of Tonto City. Doc Sargent tells me that you're handlin' any deal that might be made for that female hat-shop."

"I made a price to Doc Sargent," nodded Henry.

"Yeah, I know. But what *is* the price?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Twenty-five thousand, eh? Raisin' the ante, eh?"

"Yes."

"Conroy, what's yore game?"

"I haven't any; what is your game, West?"

"I told you that I'm buying in on Tonto City business. I've got a lot of faith in the future of the town."

"Mine, too, is unbounded, Mr. West. Observe the way in which prices are mounting. Twenty-five thousand today — thirty thousand tomorrow. As you gamblers say, the lid is off and the sky is the limit."

"Conroy, I've heard men say that you are a damn fool—but they didn't tell half of it."

"They very likely only knew half of it," smiled Henry.

Oscar came from the jail, closed the corridor door, and stood there, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. West glanced at him indifferently, and turned back to Henry.

"Let's drop all this damn foolishness, Conroy," he said. "Talk a little sense for once in yore life. I'll make you a decent offer."

Henry's eyes narrowed thoughtfully, as he replied:

"After what I have heard men say about you, Mr. West — I wonder if you could make a decent offer."

Jack West flamed quickly. His hands came from his pockets, clenched tightly, and he took a step closer to Henry's desk.

"Let me tell you somethin', you red-nosed, bug-headed—"

A SLITHER of heavy feet on the rough floor caused Jack West to turn his head quickly — but too late. Oscar's huge right hand, backed by every ounce of his big, muscular body, smacked against the right side of Jack West's head.

As big and powerful as he was, West was knocked completely off his feet by the force of that terrific blow,

and the little office shook from the collapse of Jack West. With the grunt of a triumphant grizzly, Oscar wrapped his arms around West, swung him up, stepped to the doorway and flung him bodily into the street.

Not less than a dozen people saw West rolling over in the dirt. They came running from all directions, only to stop and stare at the man, who owned most of Wild Horse Valley, trying to sit up, his right ear cut and bleeding, and already swollen to the size and shape of a doughnut.

Some of West's men came from the Tonto Saloon and helped him across the street.

"Yust ta'al him," said Oscar calmly, "Ay do not need brass-knockles."

Oscar came back in the office, and Henry closed the door against the gawping crowd.

"Thank you, Oscar," said Henry simply.

"By gad, sir!" exclaimed Judge. "Do you condone such things, Henry?"

"Condone? By gad, sir, I applaud them. That punch will be heard all over Wild Horse Valley. It will serve notice on the rough element that browbeating is taboo in this place, sir. I am only sorry that I was obliged to—er—sock him by proxy."

Jack West's men were very solicitous. They took him back to the private office, where they brushed him off and patched him up. Doc Sargent's face was solemn, but his eyes held a glint of amusement. West refused to call the doctor.

"I would, 'f I was you," advised one of the men. "'F that ear swells up any more, it'll jist bust, thasall. Even a human skin can stand jist so much swellin', yuh know."

West ordered all the men out, except Doc, who waited patiently for his employer to do the talking.

"It was that damn Swede jailer," said West wearily. "I got a flash of him, just before he hit me."

"I suspected him," nodded Doc. "He's a powerful brute. The men said he threw you bodily into the street."

"Have one of the men get my rig at the stable," ordered West. "I'm goin' north right away."

Doc gave the order, and came back.

"What price did Conroy make you on that hat store?" he asked.

"That was what started the trouble. He asked twenty-five thousand dollars—the damn fool."

"Then I imagine the deal is off."

"Off! Yo're damn right it's off! I'll show them a thing or two. I'll put that sheriff out of business. I'll make all three of them wish they'd never crossed me. I'll be runnin' this town; and I'll be runnin' this damn county."

"That's the way to talk."

"I'm not just talkin', Doc; I mean it. I'll make Tonto City too damn hot for several people I know. I'll bring gun-men, and—well, you watch my smoke."

"It'll be interesting to watch," smiled Doc Sargent. "I guess your rig is ready."

"All right," grunted West. He started to get up from his chair, but hesitated. On the desk was another plain envelope, sealed.

WEST picked it up, swung around and looked sharply at Sargent.

"Did you write a letter? This one?" he asked.

"No, I haven't written any letter," replied Doc. "What is that?"

West ripped the envelope open. It was apparently empty, until West opened it from end to end, when he

found a small clipping from a newspaper; smaller than the previous one. It was also yellow with age, and slightly faded. It read:

> Mrs. Jack West passed away last night at the local hospital, the victim of an alleged beating by her husband several weeks ago.
>
> The officers have redoubled their efforts to locate Jack West, for whom they have been searching on an assault charge, but which has been changed to murder, since this unfortunate ending of the affair.

West gripped the clipping in his right hand and lifted his head, looking straight at Doc Sargent. His face was as gray as the smoke trees along Wild Horse River, and his eyes seemed to burn deep into the mind of his boss gambler. Doc Sargent drew back.

"My God, I haven't done anything!" he breathed. "What is it?"

"The second one," whispered West. "By God!"

He got slowly to his feet, and Doc backed to the door.

"Get a grip on yourself, West," he begged. "I don't know—"

Slowly West opened his hand and looked down at the little piece of yellow paper. Then he slowly tore it to tiny bits in his palm, placed them on top of the desk, and lighted them with a match, ignoring the fact that he was ruining the polished wood.

The odor of burning varnish filled the room. With a quick motion of his hand, West brushed the ashes aside. Doc Sargent licked his lips, watching West closely. Doc had a derringer concealed in his right hand, ready for an emergency.

"Was that the one you lost?" he asked.

West shook his head slowly. There was color in his face again and his eyes were normal.

"I reckon my rig is ready," he said in a dull voice and walked out, going straight to the street.

Doc Sargent replaced the derringer in his pocket and drew a deep breath of relief. For once in his colorful life he had looked into the eyes of a killer.

"So he'll be running Tonto City—and the county, eh?" muttered Doc Sargent. "A big, big man. But there's somebody around Tonto who has got you whipped, West. I wish I knew him—and it's not the big Swede, either."

Doc went out into the saloon, where he stood at the bar, looking around the room. There was little activity in the Tonto at that time of the day. Doc was trying to puzzle out who had been in the office and left that envelope on his desk.

His searching eyes finally rested on Tom Silver, the swamper, who was putting a cover over a pool table at the rear of the room. Doc's eyes narrowed, as he studied the scar-faced man. It would have been easy for Tom to have left that letter when he cleaned out the office.

"So he forgot his last name," mused Doc to himself, as he remembered Tom Silver's reply at the time he was hired. "I wonder who he is. That scar would prevent anyone from recognizing him. Is he the man? It might pay me to find out—and, still, I've got to go easy."

CHAPTER VII.

HOLD-UP.

LITTLE real news filtered out from the Yellow Warrior mine, where a dozen stamps ground out a yellow harvest. It was West's richest property, although it was said that the

Gold Plate would be as rich a producer, when the mill was ready for production. A big crew was driving deep into the Lucky Stake, ignoring the low-grade stuff.

Armed men guarded the Yellow Warrior. No one knew when a shipment of bullion might be made, nor who would take it to the railroad at Scorpion Bend. Nick Borden had a crew of only six men at the Smoke Tree; six tight-lipped, hard-faced men, who had nothing to say about the property.

A shotgun guard rode regularly on the stage these days, although there had not been a stage robbery since the mines opened in Wild Horse Valley. There was no bank in Tonto City, but there were rumors that West might reopen the old Bank of Tonto, which had been closed for months.

West's boasted gunmen arrived in Tonto, one at a time, so as to not attract attention. Judge Van Treece, who was a walking encyclopedia of things Arizona, saw them, and mentioned the fact to Henry.

"There are five of them," stated Judge, "and I know the reputation of each one. They are unsavory."

"Do you suppose there is any significance in their being here?" asked Henry. "Naturally, they would gravitate to a new boom."

"They came too close together, Henry. No, I believe it is Mr. West's move to dominate things. He would hate us for what Oscar did to him, and West is famous for his hates."

"Is there any legal procedure?" queried Henry, a twinkle in his eyes.

"The law," replied Judge, "might prosecute them, in case we were murdered."

"As usual, Judge, the law does not prevent—it only punishes."

"It has its limitations, Henry. By gad! Here comes the long overdue Frijole Bill."

The little cook from the J Bar C tied his horse at the sheriff's hitch-rack, and came in, carrying a bundle inside a grain-sack.

"I brung yuh two gallons this crack," he grinned. "Them last prunes was great. Yuh see, I cut me some maguey plant, like the Mexicans use for tequila, and let her ferment a long time. Then I cuts the prune whisky fifty-fifty with this here tequila, and if that ain't—well, you try it. She's shore a cross between chain-lightnin' and grizzly gizzard."

"Grizzlies have no gizzards," stated Judge soberly.

"Have you," queried Frijole, "ever dug into one t' find out, Judge?"

"No, I never have."

"Well, I have—and he had a gizzard. Take out that cork and git a whiff, Henry. She's shore nectar. I can allus tell how good it is by the way Bill Shakespeare, the rooster, acts, when he eats his fill of the mash. He's m' ther-mommy-ter—Bill is."

"WHAT did he do this time?" asked Henry, sniffing carefully.

"Well, sir," Frijole sat down on Oscar's cot, his hands on his knees, "I'll tell yuh. Yuh know how it is with Bill Shakespeare, when he's full of mash—goes out to git hisself a wildcat. He ginerally goes down in the dry-wash, finds the tracks of a old bobcat, and trails him to his lair."

"Liar," said Judge.

"Lair," corrected Frijole. "Meanin' his hang-out."

"What a namesake for the Bard of Avon," sighed Henry.

"He's really the belligerentest

rooster I ever knowed," declared Frijole. "Well, sir, I seen Bill headin' for the dry-wash; so I throwed a saddle on the old buckskin, and made up m' mind I was goin' to witness the battle.

"Yuh see, Bill's in the habit of killin' wild-cats and hidin' of their skins —and I want a good pelt. Well, old Bill headed up the wash, with me close behind. The way that rooster can trail shore proves to me that his ma was scared by a bloodhound. We're way up in Smoke Tree Cañon when I lost track of Bill. It's so all broke up and narrer that I has to leave my bronc, and go on foot.

"I'm 'bout a quarter-mile beyond my horse, when all to once I hears a hell of a disturbance ahead. I knowed by the noise that Bill has caught that wild-cat; so I puts on full steam ahead, jist to be there to save the hide.

"Well, sir, I comes around in a narrer place in the cañon, and m' hair shore stood on end. There's two mountain lions comin' down that narrer gut, jist as fast as they can run, and on the neck of the rear lion is old Bill Shakespeare, ridin' straight up, with the lion's left ear in his beak. And every time that lion hit the ground, Old Bill socks him in the right shoulder with his spur.

"Well, sir, I made m'self as thin as possible against the side of that cañon, and let 'em pass. It jist left me kinda weak in the knees, but I was able to git back to my horse, and go home. Bill wasn't back yet when I left, but them four hens of hisn was out on the corral fence, lookin' down the wash; so I reckon they seen him go past. He's shore some rooster, if I *have* raised him almost from a aig. How does that stuff smell, Henry?"

"After one whiff," replied Henry, "I can believe every word of your story, Frijole."

"Well," said Frijole, "I can take yuh right to the place where I stood when the lions went past."

"And show us the lion tracks, I suppose," said Judge.

"Tracks? Say, Judge, them lions was goin' so fast that they wasn't on the ground long enough to make a track. I jist wish you could have seen 'em."

"That," stated Henry, "is something that only happens once in a lifetime. How is everything else at the ranch, Frijole?"

"Oh, purty good. Slim Pickins answered one of them mat-ree-mony ads in a little paper he got in Scorpion Bend. A female wrote to him, and Slim acted high-toned all that day. She asked him to send her his pitcher, but he didn't have none; so me and Danny found one of yours and sent it to her."

"My God!" exclaimed Henry.

"That's jist what Danny said she'd say," chuckled Frijole. "It was the pitcher of you in a plug-hat, holdin' a banjo."

"And that," sighed Henry, "will probably keep Slim from making an ass of himself."

"Oh, shore; she'll never write to him again."

"He'll be lucky if she doesn't sue him," declared Judge.

"I think," said Henry, "it is about time to sample this jug of chain-lightning. The discourse is getting personal."

NICK BORDEN and one of his men came to Tonto City that night. Borden smiled grimly as he noted the number of gunmen scattered about the establishment, and mentioned it to Doc Sargent.

"You must be expectin' trouble," he said to Doc.

"I don't know a thing about it, Nick," denied Sargent. "If West wants to pay for six-guns, I suppose it is up to him."

"Naturally," agreed Borden. "They say that plenty of bullion is bein' turned out at the Yellow Warrior these days."

"I can't say about that," evaded Doc Sargent. "My job is to run this place, Nick."

"Oh, I'm not pryin'," laughed Nick Borden. "I'll be turnin' out *mucho dinero* myself pretty soon. The Smoke Tree is gettin' to be a big thing."

"I've heard," said Doc, "that there isn't an ounce of gold in that whole hill."

"West told yuh that, didn't he? Tell him to come to see me, and I'll show him some stuff that'll make his eyes stick out."

Doc Sargent opened a draw-poker game, and Nick Borden took a hand in the game. Nick's man lounged around the saloon for a while, but finally went away. It was exactly midnight when Doc Sargent turned the game over to another gambler and went back to his office.

Nick Borden played with varying success until about two o'clock, when the game broke up. After a round of drinks, Nick Borden went home. He had not seen Doc Sargent since midnight, and mentioned the fact to the bartender.

"Well," grinned the bartender, "Doc's the boss; so he can do as he pleases about runnin' a game."

HENRY and Judge occupied a room in the Tonto Hotel. They had partaken of plenty of Frijole's prune juice that night, and their awakening early next morning was not so pleasant. But somebody was using their door for a drum, it seemed.

Henry sat up, blinking sleepily, as the pounding continued. He shook Judge, who sat up quickly, like a Jack-in-a-box.

"Somebody," said Henry, "has a grudge against our door."

And then he snuggled down in the blankets again, covering up his head. Judge yawned and look critically at the door, which was vibrating from the blows without.

"One more assault like that," declared Judge, "and I shall most certainly shoot right through the door, sir, or madame."

"Yudge!" yelled Oscar's voice. "Is dat you, Yudge?"

"The Terrible Swede!" snorted Judge.

"Tell him to go chase a road-runner," advised Henry sleepily.

"Ay vant to coom in!"

"Walk in; the door isn't locked, you vitrified Viking."

Except for his hat and shirt, Oscar was fully dressed, his blond hair standing on end.

"Hasn't that prune juice stopped stinging you, or have you been at the jug again?" queried Judge severely.

"Ay am yust as sober as a hurse," panted Oscar. Henry sat up and looked critically at Oscar with one eye.

"A real novelty," he said.

"Ay coom yust as fast as I can," explained Oscar. "Das svamper in de Tonto Saloon coom and ya'l like ha'l at me. He vants me to coom and see something. Ay skal ta'l you, Ay saw it!"

"I know," sighed Henry. "Little green devils, with red hats on their heads, going helter-skelter, hither and yon. The most reasonable theory, I

believe, is that the continued use of alcohol tends to disturb some optical nerve, which causes us to see strange and wonderful creatures. Now, I remember—"

"Yah, su-ure," interrupted Oscar. "But vat de ha'l has dis to do vit two men being oll tied oop in de Tonto Saloon?"

Henry blinked rapidly. "Tied up, did you say, Oscar?"

"Yah—su-u-ure—Ay ta'l you. Das ha'ar svamper—"

"Dead men?" asked Judge anxiously.

"Yust gagged."

"Gagged, eh?" said Judge. "Bound and gagged, Oscar?"

"Doc Sargent and anodder man."

"Dirty work at the cross-roads!" snorted Henry. "C'mon, Judge."

They piled out of bed and reached for their clothes. Henry was at the door when Judge grabbed him.

"Pants on, Henry," he stated.

"Oh, yes, certainly. I—I almost forgot."

A FEW moments later they went down the stairs and trotted across the street to the Tonto Saloon, where a curious crowd was already gathering. Oscar led the way back to the little office, where Doc Sargent, his mouth red and twisted from hours of trying to chew through a gag, was cursing Tom Silver for not turning him loose at once.

Pieces of the rope were scattered on the floor. Another man was sitting in a chair, massaging his wrists, a scowl on his face as he looked around the room. Doc Sargent caught sight of Henry and Judge.

"So there you are, eh?" he snarled. "Officers of the law!"

"What happened?" asked Henry.

"Plenty," replied Doc. "Thirty thousand dollars in bullion gone!"

"Gone where?" asked Judge.

Doc swore softly and turned to the doorway.

"Get out of here, the whole bunch of you; I want to talk with the sheriff and his gang. Close the door, Swede.

"Not that it will do a damn bit of good," said Doc, "but I've got to tell you about it. Everybody knows that the Yellow Warrior is producing a lot of gold. West was afraid of a hold-up. Yesterday a bed-roll was brought into this office, and inside was over thirty thousand dollars' worth of gold. At exactly twelve o'clock last night, a buggy was to stop at my back office door, and the bed-roll was to be dumped into the buggy. It looked like a safe way to take the gold to Scorpion Bend.

"I walked into my office at midnight, lighted a lamp, and got a gun stuck into my ribs. Two masked men were there, and they tied me up tight. Then they got the driver of the rig, gagged and tied him up, and drove away with the bed-roll full of gold. That scar-faced swamper found us this morning."

"Masked men," murmured Henry. "Two masked men, and apparently very efficient. Now, Mr. Sargent, just how many people knew about the way this gold was to be taken out of here?"

"Jack West and myself."

"What about this man — the driver?"

"I didn't know a damn thing," replied the man huskily. "I was to be there with a horse and buggy. I thought I was takin' somebody—not a bunch of gold."

"What about the man who brought the bed-roll from the mine?"

"It was brought here by the assayer

at the Yellow Warrior. But not even the assayer knew when or how it was to be sent out. Anyway, he's perfectly honest."

"It is very unreasonable to suppose that someone else did not know about it, Mr. Sargent," said Henry.

"I tell you, they didn't," said Sargent. "They couldn't."

OSCAR was squatted on his heels, examining the pieces of rope which had been cut from Doc Sargent. He reached under a chair and picked up a rawhide hondo — the commercially-made loop for a lariat rope. Oscar looked at it quickly, stood up and slipped the hondo in his pocket.

"Wait a minute!" snapped Doc Sargent. "What did you pick up, Swede?"

"Not'ing—mooch," replied Oscar.

"I think you're a liar!" exclaimed Doc, and went up to Oscar. "Give me what you took off the floor, you dumb—"

Smack! Oscar slapped Doc Sargent across the face with his open palm, knocking him backwards across the room. It was like a blow from the paw of a grizzly. Doc Sargent crashed against the wall, then sat down heavily. Oscar stepped out, closed the door —and was gone.

"Heaven is my home!" exclaimed Judge.

"I have heard that it is a nice place," said Henry inanely.

Doc Sargent got to his feet, dazed but mad, and headed for the door.

"I'm going to kill that damn Swede," he swore huskily. "He's got something that will prove who pulled this job, I tell you. He can't hit me and get away with it. I'll fix him!"

As he started past, Henry reached out, hooked his left hand into Doc Sargent's collar and yanked him back. As mad as he was, Doc looked at Henry in amazement.

"You are not going to kill Oscar," declared Henry. "Another remark like that and I'll put you in jail for—for disturbing the peace and threatening to kill the jailer."

"Well, I'll be damned!" snorted Doc. "Getting tough, eh?"

"I swore to uphold the law of this county," said Henry firmly, "and I most certainly shall do it—even if it requires putting a gambler in the hospital. I hope, sir, that you catch my meaning."

"All right! If that's the way you feel—go and get whatever your damn jailer took off the floor. He got some evidence."

Henry released Doc and stepped back.

"Have you any idea what it was, Mr. Sargent?" he asked.

"I don't know what it was—but that big-headed Swede knows."

Henry and Judge walked through the saloon and halted on the sidewalk, followed by several hearty laughs from those in the saloon.

"Derision," said Judge wearily.

"Derision—hell!" gasped Henry. "All along, I've felt— Look at us! Judge, you've got on my pants, and I've got on yours. But how—this waistband is closed and—"

"Closed? By gad, sir, you not only have my pants on, but you have them on backwards! Luckily, your coat is long, but even at that—well, it might be mistaken for a handkerchief, hanging from a hip pocket."

"Judge, I am mortified, sir; mortified, I tell you! And you! If that belt of yours slips one iota, you'll— Judge, let us go to the office."

"To the office," panted Judge. "Lean back as far as possible, Henry, and hold down on that coat."

"For once in an honest life," sighed Henry, "I have something to conceal. Cling to your belt, Judge; we shall not strike the set until the act is over."

CHAPTER VIII.

"OUT!"

THEY reached the office after what seemed an interminable journey, and closed the door. Oscar was sitting on the cot, the prune-juice jug between his knees, a six-shooter beside him.

"You — you — " spluttered Judge. "Oscar, will you ever have any sense?"

"Ay have yust been wondering," replied Oscar soberly.

"Stop chiding Oscar—and give me my pants," said Henry.

Oscar took a look at their pants, and doubled at the waist with unholy mirth. When the exchange had been effected, Henry looked upon Oscar severely.

"Now, just what was it you found over there, Oscar?" he asked.

Still chuckling, Oscar dug deep in a pocket and drew out a worn rawhide hondo, on one side of which had been burned in small letters the brand of the J Bar C ranch. Henry and Judge examined it closely.

"Das hondo belong to Danny Regan," said Oscar. "Ay burned de brand on it for him myself."

"I see," mused Henry. "The rope used to tie Doc Sargent belonged to Danny Regan."

"Rather a damning piece of evidence," said Judge.

"If it were in alien hands," nodded Henry.

"But you can't suppress evidence, Henry."

Henry looked at Judge in amazement.

"You—you would let this become evidence?" he queried.

"In this case, I believe it would become Exhibit A."

Henry glared at Judge for a moment, took a knife from his pocket and with a sharp blade deftly removed the lightly-burned brand.

"That will greatly lower the classification, I believe," he said.

"It undoubtedly destroys *all* evidence," sighed Judge. "However, the fact of its existence still remains in the minds of all three of us officers of the law."

Henry looked thoughtfully at Oscar.

"What was on that hondo, Oscar?" he asked.

"On it?" queried Oscar. "Ay never saw damn t'ing on it. Yust a plain hondo."

He took the hondo off the desk, rubbed the side of it violently on the none-too-clean floor and examined it critically before tossing it back on the desk.

"And now," sighed Henry, "I suppose the State of Arizona will expect us to find the robbers."

A horse and buggy stopped at the front of the jail, and they opened the door to see Danny Regan in the buggy. Slim Pickins was just in the act of tying two saddle horses to the hitch-rack near the Tonto Saloon.

"Anybody lose a horse and buggy?" asked Danny, laughing, as the three men crowded out against the hitch-rack.

"Did you find this one?" asked Henry.

"Shore did, Henry. It was about two hundred yards this side of the

ranch-house, away off the road, with the horse feedin' calm and peaceful."

"The horse was loose?" asked Judge.

"Jist as loose as a busted egg."

THE man from the livery stable was hurrying up to them, and he looked the equipage over closely. Several men, including Doc Sargent, were coming from the Tonto Saloon.

"That's the outfit that was stolen last night," declared the stableman. Doc Sargent looked sharply at Danny, who got out of the buggy.

"Where did you get it, Regan?" asked Doc.

"Oh, there you are!" exclaimed Danny. He looked around quickly, but turned back to Sargent and said:

"I just wanted to be sure that your boss wasn't around, ready to cave-in my ear again. Well, I'll tell yuh; we found it near the J Bar C, jist as loose as the morals of some folks around here; so we brought it to town. Any objections, Mr. Sargent?"

"What's that—in the back?" exclaimed Judge.

