ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY — SEPTEMBER 22, 1928

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

SEPT. 22

PRICE 10¢ IN CANADA 15c

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by Ray Cummings

North Woods Adventure in

The Chinook

by Frank Richardson Pierce

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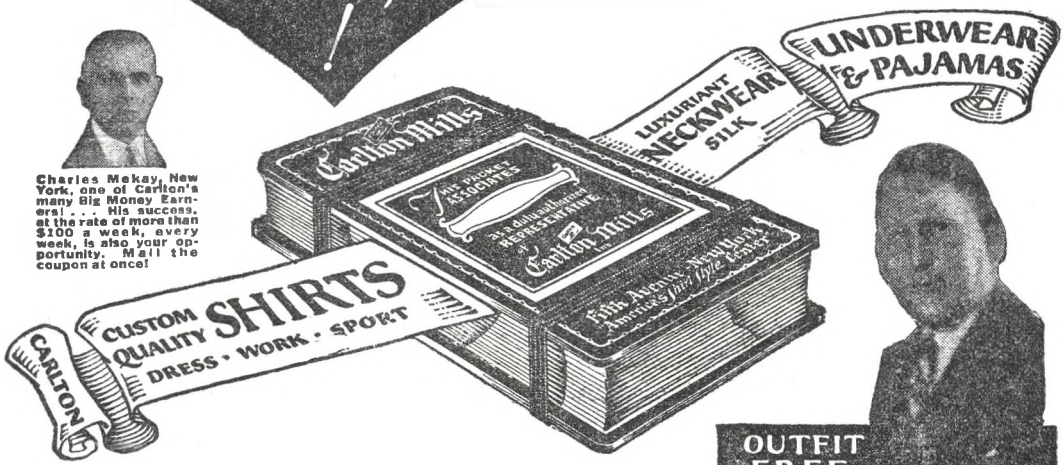

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C. E. Mandel Pres

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Address .....

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

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ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 198 CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 22, 1928 NUMBER 1

SERIALS

COMPLETE STORIES

OTHER FEATURES

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

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and
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ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 198 SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1928 NUMBER 1

"We're facing the greatest catastrophe in the history of the world!"

A Brand New World

A new planet in the solar system! And in its wake come mystery, danger—and a most amazing confusion

By RAY CUMMINGS

"There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." *Hamlet.*

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF THE WORLD.

THE new Star was first observed on the night of October 4, 1952, reported by the Clarkson Observatory, near London. A few hours later the observers at Washington saw it also; and still later, it was found and identified as unknown upon one of the photographic plates of the great refracting telescope of Flagstaff, Arizona. By observers at Table Mountain, Cape Town, and the observatory near Buenos Aires, it was not seen, for it was in the northern heavens.

The affair brought a brief mention in the Amalgamated Broadcasters' report the next day; and the newspapers

carried a few lines of it on their back pages. Nothing more.

I handled the item. My name is Peter Vanderstuyft. I was twenty-three years old, that autumn of 1952, a news-gatherer for the Amalgamated Broadcasters, attached to the New York City headquarters. The item meant nothing to me. It was the forerunner—the significant, tiny beginning—of the most terrible period of the history of our earth; but I did not know that. I tossed it over to Freddie Smith, who was with me in the office that night.

"Father's staff has found a new star—wonderful!"

But Freddie's freckled face did not answer my grin. For once his pale blue eyes were solemn. "Professor Vanderstuyft phoned me from Washington awhile ago—it's queer."

"What's queer?"

"Nothing."

"What's queer?" I demanded.

Then he grinned. "Nope. Your father says you'd sell your soul for a news item. When we've got anything important to tell the world—we'll tell you."

"Go wrap up an electric spark," I informed him.

He grinned again and went back to studying his interminable blue prints—his "thermodyne principle," as he called it, for a new heat-ray motor. Father was financing him for the patents and working model. Freddie was father's assistant in the Washington Observatory. But he was off duty now, in New York arranging for the manufacture of his model.

This was in October. I was tremendously busy. A sensational murder case developed, and I was sent out to Indiana to cover it. A woman had presumably murdered her husband and a couple of children, but it looked as though she were going to be acquitted.

She was a handsome woman, and a good talker. She was taking full advantage of the new law regarding free speech, and every night from the jail she was broadcasting little talks to the public.