"It's the bed-roll!" exploded Doc Sargent. "Why—why, I'll be damned! It's still roped, too! I don't—"

"I dunno what the hell all this fuss is about, but I reckon it's all right," said Danny, and he swung the heavy roll of blankets and canvas to the sidewalk, where Henry proceeded to remove the rope. The men crowded in and watched Henry unroll the bed, disclosing what had made it so heavy.

"Drill-steel!" exclaimed a miner. "All short stuff, too. That's a hell of a thing to steal, ain't it?"

Henry stood up and squinted at Doc Sargent.

"Thirty thousand dollars, eh?" he said. "Steel must be high."

Doc Sargent's jaw had sagged perceptibly, but suddenly he began grinning with evident relief.

"It seems to amuse you, sir," observed Judge stiffly.

Doc nodded, and laughed aloud.

"I can see it now," he said. "Jack West was too smart for them. This was a dummy shipment."

"You mean — he tempted the robbers?" asked Henry.

"And I guess they fell for it, too," laughed Doc. "Well, I'm sure glad. It takes a load off my mind."

The assembled crowd laughed with him, and immediately accepted an invitation to have a drink on the Tonto Saloon. Doc had already sent a message to Jack West, telling him about the robbery, and he felt that West would get a good laugh out of the incident.

As the crowd trooped away, Henry took Danny into the office and told him about the branded hondo.

"That rope was stolen off my saddle over a week ago," declared Danny. "Some thief used it, tryin' to put the deadwood on me. I'll have to repay Oscar for gettin' away with it. Henry, did you see Werner, that new butcher?"

"Yes, I made it a point to go up to his shop. But he had already signed a contract with the LJ outfit, up near Scorpion Bend."

Danny nodded grimly. "I just wanted to tell yuh that me and Slim found where somebody had butchered two yearlin's. It was back in a canon, this side of the ranch. They cut off the heads and legs. Mebbe happened three, four days ago."

"Do you think they were our yearlings, Danny?"

"Yuh can't tell, Henry; but I'm bettin' they were."

"Perhaps it was some prospector in need of some meat."

"A pretty big appetite, don'tcha think?" asked Danny.

"Yes, he *would* have quite an appetite, I suppose. But what can we do about it, Danny?"

"Well, it'll mean that we'll ride with a rifle handy. We can't stand for rustlers, yuh know. They got about eighty dollars' worth at that one spot—and that's money."

"That is very true. Danny, I wonder who pulled off that robbery last night?"

"Evidently some friends of mine," smiled Danny. "Or it might have been that they didn't know the ranch brand was on that hondo."

"That is possible. Well, you run along and talk with Leila. Don't worry about rustlers until we know definitely that it was not merely a hungry prospector. A—a yearling isn't very big, you know."

"Neither is eighty dollars in currency, Henry."

IT was late at night when Jack West came to Tonto in answer to Doc Sargent's message; and he was as savage as a grizzly. There had been no dummy shipment. That bed-roll had contained over thirty thousand dollars' worth of bullion. West knew nothing about the drill-steel, which was wrapped in the blankets. Doc mentioned the name of the assayer, and West flared quickly.

"Yuh can't put any deadwood on him. Anyway, two other men witnessed the packin' of that bullion. There wasn't any substitution at the mine. Doc," he glared savagely at the boss gambler, "are you tellin' me the truth about all this?"

"Do I look like a fool?" retorted Doc Sargent. "Why, they'd find out the substitution at the bank in Scorpion Bend. No, I tell you, it happened just like I said. They cut the ropes off me, and by that time that half-witted sheriff came along with his brainless help.

"While we were talking about it, that damn Swede got something from under that chair over there. I told him to give it to me, and then he—well, he slapped me so damn hard that I saw stars for five minutes—and in the meantime he pulled out."

"He did, eh? Yes, I reckon you would see stars. But what was it?"

"*Quien sabe?* I haven't seen the Swede since."

"And Regan brought the horse and buggy back, eh?"

Doc nodded gloomily.

"I wonder how much Regan knows about it," said West. "He holds no love for me, that's a cinch. Two men, eh? But what the hell's the use of askin' the sheriff to do anythin' about it? Regan is his foreman—and he'd back the damn kid. But I've started some wheels to movin', Doc. What's the use of havin' authority if yuh don't use it? I'm sick of that big-nosed sheriff."

"What have you done?" asked Doc Sargent.

"Wait and see. I'm goin' up to the Yellow Warrior to spend the night. Damn it, that robbery hits me hard. But keep still about it. Let 'em think it was a dummy shipment. It'll worry the thieves who got it."

"Just let her go as she lays, eh?"

"That's it, Doc."

IT was two days after the robbery at the Tonto Saloon, which, as far as Henry knew, was an unprofitable venture of the robbers. Just

now Henry sat at his desk, while three other men occupied the available chairs. The men were Albert Rose, of Scorpion Bend; John Calvert and Edward Harris, of Silver City. These three men constituted the Board of Commissioners of the county, looking severe, but rather uncomfortable.

"You see, Mr. Conroy, we do not wish to publicly force the issue," said Albert Rose, their chairman. "It is very unfortunate, indeed; but there has been so much comment, and certain complaints against your office, that we have decided to ask you to resign."

"Complaints?" queried Henry. "I didn't know."

The three men nodded together, as though having rehearsed the act.

"You see," added John Calvert, a merchant of Silver City, "since this valley is getting prominent through the mining industry, we really need a younger, more active sheriff. You are —well, not exactly fitted to protect the peace of this country, Mr. Conroy."

"Mr. Harris, isn't that your cue to add to the indictment?" asked Henry.

"Oh, I allus vote with the majority," replied Harris quickly.

"Gentlemen," replied Henry ponderously, "I shall also vote with the majority. You please me mightily. In fact, I said to Jack West, 'Jack, I wish you would have a talk with the Commissioners. I am weary of this office, and I would like to have their opinion on accepting my resignation.'"

"Yuh did?" blurted Harris. "Well, gee, that ain't the way Mr. West told it to us, but—well, I reckon it was his way."

"Thank you," nodded Henry. "Now, gentlemen, just how soon can you appoint my successor?"

"That is all arranged," replied Calvert quickly. "Mr. West—that is, we have tentatively appointed Mr. Lou James, of Scorpion Bend."

"Good! Now, if you gentlemen will pardon me, I shall clean out the desk and pack up my personal belongings. Thank you very much for your consideration."

They filed quietly out, and Henry sat there for a long time, a queer expression in his eyes as he looked around the old office.

"So Mr. West had me kicked out, and Mr. West appointed his own sheriff to succeed me," murmured Henry. "Ah, well, perhaps they are right. It is a young man's work."

He looked up as Judge came in, and their eyes met. Judge understood.

"It will be nice out at the ranch, Henry," he said. "I guess the town is growing past us. But tell me, did they mention West?"

"Yes, Judge. West is a big man in Wild Horse Valley. He even told them who to appoint in my stead. A man name Lou James."

"I see. Mr. James. Limps slightly in his left leg. It was caused by a bullet from a deputy's gun fifteen years ago. Convicted of helping hold up a saloon down on the Rio. Two years sentence, I believe."

"You amaze me, Judge."

"Well, being a private citizen again, you must go in for more amazement. Turn about is fair play, you know."

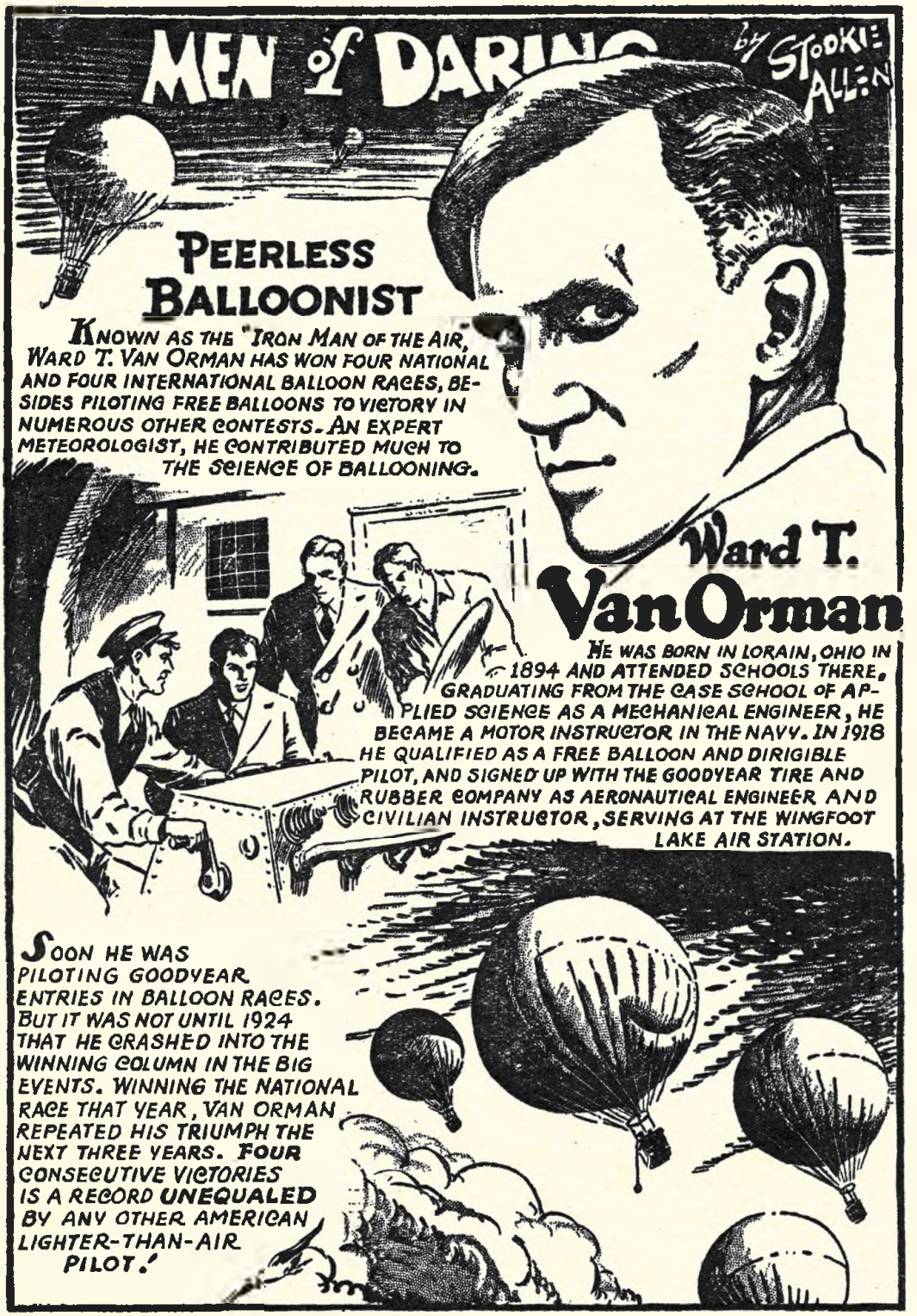
"I hope Oscar stands up under the blow," said Henry.

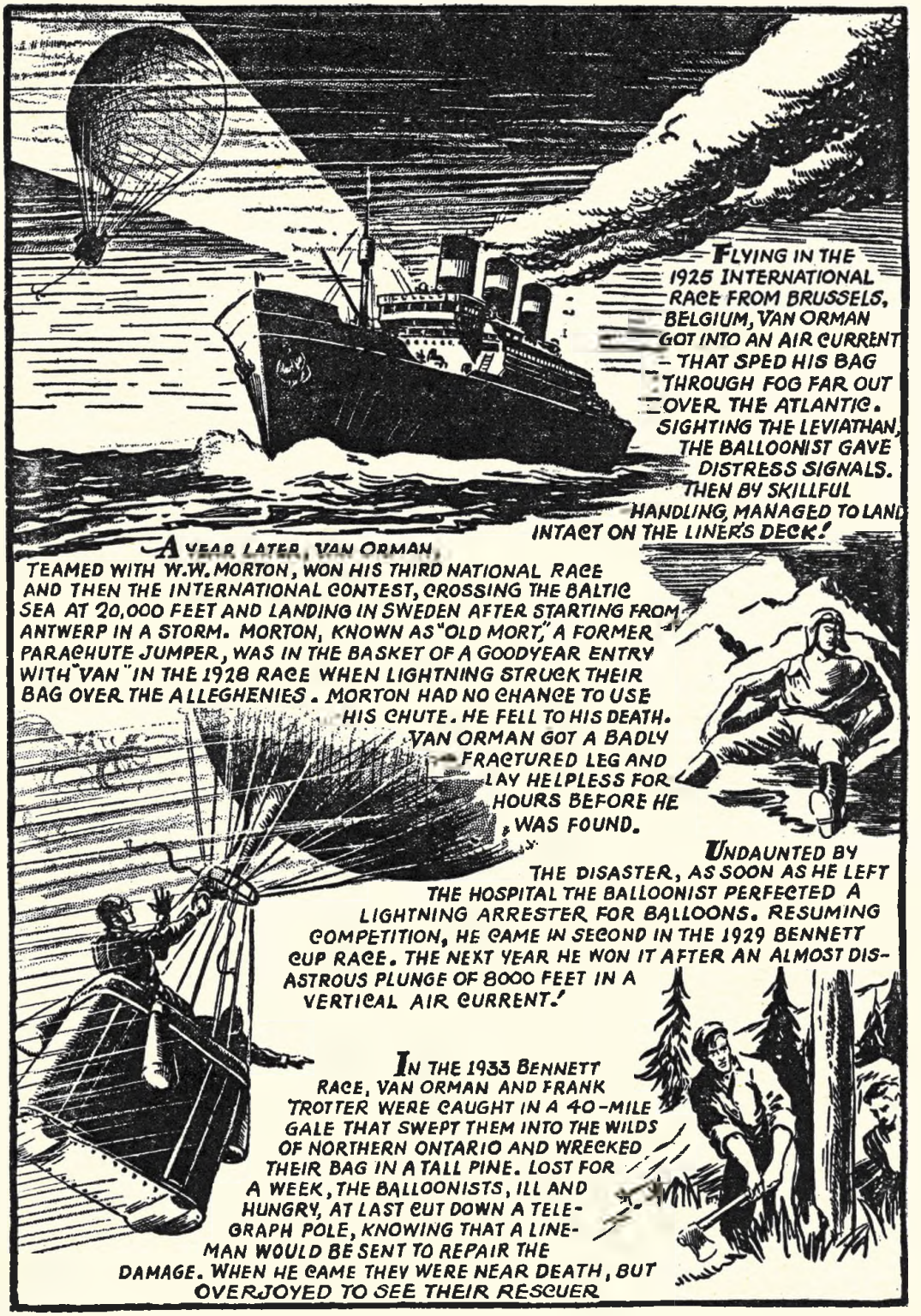
"I don't believe he will ever notice the change, Henry."

"Except on pay day, Judge."

"I'll arrange with Frijole to have a jug of prune juice on that day. In that way, we can keep him in ignorance for years."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK


MEN of DARING
by STOOKIE ALLEN
PEERLESS BALLOONIST
KNOWN AS THE "IRON MAN OF THE AIR," WARD T. VAN ORMAN HAS WON FOUR NATIONAL AND FOUR INTERNATIONAL BALLOON RACES, BESIDES PILOTING FREE BALLOONS TO VICTORY IN NUMEROUS OTHER CONTESTS. AN EXPERT METEOROLOGIST, HE CONTRIBUTED MUCH TO THE SCIENCE OF BALLOONING.
Ward T. Van Orman
HE WAS BORN IN LORAIN, OHIO IN 1894 AND ATTENDED SCHOOLS THERE, GRADUATING FROM THE CASE SCHOOL OF APPLIED SCIENCE AS A MECHANICAL ENGINEER, HE BECAME A MOTOR INSTRUCTOR IN THE NAVY. IN 1918 HE QUALIFIED AS A FREE BALLOON AND DIRIGIBLE PILOT, AND SIGNED UP WITH THE GOODYEAR TIRE AND RUBBER COMPANY AS AERONAUTICAL ENGINEER AND CIVILIAN INSTRUCTOR, SERVING AT THE WINGFOOT LAKE AIR STATION.
SOON HE WAS PILOTING GOODYEAR ENTRIES IN BALLOON RACES. BUT IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1924 THAT HE CRASHED INTO THE WINNING COLUMN IN THE BIG EVENTS. WINNING THE NATIONAL RACE THAT YEAR, VAN ORMAN REPEATED HIS TRIUMPH THE NEXT THREE YEARS. FOUR CONSECUTIVE VICTORIES IS A RECORD UNEQUALED BY ANY OTHER AMERICAN LIGHTER-THAN-AIR PILOT.



Next Week: Alexander Iacovleff, Artist-Explorer

The Prodigal's Return

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

Henry was leaving as quickly as he knew how

The dusty remains of Henry Okth arrived at the old homestead in a candy box, but the funeral was postponed indefinitely

IN every family, so they say, there is apt to be a black sheep and according to all accounts this old whisker-face named Henry Okth was about as dingy as any Okth had ever got to be. His so-called mine — The Constant Hope — was nothing but a hole in the ground and not worth two cents, and used by Henry as an excuse for owing money to all and sundry.

Along about one o'clock one night old Henry poured gasoline on his cabin on the hill back of Hell's Bells, Arizona, set it afire and got out of the state as soon as he could. He left a letter nailed to a tree saying that the report that he had robbed the till in Hennessy's store was a dirty lie, and that death was better than dishonor, and that he was ending it all and he

hoped one and all would forgive and forget.

All that was found when the fire died down was a few squares of corrugated iron roofing, one old boot sole with the heel still on it, and a lot of ashes supposed to contain Henry.

Ordinarily nothing more would have been done about Henry, he having been considered a detriment to Hell's Bells and his demise a good riddance, but Henry had bragged a lot about what a fine old family his was, and how aristocratic and hifaluting his nieces, Seraphina and Cherubina, back in Massachusetts were. He had boasted how they kept a genealogy book of all the Okths, alive and dead, so Bill Tuss, the postmaster thought that the only square thing to do would be to take his pen in hand and let her know that Henry was dead, so she could write him down in the genealogy book. So he did.

About a week later, along about eleven o'clock in the morning a telegram came for Bill Tuss from East Okthville, Massachusetts, paid, to this effect, viz., and namely:

PLEASE SEND REMAINS OF HENRY OKTH HERE STOP MY EXPENSE. SERAPHINA OKTH.

Bill Tuss showed this telegram to Oscar Glack, proprietor of the Hell's Bells Commercial Tourists' Rest, and Oscar frowned as he read it.

"Remains?" Oscar Glack said. "There ain't no remains. But still and all—"

"Still and all what?" Bill Tuss wanted to know.

"Still and all, Bill, there's ashes. There's enough ashes up there to make five or six barrels of Henry. I don't say, mind you, they're all Henry but old Henry is mixed in amongst them somewheres.

"The way I look at it, Bill, we'd ought to do what we can to stop this Seraphina lady's expense."

"Stop what expense?"

"Why, it says here," explained Oscar Glack, pointing to the telegram: "It says here 'Stop my expense.' It says that, plain enough."

"How's sending her five or six barrels of ashes going to stop her expense?" Bill Tuss demanded.

"How do I know?" Oscar asked. "That's her business. Maybe she's got to keep on paying some kind of premium or something until she can show Henry to somebody. That ain't my business. What I say, Bill, is that if a lady wants Henry we wouldn't be no gentlemen if we didn't send Henry to her."

"Well, I'm against sending her any five or six barrels of him, anyway," said Bill Tuss positively. "How do we know she ain't a delicate female with a lot of nerves? It might be a terrible bad shock to her to think Henry had growed to the size of two or three elephants. If we could sift out Henry from all them ashes I'd be with you, Oscar."

"I don't know how we could do that, Bill," Oscar said. "I don't know how we'd know which was Henry and which was planks and timbers, strewn all through like he is. Still and all—"

"Still and all what, Oscar?"

"Why, still and all," said Oscar, "with an old reprobate like Henry it ain't necessary to be too blamed particular. If we get ashes from about where Henry's bunk was we'd ought to get a right fair mixing of Henry—somewheres around sixty per cent. of Henry, anyway, Bill. And from what we knowed about Henry, Bill, sixty

per cent. of him ought to be enough to satisfy anybody."

THIS was good sense and good logic and Bill Tuss could not deny it and did not try to. He saw that Oscar was right and, that point being settled, they consulted Dr. Feltner about the amount of ashes Henry would probably have made. Doc Feltner said he thought Henry would have had pretty thorough combustion owing to the amount of alcohol in him and that two pounds of ashes would be about right.

" I'd say a quart, more or less," Doc Feltner said. " That ought to come pretty close to it."

The best box Bill Tuss could find was a tin candy box with a hinged lid. He had to choose between that and using a couple of tomato cans. The box had the picture of a beautiful girl on the lid with " Sweets to the Sweet " and " Wentworth's Superior Chocolates " printed above and below her lovely face. The girl did not look at all like Henry Okth, but neither did the pictures of the tomatoes on the tomato cans, except in complexion.

So Bill Tuss took the small sheet iron shovel he used to stoke the post office stove, and Oscar Glack carried the candy box and a sieve, and they went up to the cabin site on the hill to pack Henry for shipment back home.

The first thing Bill Tuss and Oscar Glack found when they started to fill the candy box was an old boot sole with the heel still on it, considerably scorched, and they put that in the bottom of the candy box as a sort of guarantee that the contents was genuine Henry, just as honey dealers put a piece of honeycomb in a jar of extracted honey to prove it is genuine honey. Then they filled the box full of ashes and patted them down with the flat of the shovel and closed the lid.

When they got back to the post office Bill Tuss wrote out a card—*Remains of Henry Okth, with compliments of W. Tuss and O. Glack*—and put it in the box while Oscar Glack went over to Joe Billmeyer's general store to beg an empty cardboard shoe box to pack the candy box in. Joe gave Oscar a nice clean shoe box that had held a pair of 4½ lady's tan bluchers, B last, $3.75, and Bill and Oscar put the candy box in the shoe box and crammed crumpled paper in to keep Henry from joggling, and did the whole thing up neatly and addressed it to Miss Seraphina Okth, East Okthville, Mass.

Oscar Glack wanted to toss up a coin to see which should pay the postage, but Bill Tuss thought that would be too sacrilegious or something, so they went halvers for the postage and Henry went into the mail bag, post paid and insured for twenty-five dollars against loss in transit.

Bill Tuss then telegraphed Miss Seraphina Okth that the remains of Henry Okth were on the way, and Bill and Oscar went over to the back room of the Hell's Bells Commercial Tourists' Rest and had a couple of snifters apiece and called it a good job well done—which it was.

BY that time old Henry himself was somewhere east of Rochester and making fair to middling time by box car and hitchhike. But his remains made better time and passed him near Albany. When his ashes went whizzing by on a mail train Henry and another t o u g h old reprobate were cooking coffee in a tin can alongside the road and Henry was letting loose some of his feelings.

"No, sir," he said. "I don't owe them two girls nothing. Here I've been their uncle for forty years or more, and aside from giving me house room and feed, five or six years ago, what have they done for me? Not a blame thing."

"Wimmen got no hearts," agreed Henry's new pal. "I remember one of my wives—"

"I don't know nothing about wives," Henry said, "and I don't want to. All I know is I've been an uncle to them two girls — a fond and loving uncle, never disowning them or nothing and letting them go right along being my nieces—and what's my reward?"

"Ingratitude," said Red. "That's what a man gets—ingratitude."

"And that's the truth," said Henry. "I offered to make their fortunes for them—wrote them I'd sell them half of that mine of mine for five hundred dollars—and I never even got an answer. All right; I'll get even with them. They can't kick me out and not pay up for it."

The incident to which Henry referred had happened on his last visit to East Okthville. He had drifted into the village and made himself at home in the Okth house, and in spite of the namby-pamby ideas of Seraphina, who objected to pipe smoking in the parlor, he had been willing to stay forever, but at the end of three weeks Seraphina had told him she would as lief he went elsewhere. A ten dollar bill had disappeared out of her purse half an hour before Uncle Henry had a ten dollar bill changed at the tobacco store.

"I'll get even with them," Henry repeated. "I know how. I know where they keep their jewelry and don't you forget it. Nieces! They ain't no nieces of mine no more; I disown the both of them."

"And serve them right, the ingrates," said Red. "Ain't that coffee cooked yet?"

Back in East Okthville the word that all that was left of Uncle Henry was en route put Seraphina and Cherubina in quite a twitter. They were the only Okths remaining in the vicinity of Okthville Center, which had been the original home of all the Okths in America, and every now and then an Okth returned to be tucked away in Shady Grove burial ground, making Seraphina and Cherubina masters of ceremonies. As soon as she got word from Bill Tuss by wire Seraphina telephoned to M. J. Wallover to watch the trains and meet Henry and convey him to Shady Grove, and she telephoned to Rev. Edgar Tellman to hold himself in readiness. She had considered Uncle Henry a disgrace but, after all, he was an Okth and as such she meant to do the right thing by him now that he could not dip into purses any longer.

WHEN the day came on which uncle Henry should have arrived if he came by express Seraphina telephoned and asked M. J. Wallover if Henry had come in on the 2:16 but he hadn't, and after that she telephoned whenever a train arrived from the west, but there was no Uncle Henry. So she was puzzled when the postman brought a package to the door and asked her to sign for it. As soon as the door was closed she tore off the wrapper and saw the shoe box.

"Shoes?" she said. "I did not order any shoes," and she took off the lid of the shoe box and saw the candy box with the beautiful girl on the lid and the words "Sweets to the Sweet" and "Wentworth's Superior Chocolates," and she was even more surprised. Seraphina was not the sort of woman to

whom people sent chocolates with "Sweets to the Sweet" on the lid.

"Chocolates?" she said. "I wonder who would send me chocolates?" and she opened the candy box lid and saw at once that the contents was not bonbons. She picked up the card and dusted it and read on it "Remains of Henry Okth, with compliments of W. Tuss and O. Glack," and she knew instantly that Uncle Henry had arrived.

"Cherubina!" she called up the stairs. "Cherubina, Uncle Henry has come."

"Dear me!" Cherubina called back. "Why did they bring him here? Have them put him in the parlor, Seraphina."

"He isn't—" Seraphina began, but she did not know whether to say "complete" or "entire" so she said "He's ashes."

"Oh!" Cherubina exclaimed, and perhaps she remembered how untidy Uncle Henry had always been, for she said: "If he's sifting, Seraphina, don't let him sift on the rugs."

But Uncle Henry was not sifting much, and what he did sift only sifted into the shoe box, so Seraphina put a newspaper under him and presently Cherubina came down. She said: "Tut, tut!" when she saw the untidy paper in which the shoe box had been wrapped, and she carried the box to the pantry and wrapped it neatly in clean white shelf paper, and tied a string around it.

While Cherubina was doing this in the pantry, Seraphina was telephoning to M. J. Wallover that he would not be needed after all.

"Henry is here, Mr. Wallover," she said, "and you won't be needed after all, because he is ashes. We will take him in the car with us," and then she called up Rev. Edgar Tellman.

"Uncle Henry is here," Seraphina said, "and if it is convenient for you we will go to Shady Grove tomorrow. We will stop for you with the car about eleven."

When Cherubina heard no more sound of Seraphina's voice she left Uncle Henry on the low shelf in the pantry and hurried to the front hall.

"Don't you think we ought to call up Cousin Elvira and Cousin Constance and let them know we are taking Uncle Henry to Shady Grove?" she asked, but at first Seraphina did not think so. Without saying so, she suggested that Uncle Henry hadn't been much of a credit to the Okth family, and that just about enough had been done by bringing him all the way from Arizona, without bothering Elvira and Constance, but in the end they did telephone the cousins.

While they were telephoning to the cousins at South Okthville the grim-faced individual who was chauffeur, gardener and general choreman for Seraphina and Cherubina came into the kitchen and looked around for the box of eggs he was to take to Mrs. Tunis Betz, the widow who was sick with lumbago. Cherubina had put the box of eggs in the refrigerator and Jed Doolittle looked around and the only box he saw was the one containing Henry, all done up neatly in white shelf paper and, naturally, he supposed that was the box of eggs, so he took it. He took it to Mrs. Betz. He rapped on the door and Mrs. Betz called to him to come in.

"How are you, ma'am?" he asked, holding his hat in his hand. "This here is a box of eggs Seraphina and Cherubina sent over to you, and they hope you enjoy them. How's your lumbago?"

"It ain't no better, and it wun't be till we get past this mizzable March

weather," said Mrs. Betz. "I ache in every j'int. You thank the girls for me, Mr. Doolittle, because I do appreciate eggs. Eggs is one thing I dast eat and if there's one thing I do know it is that eggs from Seraphina and Cherubina Okth is fresh eggs. I'm much obliged to 'em, and you tell 'em so."

JED DOOLITTLE said he would, but on the way home he stopped to gossip at E. Hetterbury's store and got into a checker game there.

So when Seraphina and Cherubina got through telephoning to their cousins Elvira and Constance, Cherubina went to the pantry to get Uncle Henry and put him in a more appropriate place than the kitchen pantry shelf. As she reached the pantry she gasped and then uttered a cry of dismay; she could hardly believe her own eyes, but Uncle Henry was gone.

"Seraphina! Seraphina, did you take Uncle Henry from here?" poor Cherubina called to her sister, and Seraphina hurried to the pantry.

"No, I certainly did not," she declared. "I haven't touched him since you brought him out to wrap him up. Cherubina, do you mean to tell me you have mislaid Uncle Henry?"

"Oh, dear!" Cherubina exclaimed, all in a flutter. "I was sure I left him right here."

But Cherubina was not sure she had left Uncle Henry right there; she was always losing things or putting them in queer places where they turned up days later, so she began opening pantry drawers while Seraphina poked in the pantry shelves. Cherubina went into the dark parlor on the chance that she had taken Uncle Henry there, and she looked under the hall table, with Seraphina saying: "Tut, tut!" and "If this isn't just like you, Cherubina!"

"He's somewhere," Cherubina insisted. "He must be somewhere, Seraphina," and she went back to the kitchen and stood there and thought.

"This is a nice state of affairs," Seraphina said accusingly. "We've telephoned Cousin Elvira and Cousin Constance and Mr. Tellman, and now you've lost Uncle Henry. I certainly am not going to telephone them the funeral is postponed because we've lost Uncle Henry's remains; you'll have to telephone them."

By that time Cherubina was closer to tears than she had ever imagined she would be on account of Uncle Henry Okth. Just another cruel word from Seraphina and she would have wept.

"Perhaps," she said, "somebody came in and stole him."

"Nonsense!" declared Seraphina. "Utter nonsense! Who would come into our kitchen and take anything?" but suddenly she remembered that they had told Jed Doolittle to take a box of eggs to Mrs. Betz, and she hurried to the refrigerator and threw open the door, and there was a box all neatly done up in clean white shelf paper. Seraphina drew out the parcel and shook it, and it made an eggy noise.

"There!" she exclaimed. "That's what has happened to Uncle Henry—he's gone to Mrs. Betz instead of eggs. That's what comes of leaving him in the pantry."

"Oh, dear!" Cherubina wailed. "What will she think of us?"

AS a matter of fact Mrs. Betz was quite surprised when she opened the box and saw nothing but ashes from which a scorched boot heel protruded. She knew instantly that this must be one of Cherubina Okth's flutter-brained mistakes and she might have thrown Uncle Henry into her ash

can if she had not happened to see the card Bill Tuss had written, but as soon as she read the words "Remains of Henry Okth, with compliments of W. Tuss and O. Glack" she realized that these were the ashes of Cherubina's Uncle Henry. She did up the box as neatly as she could and waited at the window until she saw little Orville Preston going by, and sent him to the Okths with the box.

Cherubina had just put on her hat when little Orville knocked on the kitchen door, and when she opened the door he held out the package and Cherubina took it.

"Now, why, Mis' Betz she says," said Orville, "she — now — says this ain't eggs; she says—now, why—it's your Uncle Henry. Anyway she says to tell you—now, why—she guesses it's your Uncle Henry. Anyway—why, now—there's a card in it that says—now—it's your Uncle Henry. Anyway it ain't eggs—so—now—she sent it back to you and—why—she says to say she's much obliged for the eggs because anyway — now — you didn't know it wasn't eggs."

"Oh, thank you, Orville, thank you!" Cherubina cried, and Seraphina came hurrying with the box of eggs, and Cherubina rushed off to get a dime for Orville, and they sent him back to Mrs. Betz with the eggs. The moment the door was closed Seraphina turned to Cherubina.

"Thank goodness—" she began, meaning to say that she was thankful Uncle Henry was back, but she saw that Cherubina did not have the box in her hands. "Well," she asked, "where have you put him now? I do hope you haven't lost him again."

For an instant Cherubina was all in a twitter again but this time she was quite sure where she had put Uncle Henry. She had left him upstairs on her bed when she went up to get a dime for Orville, and, sure enough, he was there when the sisters went up to see.

Cherubina Okth was as gentle as any creature in Massachusetts and she was quite accustomed to being scolded by Seraphina for mislaying things, but she felt the injustice of being blamed for losing Uncle Henry when she had not lost him.

"I don't think, Seraphina," she said now, "that you ought to say I lost Uncle Henry when I did not. I don't wonder that he got mislaid, or that Jed Doolittle made a mistake and thought Uncle Henry was eggs. And even considering what Uncle Henry was when he was alive, I think it is undignified for any Okth to be put in a candy box and wrapped up in shelf paper. Just imagine, sister, what Mr. Tellman will think when we hand him a shoe box and say 'This is Uncle Henry.'"

Seraphina admitted that Mr. Tellman might be surprised. She also agreed that a candy box with "Sweets to the Sweet" on the lid was an undignified container for the purpose to which it was being put, but they could not think of anything better until Seraphina remembered the jewel box grandma Mercy Okth had left the sisters. The jewel box was large and heavy, twelve inches long and seven inches high, and locked with a key. It was not an urn, but it was a more dignified container than a candy box.

SERAPHINA hated to part with the jewel box, but she and Cherubina went into Seraphina's room and emptied the box. In it were all the Okth heirloom jewelry pieces that had from time to time come to the sisters—brooches and rings and necklaces and bracelets to the value of a good many

hundreds of dollars—and until they could get another jewel box Seraphina put these between the mattresses of her bed.

Using a thumb and one finger she put the scorched boot sole, with the heel still attached, in the bottom of the jewel box and tilted Uncle Henry's ashes into the box, and laid the card "Remains of Henry Okth, with compliments of W. Tuss and O. Glack," on the very top, and closed the lid and locked it.

"And now, Cherubina," she said, "we had better get supper or we will be late for prayer meeting," and they went down, leaving uncle Henry where he was.

Along about half past eight that night the whisker-faced old reprobate from Hell's Bells and his sinful companion, Boston Red, opened the back gate and mooched along in the shadows until they stood under Seraphina's window. The night was dark and the house was dark.

"Ain't it like I told you?" Henry whispered. "There's the trellis like I said. There's the window. I could climb it myself, Red."

"A cinch, that's what it is, Hen."

"And the jool box, that had ought to be right inside on the sort of dresser. You can reach for it and get it."

But Red could not reach the box from the window. He raised the window carefully and reached, but Seraphina had left the box at the far end of the dresser, and Red climbed in and struck a match. He saw the box immediately and recognized it from old Henry's description.

"Look out down there!" he whispered and dropped the box, and Uncle Henry picked it up and tucked it under his arm. He was at the back gate when Red reached him.

Constable Amos Hooks told Seraphina and Cherubina the rest of it the next morning. He was puffed up considerably over his smartness, too, but nobody could blame him.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, "I didn't like the looks of them two, and I snuck along after them to Gracey's lot, and I watched whilst this other fellow—the one that got away from me—pried open the lid of the box. He throwed open the lid and your Uncle Henry looked into the box and the words he said I wouldn't repeat before ladies. No, ma'am. He was surprised. So he cussed awhile and picked up this card—this one with 'Remains of Henry Okth, with compliments of So and So' wrote on it—and what he said then I'd be ashamed to repeat before man or woman. 'Remains!' he says; 'If I ever get hold of that Bill Tuss he won't have any remains,' and he let loose again and I'd heard about enough of it, so I stepped in and laid hands on him."

"Did you put him in jail?" asked Seraphina.

"Well, temporary, as you might say," said Constable Hooks. "I got him under lock and key, but being an Okth I ain't made no charges against him yet. I didn't know as how you'd want your Uncle Henry prisoned for keeps."

So as Uncle Henry was an Okth, and as he had not stolen much but what were, so to say, his own ashes, he was turned loose and he got away from Okthville as fast as he could. Seraphina went to the telephone and spoke to Reverend Tellman first, and then to Cousin Elvira Okth and then to Constance Okth.

She said the same to all of them: "I'm sorry, but Uncle Henry's funeral is temporarily postponed."

THE END

Panama was a golden prize for buccaneers—and an irresistible lure for Ivor Kildare and Henry Morgan

Armed to the teeth, they clambered up the side of the frigate

The Dew of Heaven

By GEORGE CHALLIS

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LOUIS D'OR, famous pirate on the Spanish Main, engages his ship in battle with a smaller craft commanded by Ivor Kildare, a young, daring pirate who is sometimes known as Tranquillo II. Louis d'Or captures Ivor and his lady, the attractive Señorita Ines Heredia, who has run away from her domineering uncle residing in Panama.

As Ivor is about to be strung up, a Spanish galleon suddenly appears and Ines is put aboard a boat in order to delay the Spaniards who stop to rescue her. Ivor, in order to save his life, translates for Louis

This story began in the Argosy for September 7

a cipher carved in wood on the ship which tells of hidden treasure at Tortuga. Louis and Ivor become friends, and they and their band sail to Tortuga to dig up the treasure. Suddenly and without warning most all of their landing party become mutinous and there is much slaughter.

In digging for the treasure, a paper is found which reveals the next step in their quest: "Panama behind Peacock's Tail San Francisco." The real treasure is in Panama! After rescuing Luis, a faithful Mosquito Indian, from death, they all sail on toward Porto Bello.

Ivor, Louis, and Padraic More make their way across the isthmus and enter Panama by stealth. Ivor sees Ines—who is back with her uncle—for a short time. Padraic and Louis fall into the hands of the Spanish and are imprisoned; and Ivor himself is imprisoned trying to free them. They are sentenced to die when Ines pleads that they be put aboard a galley. Her request is granted and all three suffer the brand of the galley slave.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MUTE GALLEY SLAVE.

AND yet, knowing that he was being initiated into hell, he found the fire a little less terrible than he had expected. For three days his skin cooked and swelled horribly though, after the first afternoon, he was given in common with some of the others a flat, straw hat which saved his head and the top of his body a little.

The rest of him cooked, swelled, peeled, turned raw. Afterwards he began to blacken.

It was a season of little wind and sometimes an entire day passed and never once were the sails unfurled from the two long lateen yards—so long that they bent of their own weight at the ends. But when a good breeze blew up and all sail was made, then the slaves shipped their oars, for the narrow hull of the galley whipped through the sea like a flung spear through the air.

The days were the active torment; the nights were the seasons of despair, because then the cold ache entered the burns and sun-blisters and the fever which was not noticed during the heat of the sun entered the blood.

Hunger continually ripped the very vitals of Kildare. He was accustomed to long periods of privation at sea, but not combined with such labor. The captain of the galley had awarded to him a certain sum which was quite sufficient to feed the rowers well but, of course, the greatest portion of this money was a perquisite that passed into his pocket. Custom had established the exact amount of black bread and water that should keep a man alive and enable him, at the same time, to do a certain amount of hard work. And this ration was doled out, and no more. Few men could live on it indefinitely. A gross feeder might actually die of starvation inside two or three months and other men persisted in their endurance either because they were brutes incapable of forethought or because their well of nerve energy could be drawn upon to supply the needs of the body.

On the whole, there was a continual wastage. One could announce the length of time that men had been in the galley by the leanness of the ribs. The negroes altered in color, a dusty dryness appearing in their skin. Gradually a stoop appeared in the back of the galley slave. His chest caved in; his head began to thrust out; and the next symptom was a slight shuddering of the arms as the weight of the sweep came against the hands.

At that point the life of the man became less valuable to the captain of the galley than the cost of the bread which maintained him. On the second day

out, Kildare was able to observe what happened in such a case.

The noble captain, every day just before the setting of the sun, walked down the raised platform that made the long backbone of the ship and actually lowered his eyes to the faces and the bodies of his slaves. His examination was quick but it was thorough. Something about Kildare having caught his eye, he spoke to his boatswain and the huge, flat-faced man took Kildare by the hair of the head and bent his neck so that the captain could look straight down into his face.

Pedro Alvarez, as though contented with what he had seen, nodded and was about to walk on when something in the eyes of Kildare stopped him and brought him back. Whatever it was that he saw, the noble Alvarez suddenly lifted his hand as though he would strike the slave, but remembered in time that he must not soil himself by such a contact. The boatswain lifted his own burly fist and waited for the order before he flashed it into the face of Kildare, but the captain checked him.

"Let him be," he said, "because this is another man like the old white goat; this is one who will live thirty years in the galleys and never die!"

He went on, and a moment later Kildare heard a long, quavering cry of terror. Then he heard the clanking of metal on metal, the pounding of the armorer as he hammered off the chains of one of the slaves. And now Kildare could see the poor negro crawling to the feet of the noble Alvarez, embracing his knees, yammering an appeal for life.

However, it was plain that the black man was almost spent. His bowed back never would quite come straight again; the vertebræ stood out one by one, like the knuckles on a great clenched fist. He was a skeleton, loosely draped in skin and the last few shreds of muscle.

HE was flung over the side at once, straight in the path of the dorsal fin of a great shark. A great scream began, ended; and the galley continued on her way without losing the rhythm of the oars for an instant.

Kildare heard the noble captain murmur: "These waters will become safe for white men to bathe in; the sharks will become so used to black meat that they will take no other."

Captain Pedro Alvarez was wise enough to discard the slaves as soon as they were not worth the food they consumed. He was also wise enough to keep some degree of cleanliness along the crowded benches and on every Sabbath the sailors, with swabs and long-handled brushes, went the length of the galley and scrubbed down with sea water the naked six-score of the slaves.

The captain called this sweetening his ship. But in fact after the galley was a day at sea the noble Alvarez was compelled to burn incense under the canopy at the rear of the galley, whenever the wind was coming over the bows.

These cruises were not of very great duration because the fault of the galley —otherwise so maneuverable and efficient for fighting—was that its shallow hold could not contain enough food and water to support its crowd of fighters and its human machines for many days. But the galley was a splendid weapon for coast defense. And the noble Alvarez went out in three day circuits, from time to time, to search the waters for smugglers or, above all, for the dogs of English freebooters.

When they returned to Panama, after each trip the slaves were allowed

to sleep on shore in a long, low shed. Sometimes, if they had had very arduous labor at sea, they were rewarded with a great pot of boiled maize in which a few scraps of salt meat or fat were thrown to give the mess a flavor.

And it was only during these brief moments on shore that Kildare had a chance to see either the Frenchman or the Irishman. There was never the slightest possibility of talk, but Kildare could see what was happening. The Irishman endured the terrible life well enough, but in ten days Louis d'Or looked like a starved wolf. It was perfectly plain that his high spirit could not live out the month.

Kildare himself lost, at once, every scruple of spare flesh, but after that he did not waste; he merely grew tougher and harder, like well-seasoned leather.

And, after a time, began almost to forget his own fate and that of his two friends, he was so engaged in studying the tall, white-headed, mute captive who worked at the oar beside him. The man's face was carved from wood. In his eyes there was a distant, dreaming look. And day by day he performed his labor in silence. Not once would he speak. It seemed clear that he did not know that Kildare was at his side.

It was a week before Kildare learned the incredible truth. The man had been forty years a galley-slave!

THE noble Pedro Alvarez had shown his skill in his selection of galley-slaves. Fully five of the six score who sat on benches in his ship were all of a single South African tribe, men who had been captured in battle with the whites not because they had surrendered but because they had been left helpless with wounds.

Alvarez had their heads cropped once a month and declared that he was the father of a shining family. They made their weight on the oars well felt when, on the third cruise, two weeks after Kildare had joined the galley, a sail was sighted and raised rapidly above the horizon with only a mild wind to help it forward. The galley, with the head sail set to help the oars, walked up on the stranger rapidly.

As the Spaniard came closer, it could be seen that the other was making the most frantic efforts to crowd on further sail, but the wind remained light and the game was clearly in the hands of Pedro Alvarez. Kildare saw him not only smile but laugh, saying to his boatswain: "English dogs! We shall have some new slaves at the oars before night; and only at the cost of a little powder and lead."

Therefore, he laid the galley under the windward quarter of the English ship and cleared his guns for action. There were three of them mounted forward, side by side on the rectangular platform; the central one of the three was comparatively a monster and it was plain that the little English ship carried no more than half a dozen cannon of small caliber.

However, he intended to fight, and now he fired. His broadside of three shots fell harmlessly into the sea, far short of the galley. The noble Alvarez laughed again, before he put on his heavy steel helmet.

He gave orders. The big forward gun spoke and sent a shot well beyond the Englishman. It spoke again and still overshot the mark, so Pedro Alvarez had the gunner lashed to the mainmast and flogged thoroughly. A second gunner landed a pair of bullets far from the target, also; and in his turn he was triced up into the rigging and whipped till he screamed. But the

third man had better luck. With his second discharge he brought the foremast of the enemy tumbling down and the Englishman fell away from the wind and lay almost helpless.

Pedro Alvarez forgot his gentility in a wild burst of exultation. He ordered a closer position to be taken, still to the windward of the English. With his greater range of cannon, he now stood off at a convenient distance and slowly hammered the foreigner to pieces.

Kildare, his heart swelling, saw the lost men of the little ship cut away the wreckage of their foremast; he heard their deep-throated cheer as they loosed another volley at the Spaniard, all the shots falling far short again. Two of the guns on the port side were silenced. The third still continued to pop uselessly away; and still with each round fired the English cheered. Their flag remained dropping at the masthead; there was not the slightest sign that they intended to strike. And Pedro Alvarez continued to laugh, with raised visor.

His gunners, having the perfect range, then silenced the third gun on the port side. It was now possible to come straight in, particularly when another shot brought down the mainmast of the little ship with a crash.

And Pedro Alvarez ordered the Englishman to be rammed; and while the ram was still buried in the hull, the marines and sailors were to board and capture the prize.

That should be an easy task. The total crew of the little ship was not apt to be more than a score; and on the galley there were three times that number of soldiers and sailors. The dragging mass of the mainmast, moreover, made it impossible for the Englishman to maneuver to escape from the ram. The ship lay helpless while the galley, with a groan and creaking of the great sweeps and a soft rushing of water down the sides, ran in to give the death stroke.

KILDARE heard the orders given by the noble Alvarez to load the three bowguns with small shot and musket-balls. At pointblank range the three were discharged with a shock of recoil that staggered the galley from end to end. And Kildare, glancing back over his shoulder, saw that a mere scattering of three or four of the English appeared behind the nettings which had been strung up along the side. His heart sank. Even the ramming of the little ship seemed a folly. The Spaniard had only to range alongside and throw a prize crew aboard a helpless prize!

Then, solidly, heavily, with a deep crunching of metal through wood, the galley struck its prow into the side of its enemy. The impact swayed Kildare far back; it toppled many of the slaves off the benches and threw them into a wild confusion for a moment.

The moment the blow had gone home, the whole mass of the fighting Spaniards delivered a crashing volley of small arms and swarmed forward for the hand-to-hand attack. The noble Alvarez moved not to lead them but to accompany the attack, holding his long cut-and-thrust rapier straight upwards. He was now in complete armor, his visor down, looking like a metal monster.

There was not an instant rush from the galley onto the Englishman, however. The marines and sailors, armed to the teeth, were clambering up the side of the frigate, yelling furious insults and death to the English dogs, but those dogs still were managing to show some teeth.

Kildare, twisting about, saw that to

the assistance of the three or four unwounded a dozen bleeding wretches had staggered to the rail and now were fighting like madmen—or Englishmen.

They fired muskets and pistols; they thrust long pikes down through the boarding-nettings of tough, tar-boiled rope; and where a rent had been hacked by the Spaniards in the nettings, and half a dozen of them were struggling to press up onto the deck, yonder stood a single big-shouldered man who already ran blood from half a dozen wounds.

He had tied a rag about his head to keep the blood from a scalp wound from blinding him, and with a big double-bitted axe in his hands he rapped the Spaniards over their helmeted heads or sank the blades so deep into their flesh that they tumbled back faster than they could climb up.

The noble Alvarez, enraged by this delay, began to lay on his own men with the flat of his sword, cursing them for cowards. And while the English captain, armed with the axe, cheered on his men and forgot his own wounds, the Spaniard from the rear kicked his men into the fight.

One elderly, grizzled tar on the Englishman, suddenly hurled into the galley some small hammers and a number of cold chisels, shouting: "There you, black devils! Free yourself and then help us!"

Both a hammer and a chisel dropped within the reach of Kildare and he had them instantly in his grasp. It took a bit of skill to apply the edge of the chisel to the overlapping edges of the steel manacle that fastened on his legs but presently he sprung it apart and with a stroke or two in the same way liberated the old white-headed slave beside him. Rapidly, gaining skill each moment, he continued that work, springing the manacles of man after man. He half expected them to leap instantly into the fight, but to his surprise, they sat like stunned men.

If he could get to Padraic More and Louis d'Or he would find a different response, but they were not close to him.

THE Spanish captain now began to shout to back water and haul the galley out of the side of the Englishman. They had received a bloody nose instead of an easy conquest and the idea now was to stand off at short range and blow the English from their decks with small shot from the guns.

The captain himself ran back from the prow down the central walk of the galley to take command from the stern, and it was at that moment that he saw the mischief which was being worked among the crew of his slaves.

For Kildare, crawling under benches like a wriggling snake, had reached More at last and with quick blows of hammer and of chisel was liberating the powerful Irishman. And Padraic More was mumbling: "Quick, Tranquillo! I want to die. I only want to die, if I can have one taste of Spanish blood before I knock under!"

The shackle, in fact, dropped away as the noble Alvarez, with a great shout, turned on them and raised the bright length of his sword.

And they were unarmed. Except for the few hammers and chisels which the English carpenter had flung down into the galley, there was not a sign of a weapon for the slaves. And most of the blacks, even those who already had been liberated, sat stupidly, as though they had not the slightest idea of what to do with freedom.

So Kildare turned, with only that

short-handled, light hammer in his hand, and the chisel; very feeble weapons against a man in complete armor with a good Spanish blade in his grip and the bearing of one who knows how to use it.

And as the captain shouted in rage and made his stroke, Kildare held up the short, thick chisel to catch the edge of the blade. The shock almost knocked the chisel from his grasp. The glancing force of the sword descended on a chained slave on the next bench and wounded him beneath the neck and the shoulder horribly and deeply, so that a great spout of blood leaped up into the air.

But Kildare was on the central walk of the galley by that time. As the noble Alvarez drew back his sword for a second blow, the short hammer rang once and again on his helmet, putting two deep dents in the side of it. Alvarez fell on his knees, and Kildare snatched from the numbed fingers that beautiful and well-balanced length of Toledo steel.

The yelled orders of the captain before he fell in that moment, had started half the slaves to work on the sweeps, and the galley, after a sway to this side and then to that, finally was backing away from the Englishman, followed by a wild cheer of derision and triumph from the sea-dogs.

But here the marines and sailors, hurrying back from the prow where they had been trying to board the Englishman, found Kildare in the center of the walk, swaying the long, bright sword like one who is a master of weapons.

A far more terrible sight appeared the next moment.

That old, white-headed English slave who had spent forty years in the galley, had run straight back to the helmsman and had throttled him with his bare hands. Then, picking up the heavy box of cutlasses and long sea-knives which stood unlocked on the after-platform, he now carried it forward and cast it down among the blacks. Those who were free leaped to the prize like birds from the air stooping at food on the ground.

THE confusion was now absolute pandemonium. More of those chisels and hammers which the English carpenter had flung aboard were being used by the black men to help themselves to freedom, for at last they seemed to understand the example which Kildare had set for them.

Those that were free were instantly armed with cutlass or knife. And from every throat came screeching sounds such as never could issue from civilized throats, and queer, high-pitched whining phrases which last had been heard in the battle in some African jungle.

The Spaniards, their captain gone and that wild confusion before them, hesitated for a moment and in that moment they were lost. Their lieutenant began to shout to them to charge forward but while they delayed an instant Kildare ran on down the raised walk, shouting, waving that long, borrowed sword.

If the Negroes could not understand his words, his action was perfectly clear. The blacks leaped to follow him. And here at his side was huge Padraic More, brandishing a cutlass, laughing with a huge joy.

And yonder a tall man leaped high up from among the benches. That was gaunt Louis d'Or, lean as a wolf, and more savage now than ever a wolf was. He, too, had steel in his hand.

With More and Kildare, he made the

front rank of the charge that struck against the Spaniards. A pistol exploded in the face of Kildare, scalding one cheek and setting fire to his hair, but the bullet missed him and he put the point of his sword through the throat of the marine. More and Louis d'Or each brought down a man. And then the blacks came in.

They came like mad beasts. If they could not get past their white leaders, at least they could get around them. The rigging was to them no more than jungle trailers to apes of Africa. They ran along the gunwales to get in on the flanks of the Spaniards. Climbing high through the rigging, they dropped down like fighting cats; and the steel claws with which they scratched dug deep into life.

There was no end of them. Those who remained at the benches were liberating one another rapidly and rushing to join the battle. Some of them were too eager to hunt for a weapon but went in with hands and teeth.

And Kildare saw one black, with a pike thrust clean through his body, actually fasten his teeth in the throat of a marine—and topple overboard.

Kildare, beating out the flame in his hair with one hand, now drew back from the mêlée.

He was in time to see the noble Alvarez, armor and all, hurled overboard by two slaves; but Kildare made no effort to rescue the knight. He was studying the last stand of the Spaniards in the bows of the galley. For they were fighting men, as brave as any in the world on land but always ill at ease at sea. They showed their clumsiness now by trying to form ranks as though they were on a parade ground, but the tide of blacks literally closed over them. For every armored Spaniard there were two stabbing, snarling blacks.

Those who tried to stand shoulder to shoulder either were brought down with wounds and then murdered as they lay on the deck or else pushed overboard; and armored men cannot swim.

There were, besides, the sharks. They had plenty of blood to draw them to the spot, and now the sea was alive with dorsal fins that cut the waves like black scythes.

The time of the terrible outcries was very brief. Then came a silence, a swirl of reddened water, and only the deep, infrequent groan of a hurt man, sick with his wounds.

KILDARE had been in many a wild fight, but this, the moment it was ended, seemed to him to have been an explosion, a rending of the air with a great sound; and now as an after effect there remained a red, slippery deck, the horrible, nightmare heads of the sharks lifting from the waves every moment with mouths agape, blindly feeling into the blood-drenched water for solid food; and near at hand the negroes looking at one another with gaping mouths of laughter and rolling eyes.

One other thing happened, then. Or, rather, it dawned at last upon the mind of Kildare. It was a cheer from the little English ship which had given occasion for the moment of liberation to all the slaves. It was sinking rapidly, now, down by the head and heeling far to port.

And into a small boat the living survivors were descending. A wretched half dozen of them, and every man of these stained from wounds. And still the sea-dogs cheered in spite of their pain!

From that picture Kildare looked back at the galley. A grey-headed black-man with a good deal of dignity

in his bearing now came up to him and, kneeling, uttered a few indecipherable words and taking the hand of Kildare laid it on his head. The negroes very plainly agreed to this act of submission with one very violent and cheerful cry.

Kildare looked from them towards one bowed, white-headed form. That was the old English slave. He was more red than white, now, because he had been in the thick of the fight; but he had resumed his place at a sweep as though he had never left the galley bench, and he waited for further orders with his old hands hooked about the thick neck of the oar.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAIL TO PANAMA

THE good galley "Santa Magdalena," late in the service of His Majesty the King of Spain and now in the service of a hundred African negroes and nine or ten white men, lay on the white of a beach near the mouth of a lagoon. In the top of a great palm that stood well out on the beach was posted a lookout, for the ships of Spain were busily sailing in search of the fugitives and an armed force might come upon them.

However, only rough weather would drive the galley in from the open water, and in smooth waves they could laugh at the fastest of sails. They remained in readiness, as they lolled on the shore, to remove the stays that held up the galley and run the light ship swiftly down into the water as soon as any formidable stranger appeared. After that, coasting along the inlets, they could easily escape from a strong force or else capture a weaker one.

It was the same crew which had washed the galley with blood and cleared out the Spanish masters of it but it never could have been recognized. Cruising gaily here and there, they had overtaken a number of the little coastwise trading frigates which plied between the Isthmus and the rich ports of South America. The pillage of those vessels had been carried into the galley —as much, at least, as could be used. The result was an ample provisioning of everything one could desire, from munitions of war to food, and including a great quantity of European finery which had been trans-shipped from Panama for Peru. In these clothes the negroes delighted and wore them now on the beach as they took their leisure. The heat—and their own fancy—prevented them from wearing more than one garment at a time, as a rule.

It was all Kildare could do to keep them from trying the keenness of their new weapons on every Spaniard taken out of a captured frigate. He had been forced into the command of the "Santa Magdalena" with or against his will because the negroes had accepted him, after the battle, as the originator of the plan which brought them liberty and they called him their king. As Louis d'Or pointed out very clearly, with such a force at their command they might well hope to run in on one of the great treasure galleons beating up from Peru and take it,, after nightfall, with a sudden rush. So both negroes and whites had been cruising with an infinite relish. Each black man felt that he was already rich. There was at this very moment, for instance, a great kettle of pork and sweet potatoes stewing on the beach, and the former slaves to go to it to eat whenever they chose. This, surely, was to be rich. And as for the white men, they lived in the expectation of finding riches.

It was about this expectation that they talked on this morning, all of them in a close group except Kildare, who walked moodily up and down, trying the weight and the fine balance of the blade which had been just finished for him by the blacksmith. It was made of a remnant of the beautiful Toledo sword of the noble Alvarez and was of exactly the proportions of that other weapon which he had lost at the prison in Panama. At his belt, besides, he carried another slender needle of a stiletto. So he was equipped in his former fashion, but his heart was not greatly raised.

THIS was pointed out by Bartholomew, the captain of the English. He had sailed from Plymouth with more than eighty men in two small ships. Disease and the terrible weather off the Horn had cut down his party of hunters after Spanish treasure to the handful which remained when Alvarez came up in the galley. This Bartholomew was a very wise fellow, but all of his front teeth had been knocked out years before in a fight and he talked with a foolish lisp. He still had not quite recovered from his wounds in the recent battle, but his spirit was high.

"That Tranquillo," he said, "is a mysterious fellow. Not long ago he had a brand on his shoulder, an oar in his hand, and only a year or so of labor before him until he was dry of juice and thrown to the sharks; and yet he walks up and down like a king who has been driven out of a kingdom."

The Irishman explained, briefly: "He wants his girl. And she's in the hands of her Spanish uncle in Panama."

Bartholomew whistled; then he lighted his pipe and consoled himself with smoke. "Well," he said, "they're wearing black on his account in Panama now; so the girl won't be forgetting him."

Kildare, stopping in his walk, stared at the bright blue-gray of the sea and then turned and regarded the face of the jungle which rose like a vast green cliff, flowering into gold and crimson at the top, while an entangled curtain of lianas trailed down like a waterfall. And he felt that he was imprisoned between Western Ocean and the jungle.

He came back to the council of the whites and stood over them, the smallest man by far of them all but with a keen, bright temper of mind and soul that made him their master—unless it were for the Frenchman, Louis d'Or.

Kildare said: "Panama is the treasure-chest. How shall it be cracked open?"

"What!" cried Bartholomew. "Are you thinking that a handful of men like this can sack the great city of Panama, with thirty thousand people inside it, and ten of them able to carry weapons?"

"If we can't do it—why," said Kildare, "if I can't break a thing with my hand, I get a hammer and try again. What's the hammer that we could use? Think for me, Bartholomew—Louis d'Or—all of you!"

Louis d'Or said, thoughtfully; "If the King of France sent his Marshal Turenne with thirty thousand men to the eastern coast of the Isthmus, not twelve thousand of the men would get through the jungle to Panama, and those twelve thousand would be so weak from the march that the Spaniards would sweep them away and murder them all. Remember, Tranquillo, that your Spaniard who doesn't know what to do with himself at sea, is a good two-handed fighting man on dry land."

Kildare held up his head and drew in a great breath.

"If men can't take Panama," he said, "then what can be done?"

"Nothing can be done," declared Louis d'Or. "You might steal the lady, brother, but you'll never take her by force. Men won't be able to rush the walls of Panama."

"Men can't do it?" echoed Kildare. "Well, buccaneers are not men. They're devils, and they can live on gunpowder and a good chew of lead."

"Where will you get the buccaneers, Tranquillo?" asked Bartholomew.

"I can't tell," answered Kildare. "Think for me, all of you. Who can raise a flag that an army of buccaneers will follow?"

"Morgan! Admiral Henry Morgan, as they call him now!" said Louis d'Or.

"Morgan? That is true," pondered Kildare. "But he hates me with a good, cold, long-lasting hatred."

"He hates nothing he can turn into money. Show him a trail to a profit and he'll forgive you," said Bartholomew. "I know Morgan well. I knew him before he was famous. I knew him in London."

"Show him a trail? I shall!" exclaimed Kildare. "I'll show him the trail to Panama!"

AFTERWARDS, they saw Ivor Kildare sitting by himself, moodily, in the shadow of a palm tree, his head in his hand. And when they were ready to put to sea again, about noon in the day, they found not Kildare, under that tree, but a letter from him, which said:

Dear Louis and Padraic,

I have gone. You will not be able to find me. Stay here with the Santa Magdalena and make your voyage. Already you have picked up a good bit of the Dew of Heaven. There is more of it ready to fall into your hands.

I am going to try to come back, but not alone. If you hear of strange doings off the east coast and a mustering of ship and men, perhaps I'll be among them.

If you ask why I am leaving you, I reply that one man can travel faster than three. Three are not enough to fight off the Indians or the Spaniards, but three are surer to be seen. That is why I have chosen to go alone.

If you hear of me no more, I beg you, Louis, to write a letter to my lady in Panama. But this is an unhappy thing to think about. Happiness will come to us, after all. I am going to get the hammer which will crack open the treasure-chest.

Adieu.

Ivor Kildare to you both; but burn this before the rest discover that I am not the cutthroat Tranquillo, and so lose my old rating with them.

Louis d'Or, standing as one stunned, slowly read out this letter to the English, omitting only the portion after the signature.

"Search for him!" shouted Padraic More. "Call the blacks! Tell them their king has left them in the lurch!"

"You cannot find him," said Louis d'Or, "any more than you can find a jaguar in the jungle without dogs to catch the trail. He is gone as surely as though he had dived into the sea. As for the negroes, they'll follow me, I think, and that is the thought of Tranquillo, also."

"*Ah hai!*" cried Padraic More. "To be without him is like being without fishing gear, when the rivers are filled with fish."

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN MORGAN.

HOLLOW-CHEEKED, his ribs sticking out like raised fingers, his clothes mildewing on his back, Kildare came out of the jungle on the eastern shore and went up the coast to a little inlet. At the mouth of it he paused and shouted until the place rang: "Robert! Robert! *Ah hai!* Robert, my friend!"

He waited. There was no answer. He shouted again and still again without result, and then, turning because of a sudden coldness which had gripped the small of his back, he saw the tall Mosquito Indian standing just at his back. The face was as old, as dour as ever, but he had been true to his trust and had remained there through the weeks with the periagua.

Kildare took his hand with a hearty grip.

The boat was in good order. Robert had seen to that and he also had cleverly patched the two holes which the Spanish cannonball had knocked through the cedar sides of the craft, using rounds of wood and cementing them in place with layers of resin. With long wooden levers they turned the periagua on its keel and worked it by degrees down into the water.

It was not easy to handle a boat of that size unless the weather were favorable, and Robert shook his head as he looked up and down the length of it.

"Where are the others?"

"On the farther side of the land," said Kildare. "Robert, you've won your freedom from me. You can go back to your home now, if you wish."

Robert shook his head.

"On shore, it is good to be single, but it is bad for a man to be alone at sea. I go with you."

He got out a sweep and began to pole the long boat down the inlet towards the open, blue water beyond.

Captain Henry Morgan — "Admiral" he was more often called now— sat not many days later in his own private room of his own favorite tavern in Port Royal. Out the window he could see a palm tree, a bit of white beach, and half a dozen ships riding at anchor in the haven. So long as the captain could see blue water and ships riding on it, he felt as a miser feels when he sees gold, because by ships and sea, Morgan was on the trail of fortune.

He was at ease in mind because of the loot of Porto Bello and the other Dew of Heaven which he had gathered here and there. He was at ease because his was the greatest name and fame that ever had come to any buccaneer since the jolly tribe of cutthroats and pirates had begun to ravage the Spanish mainland around the shores of the Caribbean Sea.

Now he indulged himself in a period of repose during which he soaked his body daily with excellent brandy punch and gave over his mind to dreams of midnight assaults, flame, shoutings, the sound of guns—and at last the breaking open of treasure chests. He was now cracking nuts and eating them with a relish, dipping them in salt to keep alive his thirst for the brandy punch.

For every two nuts he ate himself, he tossed a third to the expectant paws of an ape which sat on a chair on the

opposite side of the table holding himself up like a caricature of a man. And now, into the moment of this perfect repose, charged thundering feet on the stairs and a voice that shouted: "Captain! Captain Morgan! Oh, Captain Morgan!"

"Here, Saunders, you bawling, blundering jackass!" called the great Morgan.

Through the door burst a big, red-faced man with three or four pistols thrust into his broad sash and a heavy sword to accompany them.

"You've been fighting," said Morgan; "there's blood on your jacket."

"It's the luck of the devil that keeps me from being dead," gasped Saunders.

The ape, disturbed by this interruption, hopped onto the table and thence onto the broad shoulder of the captain, where it sat up moving its long upper lip to clear the fragments of nuts from its teeth.

SAUNDERS dropped down into the vacant chair and helped himself to a long pull at the punch bowl. The eye of Morgan measured the amount of disappearing liquor with a grim interest.

"There was Tucker and the Swede with me," said Saunders, when he caught his breath again. "We took him on the run. Tucker from one side, and the Swede from the other, and I came right in from the front. And Tucker went down like a stuck pig with a thrust through the thigh. The Swede's face is ripped open and he's blind with his own blood. But I got only a prick through the sword arm that made me drop the blade. I tried to pull out a pistol and finish him that way, but the point of his sword was right at my throat. He told me to take myself off and tell you he is coming."

"Who? Who is coming, halfwit?" demanded the captain.

"Tranquillo!" breathed Saunders. "The moment we saw him, we rushed in—"

Henry Morgan pulled a pistol out of his belt and laid it on the table.

"Were you drunk, the three of you?"

"Sober, by my oath!"

"And he took the points of all three of you and laid you out in a row?"

"You've seen him dance in and out when he fights?" groaned Saunders. "Well, he was dancing that same measure today. Where you thought to put your sword right through the flesh to the bone, there was nothing found but thin air. And then a glitter in your eyes—and the damned sword like a touch of witchcraft—"

"He said that he was coming to me?" demanded Morgan.

"He did."

"Jimmy," said the buccaneer, "what's best to do?"

The ape reached down and picked a nut off the table and put it into his mouth. After that he began to tousle and gently scratch the head of his master.

"Jimmy Green says for us to stay right here and carry on with the nuts and the punch," said Henry Morgan. "Saunders, get three or four more and watch the stairs. Have Wilkinson, that praying murderer of a Wilkinson, come to watch my door. If Tranquillo says that he will come to visit me, he'll come— And if I fail to catch him, my name is not—"

"Henry Morgan," said a voice outside the open door, and Kildare stood on the threshold.

Henry Morgan, slowly lifting his pistol, aimed it straight at the breast of his visitor. Big Saunders gave back

a pace as he snatched out his dagger and the length of his rapier. The edges screeched against the scabbard in the haste of the draw.

But Kildare, in a ragged shirt and tattered breeches, his feet bare, and dust more than ankle-high on his legs, bowed to the captain, and his black hair fell forward a bit over his face as he made the courtly gesture.

"You see, Morgan," he said, "that two good men are apt to have a need of one another. I've come to talk."

He sat down in the chair which Saunders had just left and picked up a clean cup, which he filled with the punch, and tasted the drink.

"Too strong!" he said. "Too strong, Morgan. You are going to die happy and rich—but young."

SAUNDERS slipped around until he stood at the back of Kildare. And Morgan, his fleshy brow wrinkling, his eyes beginning to bulge with the fury of excessive hate, tried to speak, but only made a grimace.

"Saunders," said Kildare, "stand away from my chair because you keep off the sun. Your captain knows that I would never have dared to come to him unless I had a treasure to pay for my safety. Morgan, send the red-faced hulk out of the room—and order a bottle of Madeira for me. I don't want to scald my throat with your fire and lemon juice, there."

Morgan began to breathe like a winded horse, loudly, through a flare of nostrils.

But at last he said, huskily: "Jimmy Green, damn you, what would you do?"

The ape reached for another nut and cracked it between his teeth. And at this, Morgan suddenly laughed.

"Jimmy says you should have your own way," he interpreted. "Saunders, get out and send up the Madeira. Now, Tranquillo—or Kildare—or whatever sort of a name fits a five-footed hunting cat like yourself, tell me how you are going to pay for that Madeira?"

"I am going to make you rich," said Kildare. "And famous."

"I'm famous already," said Morgan, "but damn fame. I prefer pieces of eight."

"I am talking about them. And good Peruvian brandy by the tun."

"Well?"

"Mexican gold and silver work by the mule-load."

"Ah?" said Morgan, leaning forward.

But the ape, incommoded by this change of attitude, squeaked a protest and secured his balance by gripping the hair of the captain. Henry Morgan, obediently, leaned back in his chair again.

Kildare continued: "Warehouses filled with silks and laces and bales of gold cloth. And gold bars. Enough to load a train of mules. That's not all. There is a warehouse where the silver is piled up like cord-wood, seven feet high in a room thirty feet long."

Morgan groaned.

"Thirty feet long?"

"Yes," said Kildare.

"Where?"

"Panama."

"It will stay there, then, and you know it."

"It would stay there except for one thing."

"What is that?"

"That is the brave Henry Morgan."

"Tranquillo, there are thirty thousand people in Panama. There are five thousand buccaneer devils sailing the Caribbean, who want nothing except to follow Henry Morgan."

"The city's fortified, I say."

"The walls are old. The forts are poorly armed."

"The way to Panama is the way to hell."

"There's no easy way to the Dew of Heaven."

"Get out of my sight, fool!" shouted Henry Morgan.

KILDARE laughed, and the bottle of Madeira was brought in by a frightened servant who looked with popping eyes at one of these famous men and then at the other.

"You are sweating, captain," said Kildare.

"Such fool's talk would make any man sweat."

"Thirty feet of silver bars, piled seven feet high, like firewood," said Kildare.

"My God," said Henry Morgan, "what a beautiful thing even to dream of."

"What a thing to pack into the hold of a ship!"

"Such a raid would cause war; I'd have the English navy about my shoulders."

"One part in a hundred of the loot would be enough to buy the courtier who has the king's ear."

Morgan frowned impatiently.

"Tranquillo, be silent! Shall I go mad? Shall I lose my sleep forever, thinking of this?"

"Not if you sail for the Main with five thousand buccaneers."

"There would be no way to take Panama by surprise. The jungle is filled with Indian spies and they would carry the warning. The whole city would be under arms long before we came. Every man and boy in the city would be practicing with muskets."

"Muskets fired by children can't kill buccaneers."

"As for the treasure," shouted Morgan, "the governor would ship it south from the city for safety."

"All the better," said Kildare. "Our ship lies in wait and picks up the crumbs that fall from the table when the great Henry Morgan sits down to eat the city."

"Tranquillo—madman! What ship have I in the South Sea?"

"I have one."

"Impossible!"

"A ship with a crew of a hundred and ten fighting men."

"In the South Sea?"

"Yes, in that sea."

"You dream, Tranquillo."

"The ship is there. The good galley 'Santa Magdalena' with a crew of ten English and a hundred negroes of the fighting sort—men of iron, Morgan. Men who have been hardened by the labor in the galleys until bullets would glance from their bodies. Men who laugh when they fight."

"Galley slaves?" said Henry Morgan.

"I've told you the truth. A hundred and ten men armed with pistols, muskets, light and heavy cannon, knives, swords, and a very neat new device—cutlass blades mounted on pike staves for the Africans to use."

Henry Morgan was silent, staring. Tempted.

"Five thousand of the right sort, red and raw, men who love the Dew of Heaven and jolly Captain Morgan. They'll run across the Isthmus like so many rats over a granary floor. They'll scamper into Panama. They'll raise the fame of Captain Morgan like a smoke between earth and heaven."

"Wait!" exclaimed Morgan.

"I'll wait. But not your men once they know the great idea. Why, Panama is the treasure house of the Western

world. The king of Spain is wakened every morning by singing girls, and all they sing is 'Panama! Panama!' When he looks at his crown jewels he touches the biggest diamond of them all and says: 'Panama!'

"If you have Panama, you have cut the throat of Spain and all the wealth of the south country bleeds into your hands. Henry Morgan will become a name that will echo between the sea and the sky like the gallop of a horse down an empty street on a frosty morning."

"A ship?" said Henry Morgan. "A ship already in the South Sea?"

"It is there."

"With a hundred and ten fighting men?"

"I've told you that. As good men as you'll ever find for the sacking of Panama."

"Tranquillo, it was not very long ago that you were running away from me like a rabbit from greyhounds. And now you tell me that you have a Spanish galley on the South Sea, ready to capture the birds that I flush out of the Panama brush?"

"I tell you all that."

"Then," said Morgan, leaning back with a groan of relief, "then you lie!"

"You wonder how I could get my hands on such things, Morgan?"

"Yes, I wonder."

"See for yourself!"

He snatched off his ragged shirt and turned. On the flesh of his shoulder the big scar was incised, for the white-hot iron had devoured meat as well as skin.

Henry Morgan rose slowly from his chair, still staring.

"Ah?" he murmured at last. "Ah? —Then you are one of the devils who eat fire and digest it. Tranquillo—do you hear? I believe everything. We'll go—we'll leave only a scar where Panama is standing to-day!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A ROYAL COMMISSION.

As fast as the fleet frigates or the smoothly sliding periaguas could carry the word, it sped across the Caribbean to every port where wild sailors might be found, willing to turn freebooter; and to all the word was given that Tortuga was the rendezvous.

Most of all the messages flew to Hispaniola where the buccaneers by the score were following the trade which had given them their name and boucaning the meat of wild boars and half-wild cattle in the woods of the great island.

And the name of Morgan was a trumpet that few could fail to hear after Porto Bello and Maracaibo. His was the call and the summons was reinforced by all that ever had been seen or heard of Spanish treasure.

These bright visions filled the minds of the adventurers who gathered swiftly at Tortuga where their admiral waited for them in a tall Spanish ship which he had plundered from the enemy in one of his recent raids.

A party detailed to the de la Hacha River returned with a shipload of grain and thousand sacks of maize in addition, and a great quantity of jewels from the pearl-beds. With this for provender, the fleet would not quickly starve. Almost better than the surety of food was the news which "Admiral" Henry Morgan read aloud to an assemblage of his captains who had gathered on his flagship in the Tortuga roadstead.

It was a very curious paper such as never had been in the hands of a buc-

caneer before this day and it had been secured after a long session in which Captain Henry Morgan in boots and splendor and Ivor Kildare in the rags he had brought from the Isthmus, sat with no less than the Royal Council of Jamaica province, in the town of Kingston.

For a few words which Kildare had heard from the lips of the late noble, Alvarez were now sufficient to bring a great reward. The Spaniard had said, on a day, to his lieutenant, that it would not be long before many more galley-benches were filled with English dogs; because preparations were under full weigh to start an expedition to attack the English and drive them from Jamaica into the sea; it would have been equipped and it would have sailed long before, except for Henry Morgan's sacking of Porto Bello.

The rags of "Tranquillo" and the hollows which were still in his sunburned cheeks gave a conviction and a force to his words. The Royal Council, straightway, commissioned Captain Henry Morgan to act in the name of His Majesty, Charles the Second of England, to carry war into the territory of the hostile Spaniards, wherever they might be found in force. The buccaneers, when they heard of this commission, first laughed and cheered, and then cheered without any laughter, because they realized that this important paper might secure them from death on the end of a hangman's rope, if they were captured.

It was at this meeting that the rules were published. To Captain Henry Morgan went one share in every hundred of what the expedition captured. To every captain, four shares unless his crew voted him more. To every lieutenant, two shares. To each ordinary man, one share.

No plunder would be allotted until the wounded had been proportionately compensated.

There were certain special provisions. He who pulled down a Spanish standard received fifty pieces of eight. And a surgeon got two hundred pieces for his chest of medicines. A carpenter for his tools, one hundred pieces.

Any captain who, with his single ship, captured a Spanish ship at sea, should receive, with his crew, one-tenth of her value.

THERE were now, in the roadstead of Tortuga, thirty-seven ships carrying well over five hundred cannon. Outside of sailors and boys, there were two thousand musketeers. The total number had not come up to the prophecy which Kildare had made to the famous buccaneer, but at least there were upwards of three thousand trained and hardy ruffians assembled for this greatest of all the buccaneer expeditions.

And so, at last, sails were hoisted, and the ships went down the sea to Cape Tiburon, where a great cargo of oranges was taken aboard, a special value attaching to them for the prevention of scurvy. After that, they bore away for the mainland.

It was up the River Chagres that they intended to push into the land; that meant, first of all, a necessary attack on the fort at the mouth of the river, and since the place was strong there should have been more misgivings about even the initial step of the expedition, but when the buccaneers looked at the assemblage of their craft, when they thought of the luck of their commander, they were ready to laugh at all dangers.

Towards Chagres they sailed, therefore. And Ivor Kildare on a starry

evening sat on the high poop of Morgan's ship with the admiral in person beside him. The helmsman behind them was a sober fellow and chosen for that purpose. He had had one eye knocked out by the Spaniards and he was lacking a large part of his face because a Spanish bullet had passed through it; but he drank neither rum nor brandy and therefore he was of great value in a crew like that of Morgan's.

Down in the waist, up in the forecastle, by small lantern light the buccaneers ate and drank and danced and gambled and fought. There was hardly a moment when high, snarling voices were not being raised on one part of the deck, while singing amused others, and now and again a pirate inspired by a drink or by a lucky winning at dice would go leaping and dancing down the deck. Impromptu musicians with various instruments were always tuning up to play new airs that made a conflicting jargon with one another.

Kildare, sitting cross-legged beside the high admiral of the fleet, with his chin on his fist studied the riot on the deck. Henry Morgan, beside him, sipped brandy punch from a big bowl, as usual, and looked from the riot below to the queer, hunch-backed figure of Jimmy Green, the ape, who was amusing himself by running up the flag standard until he could swing from that frail rope to the mizzen topmast shrouds.

"What do you gain from this, Tranquillo?" asked Henry Morgan. "You beat the drum that starts the idea marching in my brain; you argue the Royal Council—the blockheads—into giving me a royal commission for stealing; you offer yourself to guide us through that hell's tangle of the Isthmus; you bring us to the gate of the town of Panama; best of all, you promise to bring up your ship from the South Sea to hover around the port and catch the birds of rich plumage that try to run away from the town; but what do you gain? Come, come, you can't tell me that it's all for hatred of the Spaniards or for the love of Henry Morgan that you'll do this?"

"Inside the town," said Kildare, "there are two things that I wish to find. One of them is Ines Heredia."

MORGAN whistled. "Are you still running around the world after her like a little dog after its master?" he asked. "Make a queen of a woman and she'll make a slave of *you*."

Kildare said nothing. Morgan went on: "For a man like Captain Tranquillo, Port Royal is full of pretty wenches, and any one of them, in a month, can make you as sick of women as the high-headed Spanish lady will make you in a year."

Kildare looked up at the shadowy swelling of the big square sail just above them and said nothing.

Morgan returned to the charge: "Well, I'll try to keep all hands away from her after Panama falls."

"I'll be the first to her," said Kildare, quietly.

He looked Morgan in the eye, and the admiral turned his head slowly away and seemed to be smiling a little.

There was a whisper, a thumping of a rope overhead, and Jimmy Green appeared above them, hanging head down. Morgan stared for a long moment at the ape.

"Tell me what's in my mind, Tranquillo," he said.

"You're wishing," said Kildare, "that when the fighting's over you could wash every buccaneer from your

decks and sail home to Port Royal with a crew of monkeys."

Morgan laughed.

"They'd make no more noise than the drunken apes on the deck, there," he said.

"And they could be paid off with nuts and bananas instead of pieces of eight," said Kildare.

Morgan glanced at his companion again. "D'you know the trouble with yourself?" he asked.

"Tell me," said Kildare.

"You're one of those damned romantics," said Morgan. "Except for that, I'd make you my vice-admiral and put your flag at the mast-head of any ship you wanted in the whole fleet. Look at me, now. I'm a practical man. A pipe of tobacco and a bowl of brandy punch makes me at home in any country in the world.

"You throw away a treasure for the sake of a woman's smile. And you will never be at home until your feet are on green turf again, with an English skylark in the middle of heaven, and your own chosen lady walking on your arm. The page of your life is all margin, Tranquillo, and damned little writing on it to call your own!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WITH GUNS PRIMED.

AFTER all, for the sake of securing the safety of his men in the rear and getting more provisions, Morgan touched at Santa Catalina Island, first, and summoned the governor to surrender the two forts. The governor returned word that he knew he could not contend against such an armada, but he begged to have a mock attack made so that his honor might be saved. This was done.

The buccaneers, with much laughter and yelling, fired their guns into the air and the defenders furiously loaded and discharged their cannon without charges of bullets.

Afterwards, there was a mock attack from which the Spaniards fell back; and a little later they surrendered.

This easy victory was taken as an augury for the success of the entire expedition. That savage sea-dog, Captain Brodely, was then sent with a division of the fleet down the coast to that place where the Chagres River rushes past a steep hill into the Caribbean; and on the steep hill stood the great castle of San Lorenzo, guarding Chagres harbor whose twenty feet of water made a good harbor for all except the largest ships.

Captain Brodely landed a league below the town, marched overland through the swamps, and came up behind San Lorenzo fort. Three hundred and fourteen soldiers defended the place. And there were perhaps four hundred buccaneers outside the walls. They would never have taken the place, which was defended by a true Spanish hero. But when a night attack was being driven vainly against the palisades of the outer defenses, a buccaneer in the ditch was struck in the back by an arrow. He jerked it out in a rage, wrapped some cotton around the slender shaft to fit it into the barrel of his musket, and then fired the arrow furiously back at the Spaniards. The cotton adhering to the arrow caught fire from the exploding powder and, landing in some woodwork, set it presently in a blaze. Other buccaneers followed the example of that chance and soon the whole place was in a blaze.

But the heroic Spaniards still defended the earthworks all that night. The next day they were charged and

retreated into the ruins of the inner fort, where the noble governor was shot through the brain. Then thirty of his followers, all that remained of the three hundred except a few who had slipped away in a small boat up the Chagres to carry the warning to Panama, surrendered. Of the buccaneers, half were dead or wounded. It had been a glorious defense and chance had won the battle almost more than courage.

News of this success started Morgan forward again. He blew the Spanish forts into the air at Santa Catalina, and sailed to Chagres. It was a very joyous entry into the harbor, and the whole fleet broke into a great cheering when they saw the English colors that flew from the earthen walls of famous Fort San Lorenzo.

Morgan, laughing very cheerfully on the deck of his flagship, told Kildare that he had pulled one of the biggest teeth out of the mouth of the King of Spain. In fact, he had done so.

But the first of many troubles now came on the expedition. For the buccaneers were standing about the rum keg or the brandy cask in every ship drinking healths to King Charles, Admiral Morgan, and to one another. And so the leading ships grossly missed the way into the river and, with a freshening norther behind them, four were grounded on the rock ledge of the entrance. The great ship of Morgan was among them.

The guns which had been firing salutes were silenced at once; the cheering ended; the whole harbor was filled with activity. Some tried laboriously to warp the ships off the reef, but the gathering force of the norther began to break them up, and therefore the four vessels were emptied and stripped of all useful goods. After that, they broke up on the reef under the gloomy eyes of Henry Morgan.

HE was a man who could not be downhearted for very long, however, and he started at once to repair Fort San Lorenzo, because as long as it was in his hands his retreat from Panama would be secured. The captives taken from Santa Catalina, together with those from Chagres, were set to work building and thatching huts, sinking new, strong rows of palisades to top off the earthen walls of the fort.

In the meantime the preparations for the plunge into the jungle went forward. Five hundred men were left as a garrison in the castle and two hundred more to hold the ships of the anchorage. That left a scant twelve hundred for the journey to Panama, for sickness, desertion, wounds, and death had whittled down the handsome army with which Henry Morgan left the roadstead of Tortuga. Kildare urged Morgan eagerly to leave a mere handful to watch the mouth of the Chagres because, as he said:

"You have not seen the walls of Panama!"

Morgan was obdurate. "With nothing else to show King Charles," he said, "I'll still have San Lorenzo and Chagres, and in London they pay high for captured fortresses, Tranquillo. They give out titles. They make men knights and barons, Tranquillo, for just such feathers as San Lorenzo to stick in the hat."

He scratched the back of Jimmy Green as he spoke, and Kildare stared at him in amazement; that brandy-stained, brandy-puffed face aspiring to a baronetcy was something too strange

for smiling; and all the murders, cruelties, cheats, and robberies of Henry Morgan came storming through the mind of Kildare. However, the end was to tell whether or no the ambitions of Henry Morgan were so entirely absurd!

For the overland trip, Kildare suggested plenty of food supplies, even if the army had to labor along with an annoying slowness, but Morgan was all for a flying trip. He knew that the Spaniards, having been warned of his coming long before, might very well ambush him in great numbers somewhere among the jungles of the Chagres, but he said this was all the better. He would kick the Spaniards out of his path and his army would live on food taken from the enemy.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Unusual Mishaps

OF all the accidents which fate has decreed for the human race, probably none has been more ironic than that of J. Hunt, a retired broncho buster living in South Dakota. He met death by falling from a stuffed horse. A dog caused serious injury to a New York City man. Falling ten stories, the dog knocked him unconscious. Another man lost his life in his own apartment by gas turned on by his pet cat. Many have been injured in automobiles by colliding with animals, and one by crashing into a pheasant.

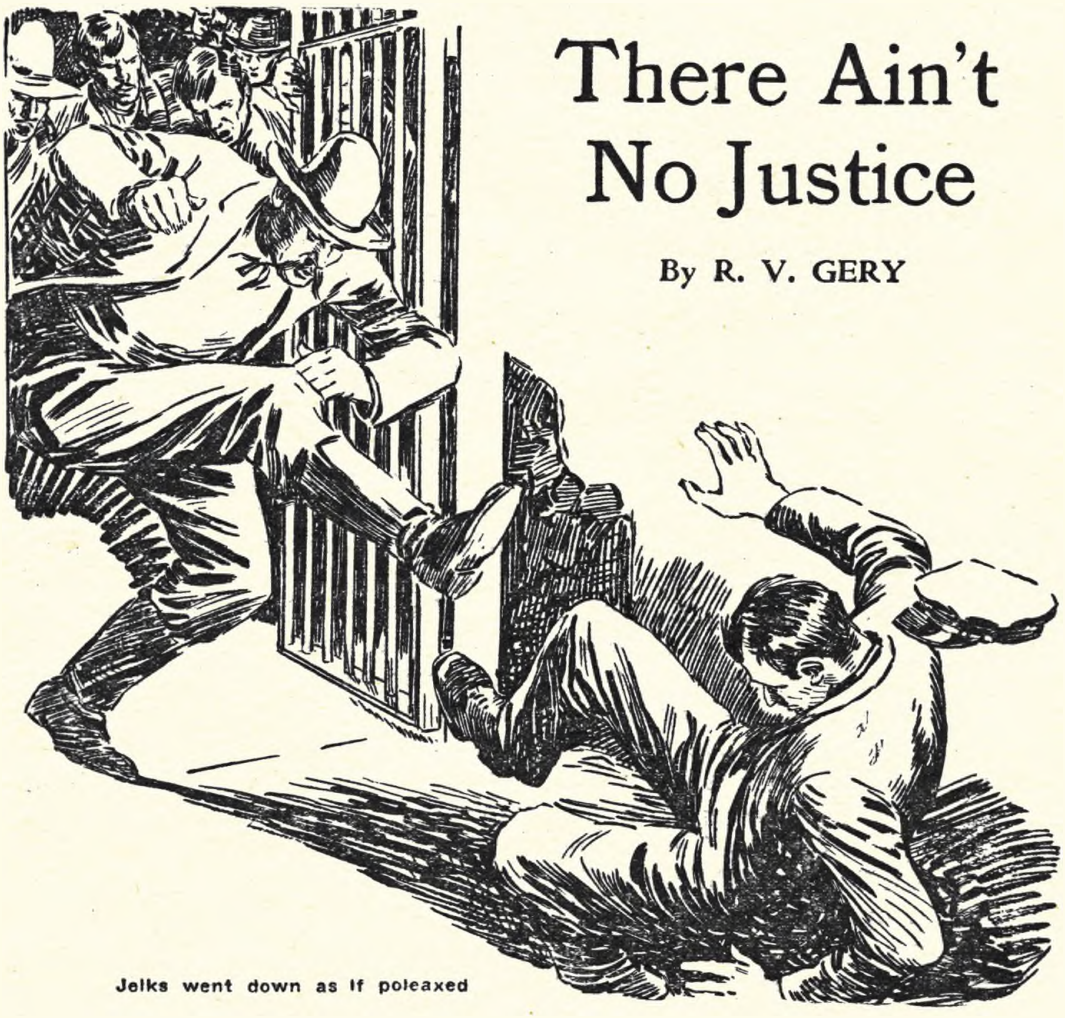
One of the most unusual tragedies by animals was that of W. N. Smith, who lived in Fort Worth. He was not able to survive seventeen bee-stings. Misfortune took even stranger form two years ago in Brazil, when two Indians were suffocated by a swarm of grasshoppers.

Ironically, bad luck has often come in moments of gayety. Unfortunate O. Stock, of Missouri, was playing Santa Claus when his whiskers caught fire and burned him badly. A Brooklyn man leaped to a railroad track to rescue a bunch of flowers and was electrocuted, the same month another resident of that city fell to his death hanging down to kiss the Blarney Stone. A young man about town. paying a call in a taxicab, was suddenly jolted to the floor and broke his neck. Another cracked his wrist —untying his necktie. Several people have choked very badly over their own dinners, and at least one on a toy whistle. Lollipops have caused several children to strangle. In France three women were badly hurt when buried under a stack of cheeses.

Hunters have been victims of grim accidents. Frequently they shoot only themselves, or other hunters. One carrying a deer on his back was quite promptly taken for a deer. A Georgia hunter, who survived, was successfully imitating a wild turkey. In New Jersey a peculiarly inept hunter, aiming at a rabbit, missed his game but hit eight other hunters.

Verging on mockery was a mishap in Bastia, Corsica, in which fifteen were killed by the collapse of the Palace of Justice. And in Durban, South Africa, thirty-one became mortally ill from ptomaine poisoning at a luncheon in their honor.

—*J. W. Holden.*



Jelks went down as if poleaxed

There Ain't No Justice

By R. V. GERY

Dame Fortune has sharp elbows, a scrawny neck, and is decidedly unfaithful, Seaman Jelks decides as things go from bad to worse in a Latin-American port

MR. GRINTER, mate of the freighter Calliope, was possessed of a red face, insignificant inches, and a notably peppery disposition that translated itself now and again into equally notable outbursts of invective.

He stood in the forward well-deck, arms akimbo, rocking heel-and-toe, and completed the delivery of a piece of diatribe, generally admitted by his audience to be completely up to his most fiery and resplendent standards.

"Yes," he said bitterly. "Yes, you—you lop-eared, left-handed son of a soldier, you! Get out of my sight, or damn me I'll take and kick your silly spine through your ears, d'ye hear me? Clear out, and don't let me see you again for a bit, or I'll be tempted beyond my

strength, as like as not, an' get hung for murder. Clumsy great oaf!"

He fairly sputtered with venom, and the subject of his oratory shrank back from him, finally turning and shambling away, red in the ears and muttering gloomily.

Gloom, indeed, appeared to be his distinguishing characteristic—a fixed and utter despondence that surrounded him as with an aura, and was reflected in his long horse-visage, drooping mustache, and hock-bottle shoulders forever shrinking, as it were, from a blow.

He vanished under the fo'c's'le overhang, and the mate continued his apostrophe to high heaven, standing over a gallon can of red paint, spilled like a glorious blood-splash across the deck.

"Great jumping Jehoshaphat!" he fumed. "Of all the slack-witted, ham-handed— Here, bos'n!" He swung on that functionary, who was continuing to regard him with admiration and envy. "Go get a couple of hands and swab this stuff away. I'll have that Jelks ashore by night, be damned if I don't. On his ear, too!"

"'E ain't much, sir, an' that's a fact," said the bos'n obsequiously. "Seems like 'e don't take no int'rest in things. 'Arf dotty, kind of."

"I'll give him dotty!" Mr. Grinter snarled angrily. "I'm going to see the skipper right now and have him sacked. We haven't got to put up with his sort, by thunder!"

He stumped aft, still breathing fire and slaughter, and ascended the ladder toward the bridge. The bos'n stood looking after him for an instant.

"'S'trewth!" he observed piously. "Nice little pennorth o' pop you are, ain't yer? Sooner 'ave yer room than yer comp'ny, an' that's a sacred fact—"

He turned and set a detail to work with mops and turpentine and sand. Then, stroking his chin dubiously, he went to the fo'c's'le door and peered inside.

"Hey, there!" he called.

THE lugubrious Jelks was seated on the edge of his bunk, chin in hands. At the bos'n's hail he stirred slightly and rolled a pathetic, aggrieved eye toward him. Hesitatingly he got to his feet.

"Yus, bos'n?" he inquired in a husky, lamenting voice.

His superior looked him up and down with a mixture of contempt and compassion.

"Wot's all this?" he demanded. "Wot you doin' in 'ere, eh? Took down yer 'air, is that it, an' goin' to 'ave a good cry? Well, this ain't a private boodwar, so snap out of it, d'ye see? Wot's the matter with yer, anyway?"

Jelks fumbled helplessly with his cap.

"I dunno," he said in the tone of one through with earthly affairs. "Don't seem there's anything I c'n do right—accordin' to 'im back there. 'E don't understand me, 'e don't. Nobody understands me—whatever I does, I gets it. I'm fed up, an' that's a fact!"

The bos'n stared at him.

"Blimey!" he remarked, as if to the universe at large. "Wot's all this? You goin' into highstrikes, or what? Sound like Sister Mary with the jim-jams, yer do. 'Nobody understands yer,' my eye! Of all the—"

"Well, it's true," said Jelks stubbornly. "Nobody does understand me; an' there ain't no justice, not nowhere. They're all a pack o' bloomin' tyrants, that's what they are, and I've 'ad enough of 'em. I won't stay 'ere to be

put upon, not by no ruddy buckoes, that I won't!"

The bos'n's mouth was open to frame a suitable response to this unheard-of recalcitrance, when there was a hail from aft.

He went to the door; Mr. Grinter was at the bridge rail.

"Bring that man here!" he called. "Captain wants him at once."

"There!" The bos'n turned to Jelks. "Now you've done it, m'lad. Up before the skipper for yours, an' a fine bellyful you'll get, too. See 'ere, don't you come none o' those tantrums o' yours, or ashore you'll go, quicker'n wink. 'E don't stand for no Mary Ann business, Mason don't, so if yer wants to keep yer berth you better watch out."

"I don't care," said Jelks, finally and completely obdurate. "They c'n do what they likes with me. Any'ow, whatever it is, it won't be fair, so what's the use?"

"Lead on," said the bos'n. "Lead on an' stop that bellyachin', or maybe I'll give yer somethin' for yerself. Come on—'op to it!"

Jelks shrugged his shoulders hopelessly, and shambled out of the fo'c's'le. As he went, however, he was still muttering disconsolately.

"Perishin' tyrants!" complained Mr. Jelks.

THE Calliope lay at anchor off the little port of San Jacinto, on the shores of Latin America. The town, deep embosomed in trees, its church spires rising gracefully above the masses of dark-green foliage, looked from seaward a picture of quiet prosperity, with just the added touch of romance that matters Spanish have for the uninitiate. One could imagine moons and strumming guitars, and languid *señoritas* waiting over the plash of fountains in secluded patios.

There were two individuals who went ashore that afternoon whose respective imaginations envisaged far different aspects of the town. One was Mr. Grinter, in the Calliope's boat and an immaculate, freshly starched suit of tropical whites. For him the *señoritas* and the patios called; ancient romance filled him, so that his pouter-pigeon bosom swelled and his sixty inches of pomposity grew to giant-killer proportions. Like many a half-pint-size, he was a true Gargantua when it came to a question of feminine conquest. And there was a family ashore here, upon one of whose dark and sparkling beauties he had long since had his eye.

The dreary Jelks, however, was thrust ashore, bag and baggage, on a cargo-lighter.

His interview with Captain Mason had been brief, forcible, and to the point. Things might have gone better with him—he might indeed have remained as part of the Calliope's complement—had his ill-omened and pessimistic tongue stayed silent behind his lank chops. But he had chosen to let it wag, for all the bos'n's urgent nudges, and Captain Mason's temper had finally given out. Now, with a battered suitcase containing his effects, he was marooned upon a strange and hostile shore.

He looked about him, standing on the hot quay. There was nothing to be seen save the usual unlovely row of cantinas and water-front restaurants, half a dozen lackadaisical and discouraged mules, and the back view of Mr. Grinter, waddling consequentially away from him up the main street of the town.

Jelks grimaced after him.

"Tyrant!" he growled. "Bloomin', low-down, snivellin' tyrant!"

With which final endearment he turned away and made slowly and with an air of funereal despondency for a building on the quayside upon whose doors appeared the inscription: "H. B. M. Vice-consul."

Explaining his errand, he was set in an antechamber to wait—a cool and airy apartment, decorated solely with a large notice-board, liberally plastered with notices in Spanish, Portuguese, and English.

Mr. Jelks stood for some time considering them with a jaundiced eye. Most of them were Greek to his untrained intelligence, but there was one —in all three languages—that made him prick up his ears.

It was headed with the smudgy and inadequate portrait of a gentleman in mustachios worthy of a Texas longhorn, a scowling and sanguinary eye, and a hard, hard mouth. This, it appeared, was no less a party than Jose-Maria Carquinez, otherwise known—said the notice—as *El Tigre de las Sierras,* and a bad guy at that. Just how bad might be estimated from the fact that a reward of ten thousand pesos was prominently offered for him. The local government appeared to be quite worked up over his personality, and the brief tale of his doings to date —murders, robberies, and so forth—was a masterpiece of indignant prose.

JELKS studied the thing without enthusiasm.

"Ten thousand somethin'-or-other!" he muttered sardonically. "Fat chance—they'll never get 'im. Things ain't like that—"

The door opened behind him, and the consul, a thin, worried-looking man in pince-nez, looked in.

"Yes?" inquired the consul. "What is your trouble?"

Jelks told him, with a good deal of pressure on the grievance pedal; and the consul sniffed.

"Well, I don't know what you want me to do about it," he said. "I'm not a shipping agent. Seems to me you had better go down in the Calle Mayor there and scout round for another berth. There are two or three local firms there that handle such things."

"But—you gotter ship me 'ome!" protested the scandalized Jelks. "I'm a distressed mariner, I am."

"Distressed your Great-aunt Jemima!" said the consul tersely. "Don't you come trying that game with me, my lad. You've been shot off your ship for incompetence, and it's no use pitching me any other kind of story. So—clear out of this, and good day to you!"

Thrown once more upon a hard and unsympathetic world, Jelks shook his fist at it and at the consulate from the middle of the quay outside. Wicked words burned on his lips, and for the first time the full tide of his misfortunes assailed him.

"Yus!" he said by way of conclusion. "That's the way it is, all the perishin' time. Ain't no right, nor decency, any place. Get a man down an' stamp on 'is fyce, that's wot it is, the dirty, swindlin' tykes! To blazes with 'em!"

For a moment he stood mouthing in the rays of the dying sun, and then, as if an idea had suddenly occurred to him, he went morosely up the street and turned into a restaurant whose doors were already open in anticipation of the evening's custom.

It was a long, low room, with the usual little tables down each side of it, and at the far end a species of stage,

used, no doubt, later on for the presentation of variety entertainment. Jelks examined it sourly, with the malevolent eye of one resolved to find no good in anything under heaven. Then he plumped himself down at a table, the suitcase beside him, and turned his attention to the card a sallow waiter thrust into his hand.

"Wot's all this muck?" he grumbled. "I want ter eat. Eat, eat, savvy?" he continued to the astonished attendant. "*Mungie,* yer bald-'eaded baboon, if that's what yer want—"

He made shoveling gestures toward his open m o u t h, while the waiter stared. Jelks stared back. There was something vaguely, but definitely, unpleasant about this person. He aroused all the glum deck hand's worst passions, for he was—yes, he was beyond any doubt the spit and image of Mr. Grinter.

There was the same lack of inches, the same bulbous head, the same general air of cocksureness and importance. Jelks swallowed and saw red, as the man continued to wave the bill of fare under his nose.

"Gor'!" he exclaimed uncontrolledly. "Lookin' at me like that, yer hugly big chimpanzee, yer! Tyke it off—switch it out, d'ye hear?"

"*S-señor?*" faltered the waiter.

Jelks seized a heavy glass carafe standing on the table and, moved by a nameless surge of annoyance with the world as a whole and this denizen of it in particular, stretched him flat on the floor.

FOLLOWED confusion, panic, and the breaking up of laws. In an instant, it seemed to the now somewhat bemused Jelks, the place was in an uproar. Swarthy men, all yelling in different keys, and all in different stages of hysterical fury, seemed to arise out of the floor all about him. A jabbering, frantic individual in a frayed dinner suit executed a species of fandango, and called down, it appeared, most of the saints in heaven in wrath upon his head. The waiter, recovering himself, sprang to life once more and whipped out a sanguinary-looking *cultello* from a tail pocket.

Women began to scream—and a couple of officious *guardias* in uniform suddenly shouldered their way in through the milling throng.

Ten minutes later Jelks found himself thrust into a narrow and noisome cell in San Jacinto's lockup. It was dark by now, perhaps mercifully so, having regard to the obvious condition of his place of confinement. The key clicked dolefully in the lock, and Jelks, equally dolefully, found a seat on the hard floor and began to catch up with events.

His situation was in no sense an encouraging one, even for a more optimistically inclined being. Since landing in San Jacinto, things appeared to have succeeded in going from bad to worse, instead of displaying any improvement. When he got out of this—if he ever got out, that was, and Jelks had hazy Spanish-Inquisition notions of what they did to people in these Latin-American prisons—when he got out, where would he be?

On the beach in an unfriendly town, with a hard-hearted consul to turn to, and the police with their eye on him. A far less cheerful nature might have been excused for taking a black view of the immediate future.

He sat with his head in his hands, sourly ruminating as usual upon the lack of reward for the virtuous in this life. Hunger assailed him, and weariness as well; the events of the day,

combined with his own thoughts, conspired to overcome him with lethargy. Little by little his head nodded, and finally slipped to his knee. Mr. Jelks slept.

He was aroused some time later by a succession of noises that slowly filtered into his consciousness, and in the end made him sit up with a jerk.

"Huh?" he muttered. "Wot's all this?"

Whatever it was, there was shooting in it—loud and frequent shooting, close at hand.

Yells arose again, the impassioned yells of Latin-Americans, but this time the yells were those of terror, not of rage. They grew in a rapid crescendo, there was a final explosion of gunfire, and then silence.

"Gor'!" observed Mr. Jelks, on his feet by the cell door.

The stillness continued unbroken for many minutes, but somehow or other it was made clear to him that matters in the San Jacinto *juzgado* were not as they had been. Some subtle change appeared to have taken place in the surrounding atmosphere, as if a tension had been relaxed.

Mr. Jelks fingered his stubbly jaw, puzzled.

THEN hurried footsteps were heard, and the gabble of voices once more. They came down the corridor, accompanied by the clicking of keys in locks and the banging of cell doors. A voice, more strident and authoritative than the rest, arose in curt and impatient command.

Mr. Jelks drew back a pace as it approached.

His door was hastily unlocked and flung open, and he stood blinking stupidly in the light of a lantern. A crowd of men were looking in on him, and even in that eerie and flickering illumination Mr. Jelks realized that here was no mob to be played with. One of them—a dark, beetle-browed fellow with a tremendous mustache — advanced and looked him over contemptuously.

"Bah!" he snarled. "It is not he. It is only a *gringo* sailor. Let him be, and find Pedro—quick!"

With a flip of the fingers under Jelks' nose he was about to turn away, when the Calliope's late deck hand asserted himself.

"See 'ere, you!" he said angrily. "You lemme out o' this, d'ye hear? Lemme go, or it'll be the worse for you. Come on, now, no foolin'—stand aside there, the lot of you; an' get out o' my— Gorblime, will yer look at that?"

The sudden interjection was caused by the lantern-light falling square on the swarthy one's features. The picture set a train of associations working in Jelks' mind; he had seen those lineaments before. And now he knew where—on the wall in the consul's office, with a lurid record set forth beneath them, and a reward offered.

"Crimes!" he ejaculated softly. "It's 'im!"

Whether *El Tigre* understood him or not was at that moment immaterial. Only the bad man was aware that this scarecrow was delaying him in his search for the comrade he was in process of rescuing, and delay was an affair highly uncongenial to his temperament.

Disdaining to employ any of the lethal weapons with which he was generously festooned, he shot out a booted foot and kicked Mr. Jelks viciously in the abdomen.

"Enough, swine!"

Mr. Jelks went down as if poleaxed, every ounce of breath jolted out

of his body, and stars dancing and coruscating before his eyes. *El Tigre* and his minions passed onward in their search of the jail, with loud shouts for the captive Pedro, and after a few moments there was again comparative silence. In the dark Jelks stirred, gasped, and sat up.

"Gug-gug-gug!" was all he was able to get out at first. Then, as the power of speech returned to him, and with it capacity for movement, a great rage swept over him. He scrambled to his feet and stood quivering all over with suppressed fury.

"Yaah!" he breathed. "Crool, stinkin' tyrant! Another of 'em—an' I never done nothin' to him, neither!"

He found himself suddenly interested in what lay immediately before his nose, the open door of the cell and the faintly lit passage. The way of escape, anyhow, was open. Mr. Jelks, still cursing bitterly and profanely, took it. In another minute he was through the outer offices of the jail—which were, he noted, decorated with a couple of picturesque corpses on the floor—and into the street.

IT was dark, and ominously quiet. *El Tigre's* sudden swoop upon the prison, with its attendant fireworks and general kick-up, had convinced the peaceable inhabitants of San Jacinto that this was a very suitable neighborhood to sing small in. They were lying, most of them, extremely doggo under beds, in cupboards, and anywhere else inconspicuous, pattering prayers.

Mr. Jelks lurched out of the jail door and looked about him.

"Wh-whazzis?" he inquired a trifle confusedly.

At first sight there seemed to be no particular answer to that question. There was nothing but the black street and the blacker night. But in a moment something else hove in view—a something that made him dodge hastily back for cover into the angle of a wall. A big racing car, lights out and engine purring venomously, came swinging round the corner and pulled up silently not five yards away from him. In the dim light reflected from the jail office, Mr. Jelks observed that the two men who dismounted from it carried objects of gleaming metal, businesslike and sinister.

"Coo!" he whispered disgustedly. "More of 'em! Narsty, dirty tyrants! Yah!"

His fulminations were interrupted by a lively tumult from inside the jail, and a mass of men came hurrying out. They were led by *El Tigre*—Jelks could distinguish those handlebar mustaches from where he stood, and to judge by their triumphant attitude they had got the missing Pedro. For a moment they stood by the car, in low and excited conversation; then at a word from *El Tigre* they faded into the murk, their lightly shod feet making no sound upon the cobbles of the roadway.

The outlaw stood for another instant, his hand on the car door, talking to those inside. He was perfectly at his ease, and once again the skulking Jelks caught a glimpse of those dark and arrogant features. Rage suddenly choked him once more—stifling, overpowering rage at everybody and everything. The bos'n, Mr. Grinter, Captain Mason on the Calliope; the consul, the café waiter, the *guardias*, and the authorities of the jail; all these had been hateful to him, as representatives of a class that trod him under, trampled on his face. But this mocking, swarthy creature—

At that precise moment *El Tigre,* with a final word to his associates, and a loud guffaw of laughter, entered the car.

The door slammed, the powerful engine hummed, and the machine moved away, its occupants sweeping the road ahead with their arsenal of deadly weapons.

"Grrrh!" said Mr. Jelks suddenly.

With a bound he had left his hiding-place and swung himself nimbly on to the tire-bracket at the rear.

His long, gloomy horse-face was set for once into the lines of resolution. Obstinacy glowed in his once lacklustre eye.

"Grrrh!" he repeated to the flying streets of San Jacinto. "Blarsted tyrants—I'll show 'em!"

HALF a mile away, in a patio as romantically secluded as the little god himself could have chosen, Mr. Grinter all at once found his evening's entertainment brought to an abrupt close—turned, rather, to sudden and mystifying confusion.

He had been progressing very favorably with his suit, he thought. For hours, in the cool gloom of the little courtyard, the parents of his inamorata had made much of him—Doña Inez, plump and comfortable, Don Felipe, a wizen little cocksparrow of a man. There was an open-handed, unconstrained quality about their hospitality that informed Mr. Grinter his presence was welcome. Already, in a rosy glow, he envisaged himself retired from the sea, settled here in San Jacinto, in luxuriously cushioned ease.

Only the girl herself, Elvira, sat apart and pouted. Mr. Grinter, flattering himself he knew the shy sex, permitted her to remain coy while he discussed matters of high politics with Don Felipe and kowtowed obsequiously to Doña Inez.

He knew his womenkind, Thomas Grinter did.

And then it happened. A pale and babbling servitor entered, his eyes bulging from his head.

"*El Tigre!*" he gasped, pointing toward the town.

Don Felipe jumped, precisely as if some one had thrust a knife into him.

"*El Tigre!*" he exclaimed. "Here? *Dios de mi alma—*"

He exploded into a coruscating outburst, and his wife accentuated the confusion by giving a loud shriek and falling backward in her chair. Elvira also screamed, but seemed to retain her composure.

Mr. Grinter gaped. "Er—what's the matter?" he asked a trifle shakily.

Don Felipe shook clenched fists at the dark heavens.

"Matter?" he screamed. "It is *El Tigre*—the outlaw, the bandit, the murderer. He comes—he comes for Elvira—"

This statement swiftly took all the rubicund color out of Mr. Grinter's cheeks.

"I—I don't get you—" he began.

Don Felipe continued his raving, but this time it was directed at his daughter. In a flood of invective—quarter-comprehended only by Mr. Grinter—he swept and lashed her, while the girl stood angry and defiant, her back to the wall. When he had run down, Mr. Grinter tried again.

"I don't understand," he said. "Who is this—this *Tigre?*"

Don Felipe whirled on him.

"As I have told you!" he spluttered. "The outlaw, the pig-dog, the— And this one here"—he indicated Elvira with a shaking hand—"pretend to—love him, *diablo!* It is long time—we

think she has forgot—but he remember and he come for her!"

He fairly foamed at the mouth, and Elvira said nothing. Nothing whatever.

"Oh!" Mr. Grinter spoke blankly. He had just made a discovery—a staggering discovery. All in San Jacinto was not just as he had so fondly imagined it to be. To pose proudly as the accepted suitor of the Señorita Elvira was one thing—but to be a prominent and successful gunman's rival entirely another. Mr. Grinter turned a pale shade of green.

NOR was his color altered, or his state of mind improved, by a sudden *rat-tat-tat* of machine-gun fire, shockingly close and clear. One of *El Tigre's* henchmen, out of pure joviality, had loosed off at random as a gentle proclamation of his continued presence in town, and a hint to peaceable citizens to duck and keep on ducking.

Mr. Grinter was galvanized to sudden action. He leaped from his chair and fled out of the courtyard toward the street.

At which precise instant *El Tigre's* carload of cheerful assassins came hurtling to a stop immediately before the door.

El Tigre bounded to the ground, to collide violently with the flying mate. "Ha!" he grunted, and instantly rammed a pistol muzzle home in Grinter's ribs. "*Qui es?* What is this, son of a she-mule?"

A single move, and it is doubtful whether the Calliope's mate would ever have seen the freighter again; but fortunately for his skin he was frozen into immobility by that prodding sensation in the midriff. It was pitch dark in the street, and he was able to guess at his antagonist. But there was no guessing about that pistol muzzle.

"Awrk!" said Mr. Grinter, appalled.

Once again the merest chance saved his life, for *El Tigre* hesitated, his finger twitching at the trigger. He was, perhaps, trying to translate Mr. Grinter's remark into coherency—but at that moment another sound arose, faint and distance-dimmed, but unmistakable. It was the sound of shots and shouts from the direction of the town. San Jacinto's guardian soldiery were noisily getting under arms.

El Tigre—even his worst enemies admitted it—was a man of instant action. He was here for one purpose, and no Mr. Grinter was to divert him from it. However, he was also, in his own peculiar fashion, prudent; and he had caught a faint glimpse of gold lace on the cap and uniform of his prisoner. Experience had taught him to avoid embroilment — serious embroilment— with foreign nationalities. He was quite hot enough already at home.

So he shifted his grip on the pistol, clouted Mr. Grinter very satisfactorily on the side of the head with it, leaped his prostrate body, and darted into the house, where blood-curdling screams hailed his advent. The hubbub from down town continued, and grew louder. It was going to be nip and tuck if *El Tigre* got clear without a battle.

Mr. Jelks on the back of the car in the dark was growling under his breath still. The fires of his resentment glowed all the brighter, indeed, for the jolting, bumping ride over irregular cobbles. He was sore clear through, and in more senses than one.

Just what might be taking place now was not entirely manifest to his laborious mental processes, and of Mr. Grinter's presence he was naturally un-

aware. But he heard the thump of his downfall, the patter of *El Tigre's* racing feet, and the screams from within the house.

"Gaw!" he said suddenly. "Wimmen!"

For some unknown, inexplicable reason the outcries put the finishing touch to his wrath. With a muttered reference to "Tyrants!" he slipped from his perch and darted across to the door.

The men in the car—there were four of them, including the rescued Pedro—saw his flitting shape, and leaped to action.

But Mr. Jelks had fled through the dark aperture before they could do more than swing their batteries on him.

HE was here and gone, hurrying, blundering headlong into the archway. No chivalry carried him forward, but merely a blind, unreasoning annoyance with everything and everybody, and with *El Tigre* in particular. So that it was not astonishing that he should cannon violently into the outlaw, returning helter-skelter to the outer world, Elvira, so to speak, under his arm.

The crash was a devastating one, being totally unexpected by all involved. It hit *El Tigre* worse than anyone, however, as being unused to mere physical brawling. He went down in a heap, all the breath jerked out of him, and Jelks, victorious, astride his prostrate form.

"I'll learn yer!" panted the ex-deckhand. "Kickin' fellers in the—"

He groped and gouged for his victim's eyes after a fashion learned in some murky dockside school. Passion surged through him, the bitter, vengeful passion of a grievance released. For the first time in his existence Mr. Jelks was seeing red—and enjoying it. Not, however, for long.

There was a rending shriek, and Elvira fell upon him in the dark, literally with tooth and claw. Mr. Jelks, a man of peace, recoiled from that onslaught, four deep, parallel, and angry scratches making crisscross patterns on his countenance, and *El Tigre,* roaring like his prototype, sprang to his feet. Simultaneously there was a sputter of musketry close at hand, and excited voices called upon him from the car outside.

"*Carracho!*" said *El Tigre* with sudden venom, and turned to flee.

"No, yer don't!" said Mr. Jelks, sensing rather than seeing the movement. "Come hup, yer big bullyin' crocodile, yer!"

He made a grab at the outlaw, but *El Tigre* was otherwise engaged just at that instant. Elvira had all at once realized the truth: that her bandit-hero was running away with her. She was taking steps—drastic, Latin-American steps—to restrain him. Mr. Jelks reeled back once more, paralyzed by the intensity of her fury. As for *El Tigre,* he made for the archway and the car, spitting brimstone, and with a hundred pounds or so of flashing-eyed, indignant beauty coiled about him.

A light shot down the street outside—the powerful headlight of a military armored car—and there was again the crackle of small-arm fire. The shouts from the car changed abruptly to yells of alarm and pain—and *El Tigre,* desperate, reached for his gun.

Mr. Jelks, close at hand, saw the movement and made an indescribable noise in his throat. With a single movement he plunged for the outlaw's feet and whipped them away from beneath him.

El Tigre went crashing to the cob-

bles. His pistol, jerked from his hand, exploded with a single report, ear-shattering in the confined space. The lights went out abruptly for Mr. Jelks.

HE came to himself, swimmingly and with a terrific pain in his head. For some time he remained blinking at his surroundings, which were dreamily comfortable and cool.

A white-clad, ravishing figure flitted across his vision, and Mr. Jelks closed his eyes again happily. He was in heaven, all right—in heaven, where oppression ceased and justice reigned free for all. Mr. Jelks sighed ecstatically. Here was his reward.

He drifted off into an iridescent, shimmering kind of a dream, through which faces came and went confusedly—a man with gigantic longhorn mustachios, for instance, and another with a bulging corporation and a consequential air.

Unpleasant fellows, these, Mr. Jelks reflected; but there, they would not be in this new paradise of his. Another location was doubtless reserved for them—

A hateful voice suddenly cut across his consciousness.

"Is he out of it yet?" it asked.

Mr. Jelks opened his eyes to find Mr. Grinter beaming down at him.

"Well, well, well!" the mate began cheerfully. "Here we are again, eh, Jelks? Mighty glad to see you coming through, I'm sure. Er, yes—Captain Mason, you wished to say a few words, sir?"

He was as pompous and brazen as ever, but there was something in his demeanor Mr. Jelks found it difficult to interpret in his present dazed condition. Captain Mason coughed behind his hand.

"Hm, yes!" he said. "Well, I'd just like to tell you we're very pleased with the part you played in this affair, Jelks. Mr. Grinter's told us all how you assisted him in capturing this notorious desperado—"

Things began to whirl round again for Mr. Jelks. As if through a haze he heard fragments of Captain Mason's address. "...gallant piece of work...Mr. Grinter here...Mr. Grinter's courage...everyone talking of it ...honor to the service and the Calliope...be glad to hear Mr. Grinter... reward...ten thousand pesos..."

It faded and flickered up and down, but its general sense was clear enough. Too clear for Mr. Jelks. He groaned and turned his aching head wearily on the pillow, in time to hear Captain Mason conclude.

"So, under the circumstances, Jelks, we'd—ah—like to have you back aboard. We'll forget about—ah—any unpleasantness; and as soon as you're fit, in a fortnight, say, we'll call in here for you. You and Mr. Grinter should have plenty to talk about—"

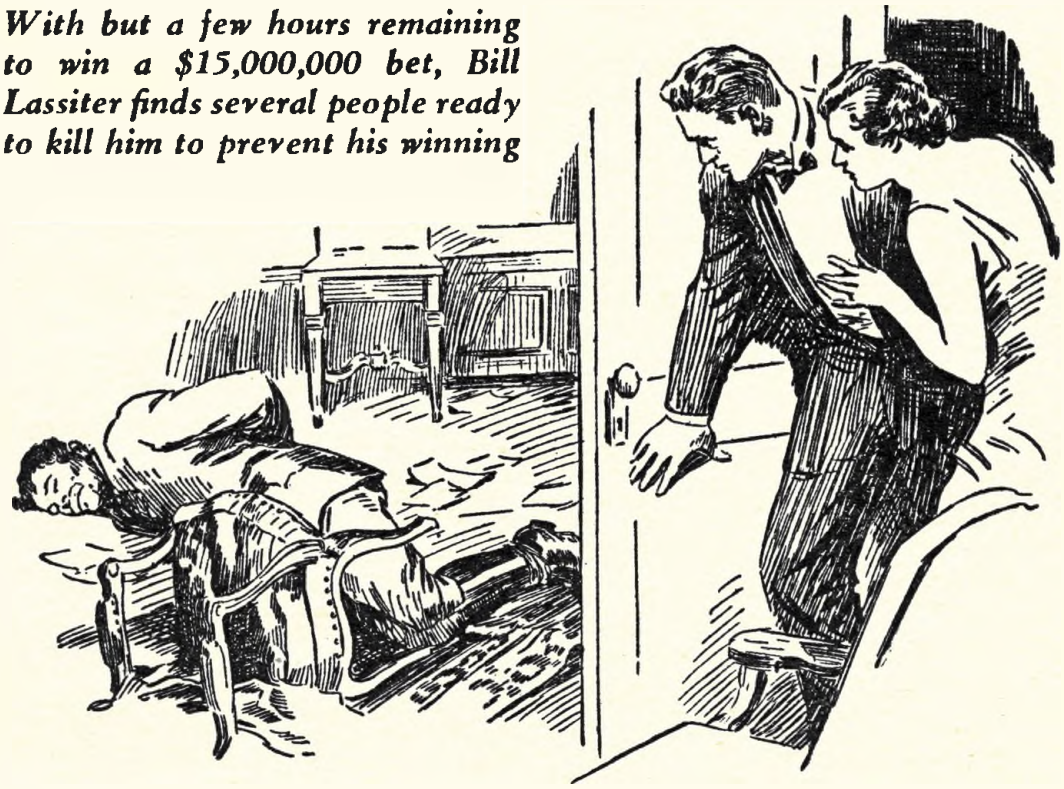
He stopped, with a glance at the still form in the bed. "Poor fellow!" he said to the mate. "He's gone off again; shock, no doubt. Well, let's leave him, eh? He'll be all right..."

But Mr. Jelks, in his inner consciousness, was wearily assimilating this newest affront to his humanity. To get out of San Jacinto—well he knew it—he would have to close with Captain Mason's offer. And a voyage with that smirking, bouncing, blaring little abomination, ten thousand times worse now...

Mr. Jelks turned his face to the wall and groaned. The sky was black above him again. There was indeed no justice—no justice anywhere at all.

THE END

With but a few hours remaining to win a $15,000,000 bet, Bill Lassiter finds several people ready to kill him to prevent his winning



Jake, the chauffeur, was groaning

The Gold Fist

By GEORGE F. WORTS

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

BILL LASSITER, New York playboy, bet his $15,000,000 inheritance from his uncle against the $2,000,000 bequest to his uncle's ex-secretary, Ladorna Whipple, that he could, without funds, make $50,000 in the period of a year. With less than four hours of that year to go, it looked very much like Bill might lose his $15,000,000.

He had not made a penny, and his only hope was in cashing in on a mysterious secret formula he had acquired in Peru when he became the possessor of a gold fist containing a quipu, or knotted string that spelled off the formula. John Grayson, of New York, had offered Bill $100,000 for the fist and the quipu, and Bill was doing his best to deliver them.

A good many things and people stood in his way. There was Victor Chine, and his wife Nita. There was Ramon Amador, a Bolivian political refugee. There was Joanna Trowbridge, New York society girl. All these people wanted the fist. Joanna, however, had thrown in her lot with Bill.

Bill arranged a large and gala party at his huge penthouse, and invited all of the people involved with the fist, as well as his cousin Homer, who had the strange gift of being able to tell by looking at a person's face whether that person was in imminent danger of death. The faces of people about to die became blank to Homer.

Bill left the fist in his wall safe, under guard of his chauffeur. When he went to get it, he found the safe open, the chauffeur unconscious on the floor.

CHAPTER XV.

"WHO HIT ME?"

JAKE, the chauffeur, was groaning. Joanna began to tremble.

She cried, tremulously, "Oh, Bill!"

Bill crossed the room in two bounds and looked into the safe. Various documents which the wall safe had contained were

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scattered about on the floor. The gold fist was gone.

"Tell Homer," Bill said wearily.

Joanna ran toward the stairs and Bill kneeled beside his half-conscious chauffeur. Jake opened his eyes, groaned and groaned again. Bill removed the adhesive tape and the wire.

"Who did it, Jake?"

"Who did what, sir?" Jake asked feebly.

"Who knocked you out?"

Jake shook his head in the familiar gesture of a floored fighter. He looked pale and ill. "I don't know, sir. I was standing here, just like you told me, and the next thing I knew you were saying, 'Who did it?'"

The fighting chauffeur was strong enough now to stand up. He did so. "Get yourself a shot of whisky at the bar," Bill said, "and stand by for further orders. We're up against a tough gang, Jake."

He went out of the room and downstairs. The orchestra was now playing, "You're the Top," and the penthouse was noisy with the uproar of Bill's guests. He found Homer and Joanna at the edge of the dance floor. Homer was peering at faces.

He stared at Bill. "That you, Bill?"

"Yes."

"Your face is blank!"

"Of course it is. I've got the quipu. How about the others?"

"No luck," Joanna replied. "Oh, Bill, what a pity!"

"I'm not licked yet."

Withers came over and told him that Mr. Grayson had come.

"He and two other gentlemen are in the billiard room with Mr. McClurg. Mr. Grayson would like to see you, he said."

Bill asked him if he had seen anyone leave recently.

"Yes, Mr. Lassiter. Mr. and Mrs. Chine left."

"Homer, did you see them go?"

"No, Bill."

Bill experienced a moment of panic. Then he said, "If they've got the fist, they'll be back for the quipu. Or they'll get in touch. Withers, have all exits watched. No one else is to leave without my cousin's consent."

"Very good, sir."

Bill went on to the billiard room. Mr. Grayson, Mike McClurg and two elderly strangers were playing bottle pool. When Bill came in they stopped playing.

"BILL," Mr. Grayson said, "these are the two gentlemen you asked for. This"—he indicated a stout, florid, gray-haired man—"is Judson Forster, my head engineer. And this"—he indicated the other man, a tall, slender blond man of forty—"is Bert Fisher, my best geologist. Mr. Fisher was formerly an archæologist. And now will you tell me why you wanted an engineer and an archæologist whom *I* trusted?"

"Their trustworthiness," Bill said, "is up to you, Mr. Grayson. All I'm undertaking is to deliver to you the gold fist and the quipu it contains—"

"And their explanation," Mr. Grayson reminded him.

"I am sure these gentlemen will attend to that," Bill said. "Mr. Fisher, are you familiar with the Incas—their artifacts—quipus, in particular?"

"Modesty," the blond man answered, "forbids my answering you in full."

"Can you translate quipus?"

"Oh, yes."

"That's fine. What I'm driving at, Mr. Grayson, is that the men who interpret or translate the fist and the quipu must be men you place absolute trust in. The fist and the quipu are of value to you only if no one else knows their secret."

"Yes, that's obvious," the president of Grayson and Clark agreed. "And here's how I've figured we will work it, Bill. I will gamble a hundred thousand of my own money on this mysterious gold fist, although I don't think it's a gamble, because we presume it will give us some engineering method or process of great practical value. We will incorporate; I will hold fifty-one per cent of the stock. The balance will be distributed equally among you, Bill, and

Mr. Forster and Mr. Fisher. That ought to keep the secret pretty tight. Your lawyer can tell you whether or not that's a fair proposition."

Mike McClurg shrugged. "I still call it a wild goose chase, but I consider the proposition eminently fair."

"Where is the fist," Mr. Grayson said, "and where is the quipu?"

"If you gentlemen will keep on playing pool," Bill answered, "I'll have them both for you in a few minutes."

He returned to the large drawing room. Homer and Joanna were not there. He found them in the doorway into the bar. He had a rushed feeling.

"No luck?" he asked.

"No luck," Homer answered.

"Have you looked everywhere?"

"Yes, Bill. I've looked at every face on the premises. Only yours is blank. One or two are a tiny bit vague, but not blank."

Bill narrowed his eyes. "Have you tried the billiard room? Four men are in there. I think they're honest, but I don't trust anybody now. Let's check them."

He took Homer to the billiard room, but did not go in. Homer went in, watched the four pool players a moment, and returned to report that the faces of the four men were crystal clear.

"How about the servants?"

"I've checked everybody."

Bill glanced at his watch. It was twenty minutes to eleven. Only a little more than an hour and a quarter was left! He was sweating. The feeling of desperation was increasing.

"We'll make the rounds again," he said to Homer. "Do you suppose there's a chance that you're losing your gift?"

"No," Homer said. "Your face is still blank."

THEY made the rounds again. They were in the bar when Withers found them. "Mr. Lassiter," he said breathlessly, "you told me to let anyone in who came here with any kind of a secret message for you. A man came fifteen minutes ago and says he must see you privately—urgently. He is now waiting in your study."

"What's his name?"

"He would not give his name. He looks Mexican or Cuban, sir. He was most mysterious."

Bill cried, "Amador! I'd forgotten Amador!"

A strange, hard voice said: "There's the guy!" And a tall, heavily-built man in blue serge took Bill firmly by the elbow. "You Bill Lassiter?"

"Yes," Bill said. The man wore a gray felt hat and he had hard blue eyes.

"I'm Sergeant Hopper, of the Homicide Squad," the big man said. "I want to have a little talk with you."

Bill looked past him at Joanna, who stared at Bill with large, dismayed eyes. With an effort Bill said, "I'm delighted to have you here, sergeant. The bar's right over there."

"I didn't come to your party," Sergeant Hopper said harshly. "And your party can get along without you for a while, I guess. You're coming to headquarters with me."

Bill said quietly, "You mean you're arresting me?"

"We'll see about that after we've had a little talk. It's about a killing, Mr. Lassiter. A man named Bruce Orwood was found stabbed to death in his house on Gramercy a few hours ago. You were seen going into the house this afternoon, and you were seen hanging around there with a woman this evening."

Bill said hastily, "I can explain that, sergeant. I can explain everything."

"Sure you can, Mr. Lassiter. That's why we're going down town."

Joanna's lyrical voice said, "Bill! Aren't you going to introduce me?"

Bill introduced Sergeant Hopper to Joanna. And Joanna said, "Sergeant, I'm practically dying of thirst, and it's worth a girl's life to get into that bar alone. Won't you—"

Sergeant Hopper looked at Joanna. He suddenly blushed. "I'm sorry, miss, but I—"

"Please!" Joanna said.

"Homer," Bill whispered urgently, "have you seen the police commissioner?"

"He's around somewhere."

"Get him. Quick!"

Homer hurried off.

Sergeant Hopper said, "Kindly get your hat, Mr. Lassiter."

Joanna had entwined her arm with the detective's.

"Sergeant," she said gently, "you wouldn't ruin this party."

"I'm sorry, Miss Trowbridge, but you're wanted downtown, too. You're the woman Mr. Lassiter was seen with."

"Let's have a drink," Joanna persisted. "And then we'll all go downtown. Bill, get my cigarettes and meet us in the bar. Come on, sergeant!"

THE detective looked embarrassed but stubborn. He thrust out his jaw. "Sorry," he said. "It's all in the line of duty. You've got to come along, Mr. Lassiter."

Bill saw the police commissioner approaching with vigorous strides. He was a big man with a florid face and bristling red hair.

"What's all this?" he barked, glaring at the sergeant.

"Sergeant Hopper," Joanna said indignantly, "wants to arrest Mr. Lassiter!" She looked at the commissioner appealingly.

"Nonsense!" the big man roared. "At a time like this? What have you been up to, Bill?"

"He's wanted in connection with a murder, sir," the sergeant said.

The big man turned his cold gray eyes on the sergeant. "What murder?"

"Dr. Bruce Orwood, the archæologist, was bumped off this afternoon, sir."

"Bill," the commissioner said, "did you murder this doctor?"

"Certainly not," Bill said.

"Then," the big man snapped, "what do you want Mr. Lassiter for, sergeant?"

"Orders, sir," the sergeant said humbly. "He was seen around Orwood's house, and so was this young lady, Miss Trowbridge. I've got to take them down for questioning. Line of duty, sir."

The police commissioner had known Bill for years, and, like every other person at that party, he had heard of the bet. He had even made a wager of his own on the outcome. He took out a handsome platinum watch and looked at it. He glanced at Bill questioningly.

Bill shook his head. "Not yet," he said. "I need all the time that's left until midnight."

Joanna cried, "You can't let him take Bill off now!"

The police commissioner appeared to consider, while the sergeant stared at him disapprovingly. "I have a suggestion to make, sergeant," the big red-haired man said finally. "Mr. Lassiter is very busy at the moment. I know he will be delighted to go with you at a few minutes after midnight. I suggest that you make an appointment with him for that time."

"But—" the sergeant began.

"In the meantime," the police commissioner continued, "you might pursue your line of duty by questioning Miss Trowbridge. And," he added gallantly, "I can think of no more pleasant occupation than chatting with Miss Trowbridge. In fact, I believe I will assist you."

The sergeant muttered, "Just as you say, sir."

"Fine," Joanna said. "Go ahead, Bill."

"And if you don't make good on this bet," the big man told Bill, "I will be out one hundred and fifty dollars, and I'll arrest you for grand larceny as well!"

He walked off with Joanna and the sergeant. Bill looked around for Homer and growled, "Come on, Homer!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AMADOR STRIKES.

THEY went to the study. The door was closed. When Bill opened it, he saw a man seated in the same chair Ladorna Whipple had occupied a short while before.

The man was Ramon Amador.

Homer whispered in an excited voice: "Blank! Entirely blank, Bill!"

The Bolivian was rising. He arose from the chair gracefully and gave Bill his suave smile. There was a cross of adhesive tape on his left temple. His slender, powerful figure was emphasized by the perfectly cut dress suit he wore. The maroon ribbon of a diplomatic order crossed the snowy expanse of his shirt front. Upon it blazed a star of rubies, sapphires and diamonds.

Perfectly at ease, he regarded Bill with his Mephistophelean eyes, his suave smile.

He said, in his cultured voice, with its romantic accent: "It was most charming of you, Mr. Lassiter, to include me among your guests. I am honored."

Bill said quietly to Homer, "Tell the police commissioner I'd like to borrow Joanna for five minutes." He was certain that Ramon Amador had the gold fist, that one of his agents, a guest of Bill's, had knocked out Jake and looted the wall safe. And he was certain that he was dealing with the most dangerous of the many men who were interested in obtaining the gold fist.

But he was not worried about the danger of Ramon Amador. He was worried over nothing but the possibility that another of these maddening slip-ups would occur.

Bill said, in a controlled voice, "*Señor*, I am delighted that you could come. My house is yours. I wanted very much to see you."

Homer had gone. Bill closed the door. Ramon Amador might be a desperate criminal, but Bill was desperate, too.

"I think," Bill said, "that we can reach an amicable agreement, Señor Amador. Shall we be perfectly frank?"

"By all means, Mr. Lassiter."

"Then I will make you a proposition," Bill said. "You have the gold fist. I have the quipu. I will offer you a good price for the fist."

"No, *señor*. The gold fist is not for sale. It has never been for sale. It never will be for sale."

Ramon Amador spoke with sureness and calm. He still smiled. He was still suave.

"Then," Bill said, "I will sell you the quipu for a reasonable sum. We know that the two together are worth millions of dollars. In fact, I have gone so far as to organize a syndicate to exploit or develop the fist and the quipu. However, if it is necessary, I will disappoint my business associates. I will sell you the quipu for fifty thousand dollars, payable before midnight tonight."

"No, *señor*. I am not interested. Not Ramon Amador!"

And Bill saw that beneath the Bolivian's flawless courtesy, his apparent calm, his suave manner, was raging a hatred that he was keeping in check only by great effort. Behind those Mephistophelean eyes shone the red light of murder.

"You have trifled with me," the Bolivian said. "You came to my hotel room tonight! You knocked me unconscious as I came out into the hall! That mask you wore did not prevent my recognizing you! You knocked me unconscious and stole my quipu. I will have no dealings with you!"

BILL wondered who the masked man had been. Victor Chine, beyond doubt.

He said quietly, "It seems to me we are even. Someone unknown knocked my chauffeur unconscious and robbed my wall safe tonight."

Amador said coldly, "I will thank you for the quipu."

Bill shook his head. "Amador, you can't bluff me. You're wanted for murder. A detective downstairs wants you for killing Dr. Bruce Orwood. Do I get the gold fist, or do I notify the detective that you are here?"

Some of the tenseness that had grown in the Bolivian's face went away. He smiled again. "Mr. Lassiter," he said, "you are acting like a child. I am not a child. I know nothing of a man named Bruce Orwood. The death of a man named Bruce Orwood cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be left at my doorstep. We are

wasting time. I have come for the quipu."

He pivoted his hand, palm up, from the wrist joint, to let Bill see clearly what lay in his palm. And Bill saw it quite clearly —a knife with a thin blade about six inches long.

"With this knife, Mr. Lassiter," the Bolivian went on imperturbably, "I can pin an ace of hearts to any wall fifty feet away—through the heart. I do not have to tell you that I am not a man who makes empty threats. I assure you, Mr. Lassiter, that your death can only pay for my failure to attain my objective. Will you give me the quipu?"

The door behind Bill opened swiftly. Joanna came in.

She stared at Amador and gave a little scream.

Then: "Ramon Amador!" she said in a husky, small voice.

The Bolivian bowed. "*Señorita.*"

The girl was suddenly deathly pale. She caught her clutched hands to the breast of her sapphire-blue gown. Bill thought she was about to faint.

She whispered: "Bill! Do you know who this man is?"

"I only know his name is Ramon Amador, and that he has the gold fist—and has been trying to get it by murder, theft and God knows what else for God knows how long."

She clung to Bill's arm, panting. "Bill! This man is the head of a great band of South American criminals! He's the most dangerous criminal in South America!"

Ramon Amador was smiling, watching Joanna with admiring eyes.

"There's nothing he and his band won't stoop to, Bill. They start revolutions in order to sell arms. They will assassinate presidents or kidnap anyone. They're at the root of most of the troubles in Latin America!"

The Bolivian bowed again, more deeply. "But is that all, *señorita?*"

Joanna said tensely: "I believe it was your man who killed my Chinese servant!"

Ramon Amador made a graceful, disparaging gesture with his free hand. "But you are painting such a pale picture of my deeds, *señorita.* I have been telling this young man that I am dangerous, that he will pay with his life for further interference with my plans. I hope you have convinced him—yet you have left so many, many colorful episodes unsaid!"

"You murderer!" Joanna panted.

AGAIN the hand was waved languidly, but this time in reproach.

"Calm yourself, *señorita.* I will tell you what I have told Mr. Lassiter. That you are a woman makes no difference. I will leave this building safely with the gold fist and the quipu. If I do not, you will die shockingly. With the reputation you have given me, must I make myself clearer? Do I have the quipu, Mr. Lassiter?"

"Yes," Bill answered in a husky voice. He removed the quipu from his pocket. He looked at it a moment as it hung, dangling, from the palm of his hand.

Inches away from it was his wristwatch, busily ticking.

It was eleven-twelve. Forty-eight minutes to go!

"At my feet, *señor,*" Amador said.

Bill tossed the quipu to the rug at the Bolivian's feet. In the next split second, two things happened simultaneously. The lights went out, and Joanna cried: "Jump him, Bill!"

He heard Joanna drop to the floor behind him. He dropped and sprang. He heard the knife hiss close over his head with a sound like tearing tissue paper, then the thud as it struck the door.

The next instant his fists found Amador. He struck him savagely, twice, felt him go limp, and heard him strike the floor.

"Lights," Bill said.

Joanna turned the lights on. The quipu lay where he had tossed it. Amador lay just beyond it, on his side, holding himself up on one rigidly extended arm. Blood was trickling from a corner of his mouth.

Joanna said, "Look, Mr. Amador." Her little automatic was in her hand.

Amador wiped the blood away with a

handkerchief, got up, carelessly dusted himself off, and smiled. Then he bowed.

"Mr. Lassiter—Miss Trowbridge. I acknowledge myself outwitted—but my warning remains in force."

"The fist," Bill snapped. And held out his hand.

Joanna cried, "Watch out!" But Amador produced no more knives. He took out the gold fist and Bill accepted it and placed it in the pocket with the quipu.

"*Señor*," Bill said, with an excellent imitation of the Bolivian's manner, "will you permit me to escort you to my front door? You're too dangerous to play with my little friends." He indicated the long, thin knife embedded in the hardwood door about three feet from the floor.

He grasped the handle and tried to pull it out, but the blade, with its razor edges, was too firmly embedded, so he left it sticking there.

He took the Bolivian by the arm, led him out of the room, down the stairs, and to the front door.

At the door, Amador smiled and bowed.

"I have had such a charming time at your little party, *señor*," he said, and left.

Bill turned from the door to find Joanna standing behind him, looking at her wristwatch.

"Eleven twenty-two!" she said, and looked at him with bright eyes.

"Joanna," Bill said, taking her arm, "you're the answer to every man's prayers. You're a wonder. The way you settled the Whipple gal, and the way you used your head up there just now—"

"Aren't you worried, Bill?"

"About him?"

"Yes."

"No."

"I am. You don't realize what a desperate man he is. What shall I do now?"

"Go back to the commissioner. And tell Homer to go to the study and wait outside the door. I may be wanting him for some important errands. It won't be long now, Joanna!"

He watched her as she went. Joanna had a beautiful back. It was slender and white and flawless. He wondered if there had ever been a girl to compare with her.

JOANNA vanished into the crowd. Then he saw another girl, almost as beautiful as Joanna, but golden blond. She stood in a doorway, and she was smiling at him. There was something in Ladorna's smile so malicious, so mysterious and yet so triumphant that he was startled.

Bill walked briskly into the billiard room and said to the pool players: "Gentlemen, I apologize for the delay."

"Have you got it?" John Grayson asked.

"I have."

"The fist and the quipu?"

"Yes. Will you come with me?"

He took them to the room that had so far proved to be the busiest that evening, in point of drama, of the fifty-six rooms which comprised his penthouse.

When they were in the room, he locked the door. He produced the quipu and the gold fist and said, "Well, gentlemen, we'll have to work fast. I've got to have that check within twenty-eight minutes. But there's one point, Mr. Grayson. It's obvious that there's a rather complex mathematical problem involved here. There won't be time to work it out completely before midnight. Will you be satisfied, for the time being, to have merely the explanation?"

Mr. Grayson said, "I have to be convinced, Bill."

Bill said to Fisher: "Bruce Orwood said it would take him two hours to translate the quipu. Can you do enough in twenty-eight minutes to satisfy Mr. Grayson?"

Fisher said, "Orwood must have intended to translate the knots and to compute the entire mathematical content. I'll merely translate the knots into numbers and do my computing later."

"Good!" Bill said.

He glanced at his watch. Mr. Grayson had taken out his checkbook and a fountain pen. His head engineer and the archæologist were seated on either side of a small table with the gold fist and the quipu between them.

Watching them, Bill lit a cigarette and began to walk up and down the room. The old feeling of desperation returned. He suddenly felt quite weak. He recalled that he had had no dinner. He paced the floor, smoking one cigarette after another, glancing at his watch from time to time, and keeping his eyes, the rest of the time, on the two men at work on the secret of the gold fist.

"Mirrors," the engineer said presently.

"And lenses," the archæologist added.

"They must have been quartz."

"They had to be quartz—"

THE engineer said to Bill, "You see, you've been laying too much stress on this quipu. The fist and the quipu are each worthless without the other, but the real secret lies in the diagram on this fist—these lines and markings. The quipu is merely a mathematical formula which must be applied to that diagram."

"Bill," Grayson said sternly, "what assurance have I that this fist has not been deciphered or copied previous to this evening? You realize, of course, that its value to me lies in my having exclusive rights to it."

Bill nodded. "No one's had a chance," he said. "Miss Trowbridge got the fist directly from the old man your head field man dickered with. It was stolen from her, but the man who stole it hid in a warehouse for the few hours he had it in his possession. I got it from him, and it hasn't left my possession since, except for a few minutes this evening."

"And the quipu?" Grayson asked.

"The same. Orwood destroyed his translation when he died. And there's only one man who's had the quipu in his possession for any length of time—a man named Amador. He just tried to kill me to get it back, which indicates that he hasn't learned anything of value from it yet."

"Good!" Grayson said. He looked almost as excited as Bill felt. He got up from the desk.

Bill looked from him to the two at the table. It was eighteen minutes to twelve. His throat felt burned out. His eyes itched. He couldn't stand this suspense much longer. As if from a great distance, he heard Mr. Grayson say, "Got it?"

"Yes!" the engineer cried in great excitement. "It'll take weeks to work out the details. These little straight and curved lines on the back of the fist are mirrors and lenses. The quipu gives in detail their mechanical arrangement. There's no question that it's a machine for concentrating the heat of the sun!"

"What!" Grayson roared.

The engineer was obviously trying to control his excitement. He said, "The short rippled line at the bottom means either molten glass or metal. Perhaps both. It would concentrate the heat of the sun to such a degree that you could generate steam or melt brass! Our civilization doesn't understand heat generation on such a scale! It will revolutionize industry! It's actually a new principle! It's the biggest thing I've ever heard of! It's worth billions, Grayson—*billions!*"

"Good God!" Grayson said.

Bill felt that he must sit down. His knees felt weak. This thing was even greater than he had hoped for!

Grayson bent over the table. "What's that for?"

The archæologist answered, "It's a copy of the markings on the fist. These figures are a complete translation of the knots of the quipu. When they're computed you'll have the entire formula to apply to this system of lenses."

"There must be no more copies," Mr. Grayson snapped. "The fist and the quipu are of no value to me if copies get into the hands of my competitors. These are perfect copies."

He wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. He started to speak, shook his head dazedly, cleared his throat and said to Bill: "I'll write that check."

BILL took a deep breath quickly and expelled it. He glanced at his wristwatch. It was a quarter to twelve. The room seemed to swim before his eyes.

The first person he thought about was Joanna.

He went to the door with a dazed air, unlocked it and opened it. Homer was standing outside.

Bill yelled, "We've won, Homer! Get McClurg and Ladorna quick."

Homer went down the stairs. He returned with Mike McClurg and Ladorna Whipple. Ladorna entered the study, still wearing that little malicious, mysterious smile. But it didn't worry Bill now. He'd settle something on her, he thought—a couple of hundred thousand.

Bill said, "Mike — Ladorna — it's still this side of midnight. You're the referee, Mike. Mr. Grayson is writing me a check for a hundred thousand dollars. According to the terms of my bet with Ladorna, I was to make fifty thousand dollars before midnight tonight, by my own wits, by my own efforts—"

"Under your own name," Ladorna murmured.

"I didn't take advantage of that," Bill said.

"Oh, we won't quibble about that. Did you do it honestly?" She smiled mysteriously at him. "We won't quibble about that, either. You're selling the gold fist and the quipu to John Grayson for a hundred thousand?"

"Yes."

"Good boy," Mike McClurg congratulated him. "I didn't suspect you had it in you, Bill."

Bill said, "Ladorna, is there any question in your mind that I've won this bet?"

She gave him her mysterious, slightly malicious smile. "But have you the check yet, Bill? You haven't earned the money until he hands you that check."

"We'll quickly attend to that," Mr. Grayson said, and held the slip of paper out to Bill.

But Ladorna Whipple said sharply, "Wait a minute. Just a minute, Mr. Grayson. If the gold fist and the quipu were to pass into someone else's possession at this instant, would you still pay Bill his hundred thousand?"

Grayson looked at her curiously. "No, of course not. Here you are, Bill."

He held out the check to Bill once more.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEATH TO ALL!

HOMER had gone back downstairs. The excitement was too much for him. He had been under an awful strain all day, and the happy knowledge that he was back on Bill's payroll called for a stiff drink. In fact, several stiff drinks. Homer never drank much, but he was going to drink now, and he was going to dance with Joanna. He had never met a girl who appealed to him as that slim, dark-eyed, lovely little creature did. He knew it was useless to entertain romantic ideas about Joanna, but he would at least have the fun of holding her in his arms while he danced with her.

The party, to judge from the sound of it, was still going strong, and it would probably go strong all night long.

He wished he were as tall and strong and good looking as Bill. He wished women would look at him the way they looked at Bill, as if he were something in a shop window that they would give their souls to own.

"But I'm not really homely," Homer thought. He stopped before a mirror to verify this and to straighten his tie.

He looked at the mirror. He stared at the mirror.

He had no face!

A sickening chill ran through Homer. He could see his neatly brushed and parted reddish-brown hair clearly. He could see his tie clearly. It was a little askew. He could see his coat and his vest and his shirt front. But where his face should have been was a blank.

He could not even see his eyes. All he could see was a pink oval blur.

Homer blinked his eyes and stared again. His face was still blank. Terrifying thoughts tripped through his brain. He knew what that blankness of countenance

had meant in other men he had seen today. He recalled the man who had been run down by the truck on Madison Avenue. He recalled the man who had dropped dead on the Fifth Avenue bus. He recalled that planeload of passengers at the Newark airport. He recalled the blank faces he had seen all evening.

Death! The threat of death! The fear of impending doom!

Yet he had neither the gold fist nor the quipu in his possession. His heart was fluttering wildly. Was he about to die of a heart attack?

He backed away from the mirror as if he had seen his own ghost staring over his shoulder. He ran on into the bar, where an even more shocking surprise awaited him.

Every face at which he looked was blank! Not a man, not a woman in the room had visible features!

Homer ran on into the large drawing room. The orchestra was playing "Anything Goes." Men and girls were whirling and dipping and walking. The stagline surged about, as staglines do. Yet every face in the room, as far as Homer was concerned, was blank.

He rushed out of the room and up the stairs. He stumbled and fell. He picked himself up and ran on. At the moment John Grayson was holding out his check to Bill for the second time, Homer burst into the study shouting, "Bill! Bill! Where are you?"

"Here, Homer," answered the mahogany blur above the wide shoulders of Homer's cousin.

"Bill!" Homer squeaked in his panic. "My face is blank! Your face is blank! All your faces are blank! Every face in the bar and on the dance floor was blank! Every one! What does it mean?"

Ladorna Whipple laughed.

THE telephone rang. John Grayson, who was nearest, picked up the instrument and said, a moment later, "For you, Bill." He still had the check in his hand.

Bill glanced at Ladorna. She was still smiling maliciously, and there was sparkling triumph in her eyes.

"Hello," Bill said.

"It is Ramon Amador again," that familiar, suave voice spoke into his ear. "Mr. Lassiter, I regret that you have forced me to use such measures as I am prepared to use. Yet I warned you adequately, not once, but a number of times. You are possibly not aware that the lives of every one of your guests and your servants are at this moment in the greatest jeopardy."

Bill sat down quickly.

The suave, chilling voice went on: "It is simply this, my friend. Either you will deliver the gold fist and the quipu at once to my emissary, or I will blow your penthouse into atoms."

He stopped. Bill said nothing. His mouth was suddenly too dry for speech. He knew Amador was not bluffing. The blankness of every face in the penthouse, as reported by Homer, was sufficient proof of that.

But the proposition made by the Bolivian was too preposterous, too fantastic for him to grasp quickly. He had, however, the presence of mind to cover the mouthpiece of the phone and whisper softly to Homer: "Go to another telephone quick, and have the switchboard girl trace this call. Then send Sergeant Hopper up here!"

The voice went on urbanely: "There is nothing you can do, Mr. Lassiter, but accede to my wishes. This telephone line over which we are talking is the only line remaining open on your switchboard. It will be severed in a moment. Every exit from your penthouse is guarded by one of my men with instructions to shoot to kill anyone but my emissary."

Bill exploded: "This is going pretty far, Amador. You wouldn't kill all these innocent—"

"Mr. Lassiter, I do not doubt it will be unnecessary for me to kill all your innocent guests. Because, Mr. Lassiter, it seems to me that you have no choice in the matter. I never bluff, Mr. Lassiter. I give you two minutes to make up your

mind. I give you another minute to give the fist and the quipu to my emissary and to go into your garden with a flashlight and blink it on and off three times. I will consider that a signal of your willingness to fall in with my plans. If anyone attempts to call for help, if you attempt in any way to defy me, I will blow up your penthouse and kill not only you but all your servants and your guests. Three minutes, Mr. Lassiter! This line is now severed!"

BILL heard the click as the line went dead. He glanced at his wristwatch. Ten minutes of twelve! In the space of eight or ten seconds, Bill Lassiter probably did more thinking than he had ever done in a like interval in his life. He knew that Ramon Amador was not bluffing. He wondered about the exits. He wondered where the bombs were planted, and how they had been planted, and how Amador planned to set them off without killing his own men stationed at those exits.

But there was no time to ponder such mechanical details. Time only to decide and act.

As he hung the telephone in its cradle, he turned and met Ladorna's malicious and mysterious smile, but it no longer mystified him.

"I am the emissary," she said calmly. And laughed. "Two minutes to think, Bill. Think fast!"

Bill went to the table where the gold fist and the quipu lay. He briefly told those in the room the substance of his and Amador's conversation. There was an immediate outburst of protest. Forster and Fisher shouted that it was a bluff.

John Grayson said it was not a bluff. He said, "I warned you, Bill, about that South American gang. It looks to me as if you haven't anything to do but give in."

"One minute," Ladorna said sweetly.

"So you're in with him," Bill growled.

"Darling, I've been in with anybody who could possibly help me win this bet. You didn't have a chance to win, Bill. What I said a year ago still goes. You haven't got what it takes. You haven't got the stuff. You're a softie. You're a playboy. And I'm not sorry for you. I need that fifteen million. I need every penny of it."

Bill groaned. He picked up the gold fist and the quipu. He moaned, "Don't talk. Let me think. Let me think."

Shaking his head, and with shoulders slumped, he began to walk up and down the room.

Ladorna, watching him, laughed again. "Think fast, Bill! You've got three quarters of a minute!"

Bill went to the hall door. Everyone but Ladorna watched him with sympathy as he leaned, sagging, against the door. His shoulders heaved as if with a great sigh.

"Bill," Mr. Grayson said sharply, "stop crying over spilled milk. You did your best. You were licked by forces too strong for you. You can't jeopardize all these lives. Give in! Give her the fist and the quipu. It's too bad, but there is no other way."

With his back to the room, Bill slowly nodded his head.

"Yes," he said wearily, turning, "you're right, Mr. Grayson. They've licked me this time."

Homer returned. "Bill! Every damned line on the switchboard is dead!"

"Tell Withers to post a man at every exit and to let no one out but Miss Whipple."

"Are we licked, Bill?"

"It looks that way, Homer."

Bill gave the gold fist and the quipu to Ladorna. His face was flushed. She laughed at him. "Well, Bill," she said gayly, "did the best man win?"

"Yes," he said. "The best man did."

Ladorna looked at the solemn faces about her. "Good-by, gentlemen! It's been such a nice party. I'll be in your office first thing in the morning, Mr. McClurg, to have that estate transferred to my name. Bill, you will be out of here by noon tomorrow. Also, if you have any personal belongings on your yacht, get them off. The same for your Long Island

estate. It's all mine, now, Bill. Toodle-oo!"

SHE left. Bill followed her out the door. He went to his room for a flashlight, went downstairs and out to the parapet at the outer end of the garden. Beyond were a myriad of lights—millions of lights. At any one of countless windows in any one of countless buildings, Amador might be watching for his signal.

Bill blinked the light three times, then returned to the drawing room. An uproar came from the bar. The orchestra was playing a rumba. Not one of these happy people would ever know, probably, how close he had come to death.

Bill went up the stairs and into the study. Sergeant Hopper, the police commissioner and Joanna had arrived there in his absence. The detective said, "Say, Mr. Lassiter, what's all this about blank faces and a bombing?"

Bill told him briefly. Mr. Grayson interrupted his explanation.

He said sadly, "Bill, I'll have to tear up this check. I hate to see you lose that bet. Quite as much, I hate seeing this opportunity slip out of our hands. I think we could have made millions—perhaps billions. But these drawings are no good to us now."

"Don't destroy them," Bill said hastily.

"But they're no good now, Bill. With the fist and the quipu in Amador's possession, this engineering principle is of no monetary value to me."

Joanna came and linked her arm through Bill's. Her eyes were misty with tears. She whispered, "Bill, it's all wrong. You put up such a grand fight. What are we going to do?"

"Wait a minute," Bill said. "Homer, how about the faces? Are they still blank?"

"Yes, Bill. The same as before."

Perhaps a minute passed. Then Homer said, "They're clearing! Miss Trowbridge, I can see your eyes! Bill, I can see your nose! They're suddenly clear!"

The telephone rang, and Bill answered it. The switchboard girl said, "Mr. Lassiter, the trunk lines are all working again."

Bill hung up and turned to John Grayson. He looked at his watch. It was three minutes to twelve. "Now," he said, "you can give me that check, Mr. Grayson, in exchange for—this!"

He took from his pocket a blue knotted cord and held it out.

"My God!" Grayson cried. "What's that?"

Joanna uttered a faint shriek.

"This," Bill said, "is the key string of the quipu."

"Bill!" Joanna cried.

"And," Bill continued, "with this missing, the quipu is utterly worthless to Amador. But these diagrams are just as good to us as the fist and the quipu. Do I get the check?"

"You certainly do!" Grayson barked. "Congratulations! How in hell did you do it?"

Bill nodded toward the door. "When I leaned there with my back to the lovely Miss Whipple, I cut the string from the quipu on the edge of Amador's knife, which is sticking in the door." He took the check which Grayson held out to him for the third time. "Now, Mike, do I win that bet?"

MIKE McCLURG held up his watch. It was one minute before midnight.

"You certainly do, Bill. And congratulations!"

The phone rang again. Homer, who was nearest, answered it. He said, "What!" sharply. Then, "No kidding! Well, for—Dying?"

He put the telephone down and looked dazedly about the room. He moistened his lips.

Sergeant Hopper said, with sudden impatience, "Say! I'm sick of all this. Mr. Lassiter, you're coming along now. You've got a whole lot of explaining to do."

"Wait a minute," Homer said thickly. "Bill! That was Victor Chine. He was telephoning from his suite in the Chelswick Arms. He was in a dithering rage. He says

he's going to kill you for double crossing him! He says Ladorna just shot Amador. He—he attacked her with a knife for bringing the quipu to him with the most important string on it gone! He says Amador is dying!"

"Sergeant," Bill said quietly, "the man you want—the man who killed Bruce Orwood—is dying in Victor Chine's suite at the Chelswick Arms. That's just across the street. I'd better warn you that Victor Chine is little better than insane. You'd better call for help."

Sergeant Hopper hastily left the room.

Bill took Joanna's arm. "Gentlemen," he said from the doorway, "we will meet you in the bar in approximately one hour. Although it may be two or three hours."

He took Joanna downstairs, and across the dance floor and out into the garden. The night was a little less misty, but the fragrance of roses in bloom still lay sweetly in the air.

They sat down on the bench. "There are a lot of things I'm going to do," Bill said. "I'm going to put on a great big party for one hundred kids who are sort of interested in me. I'm going to see to it that Ladorna has the best legal counsel in America to defend her if Amador dies. I'm going to settle a couple of hundred thousand dollars on her, because she's had such tough luck tonight. And I'm going to arrange for the old hermit in Lima who gave you the fist to have five thousand a year for the rest of his life."

Sitting close beside him, Joanna looked up into his dark face.

"But what," she asked, "are you going to do first, Bill?"

THE END

A Strange Ethiopian Feast

NOTHING is so dear to the Ethiopian heart as a feast consisting of raw meat. Once a year, in celebration of his coronation, it is customary for the Emperor Haile Selassie to provide a raw meat banquet for his people. It is truly Ethiopia's feast of feasts.

The repast is held in the open and every citizen of Ethiopia is welcome to participate without the formality of an invitation. The emperor, who bears the imposing array of titles of King of Kings of Ethiopia, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Elect of God and Light of the World, supervises the banquet personally. He rides in state from his palace to the banquet field in a golden coach formerly owned by the ex-Kaiser of Germany, preceded by hundreds of white-robed priests of the Coptic church, bearing candles and incense and chanting the Ethiopian ritual in the ancient Amharic tongue.

On arriving at the feast, the emperor throws aside his royal dignity for the duration of the festivities and mingles with his people as a common layman, passing among the many tables piled with huge dishes of raw meat to see that all persons are provided for. In the evening, following this strange banquet, the emperor gives his subjects a display of American fireworks as a climax to the affair.

—*Gerald FitzGerald.*

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

WHO'S right?—Dennis Lawton or

H. FORD

As an old subscriber, etc., allow me to congratulate you on some of your stories published lately, such as "Lysander of Chios," the *Tizzo* tales, and many others, even some of the *Bellow Bills*. But, dear sir, "The Blackbirds Sing," by Dennis Lawton—please cut that off before I go mad. You have allowed some of your authors plenty of license and liberty; but Ye Gods, Mr. Lawton—having the blackbirders taking natives to Sidney (should be spelled Sydney, too) to work on "Australian cotton fields" in the late 19th century, there to be driven with *whips!* Mr. Lawton's seamanship, too! Good Lord!— At least he might have gone to a library and studied a little of the early days of blackbirding, as well as some Australian history and the history of Australian agriculture.

Give us some real sea stuff, and not these superman stories, where the hero, with his trusty hands and lusty voice, defeats hordes of natives and whole ships' crews!

I am leaving shortly for another seven to nine months' cruise of the South Seas. I expect to be able to get the copies of ARGOSY which I shall miss thus in Sydney, Australia. Perhaps some of your writers would like to make the trip. Some of them certainly need it! We have a four-masted schooner equipped with a 150 h. p. engine. We'll be leaving late in the autumn, and if anyone is interested, he can write to the Jensen Expedition Headquarters, 3281 Lakeshore Ave., Oakland, Calif. (care of Dr. Bernard Jensen).

Forgive the way this is written. I'm scribbling it off on ship's time, atop a barrel, while the Old Man is ashore for a few minutes.

Oakland, Calif.

ARGOSY a boon to young globe-trotters like

HARTLEY de GERALD

I am writing to you not so much for the purpose of winning a subscription as to express the satisfaction I get out of ARGOSY each week. My Dad tells me that if I showed as much interest in my school work as I do in ARGOSY I would be one of the star pupils. I have noticed, however, that Dad reads it every time he has a chance.

The stories I like best are those which take place in British Guiana or in the South Seas; or stories about the so-called frozen north. The reason for that is probably the fact that I happen to have been fortunate enough to see those places during my travels a few years ago. You may be surprised to know that when Colonel Lindbergh flew to Japan across the Arctic, I met him

VOTES FOR 1935 ARGOSY COVERS

DO you want an original black and white drawing, an illustration like those which appear on the inside pages of the magazine? Save ten *consecutive* coupons like the one attached, fill them in with the date (or description) of the ARGOSY cover which you have liked best, and mail the coupons to The EDITOR, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City. The artist will present you with a drawing. You may divide your votes among several covers, in any way you choose, or even cast all ten votes for a single cover. But the ten coupons must be *consecutive*.

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at Aklavik, a trading post at the mouth of the Mackenzie River, and was permitted to take a few photos of him.

If you ever happen to find yourself on the Island of Bau, in the Fiji group, South Seas, present my best wishes to Ratu Popi, the Fijian king, who extended to me his hospitality during part of my stay there. He will remember a thirteen-year-old boy whom the queen tried to teach a few words of the native language. That happened about three years ago.

Stories of the French Foreign Legion are always interesting. *Hazeltine,* too, is unusually clever.

Chicago, Ill.

Looking Ahead!

CLARIONS OF YOUTH

Morart couldn't seem to fit into the French Foreign Legion—and how many men ever can fit in completely? He had his own grim reason for joining, and he had sworn that nobody would ever find out what that reason was. A vivid, movingly human novelette about one of the most colorful fighting forces in the world, by

GEORGES SURDEZ

HALF-MILLION MURDER

Presenting Major Tom Eagle in his first long story.—And who could be better suited to the relentless tracking down of murderers than a D. A. in whose blood are all the instincts of a Cherokee Indian, and whose brilliant mind is educated and trained to a higher degree than the minds of many of his white brothers?—An impressive new detective creation by

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

THE BOY

A Western father metes out stern justice to a son who had never lived like a man. A remarkable short story by

MURRAY LEINSTER

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—SEPTEMBER 28

WHO'D BELIEVE I WAS SKINNY AND LONELY A FEW WEEKS AGO

Thousands Are Quickly Gaining 5 to 15 lbs. This New Easy Way

DON'T think you're "born" to be skinny and friendless. Thousands with this new treatment have gained normally husky pounds—*in just a few weeks!*

Doctors now say the real reason why great numbers of people can't seem to gain an ounce is they fail to get enough health-building Vitamin B and iron in their daily food. But now with this new discovery which combines these two vital elements in little concentrated tablets, hosts of people have put on pounds of firm flesh—*in a very short time.*

Besides, thousands have also gained a naturally clear complexion, freedom from indigestion and constipation, new pep.

7 times more powerful

This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is made from specially cultured *ale yeast* imported from Europe, which is the richest known source of Vitamin B. By a new process this yeast is concentrated 7 times—*made 7 times more powerful.* Then it is *ironized* with 3 kinds of strengthening iron.

If you, too, are one of the many who simply need Vitamin B and iron to build them up, get these new Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist at once. Day after day, as you take them, watch skinny limbs and flat chest round out to normal attractiveness. Skin clears to natural beauty, new health comes — you're an entirely new person.

Results guaranteed

No matter how skinny and rundown you may be from lack of enough Vitamin B and iron, this marvelous new Ironized Yeast should build you up in a few short weeks as it has thousands. If not delighted with results of very first package, money back instantly.

Only don't be deceived by the many cheaply prepared "Yeast and Iron" tablets sold in imitation of Ironized Yeast. These cheap imitations cannot possibly give the same results as the scientific Ironized Yeast formula. Be sure you get the genuine Ironized Yeast. Look for "IY" stamped on each tablet.

Special FREE offer!

To start you building up your health right away, we make this absolutely FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results guaranteed with the very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 379, Atlanta, Ga.

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