October passed; and then November, and still I had not been able to get back to New York. Freddie occupied my rooms there, busy with his invention; father was at his post in Washington, and my sister Hulda was in Porto Rico, visiting our friends the Cains. Our plans—father's and mine—were to join the Cains and Hulda in Porto Rico for Christmas.

Father was leaving the Washington Observatory to assume charge of the Royal Dutch Astronomical Bureau, which had just completed an observatory in extreme Southern Chile, with the largest telescope in the world soon to be installed there. Freddie Smith was going with him as his assistant; and the A. B. Association had appointed me their representative, to live down there also.

None of these plans worked out, however. Christmas approached, and I was still engaged in Indiana with this accursed broadcasting murderess. And father wired me that he was too busy in Washington to leave.

During all these weeks there had been continual items in the news concerning the new star—issued by father's Washington staff, and by most of the observatories of the northern hemisphere. Father is a queer character; the Holland blood in us makes us phlegmatic, silent, and cautious—characteristics which apply more to father than to me. He is a true scientist, calmly judicial, unwilling to judge anything, or form any decisive opinion, without every possble fact before him.

Thus it was that during those weeks, neither Hulda in Porto Rico, nor myself had an intimation from father of the startling things he was learning. As he said finally, of what use to worry us until he was sure? Like the public in general, I became aware of condi-

tions gradually. A news item here and there—items growing more insistent as the weeks passed, but still all crowded aside to make room for the sensational murder trial.

I recall some of the items. The new Star was approaching the general region of our solar system with extraordinary velocity. A star of the fortieth magnitude. Then they said it was the thirtieth. Soon it was visible to the naked eye. I remember reading one account, not long after the star's discovery, in which its spectrum was reported to be sunlight! Our own solar spectrum! Reflected sunlight! This was no distant, gigantic, incandescent star blazing with its own light. It was not large and far away, but small and close. As small as our own earth, and already it was within the limits of our solar system. A dark globe, like our earth, or the moon, or Venus and Mars—dark and solid, shining only by reflected sunlight!

By mid-December, at a convention of astronomers held in London, the new world was named Xenephrene. Father went over in one of the mail planes and read his afterward famous paper, suggesting the name, and giving his calculation of the elements of the orbit of this new heavenly body. It was the most startling announcement which had yet been made, and for one newspaper edition it got on the first page. And I was ordered to give nine minutes of broadcasting time to it.

"Xenephrene" was a globe not quite, but very nearly as large as the earth. It had come whirling in like a comet from the star-filled regions of outer space; presumably like a comet to encircle our sun and then, with a hyperbolic orbit, to depart from us forever.

It had come visually into our northern heavens, and crossed the earth's orbit on the opposite side of the sun from us. It encircled the sun—this was in December—made its turn between the orbits of Mercury and Venus, and now was supposedly departing.

BUT according to father's calculation of its new orbital elements, it was not about to depart! Its orbit had become an ellipse—a very nearly circular ellipse similar to those of Venus and the earth! A new planet—a brand new world—had joined our little solar family! A world only a fraction smaller than Venus and the earth; larger than Mercury, larger than Mars. An interior planet, its orbit would be within that of the earth—between the earth and Venus.

On this date, December 20—so ran father's announcement — Xenephrene was proceeding in its elliptical orbit, and the earth was in advance of it. We could see Xenephrene in the sky now—any one could see it who cared to look. It was no more than thirty million miles from us now. A new morning and evening star, which at times would far outshine Venus.

See it indeed! Xenephrene, the magnificent! For weeks it had been visible throughout its erratic course as from the great unknown realms of outer space it swam into our ken. During October and November it had been visually too near the sun—and too far away as yet—to be much of a spectacle. But I saw it in early December—a morning star it was then—just before dawn, rising in the eastern sky. A glowing purple spot of light, blazing like a great sapphire in the pale gray-blue of the dawn.

Xenephrene, the new world! I stood gazing up at it, and a flood of romance surged over me. A new world, strange, mysterious, beautiful! I had occasion several times during those terrible, fearsome days which so soon were to come to all of us on earth, to recall my fleeting mood of romance at first sight of Xenephrene. Mysterious globe! Romantic! How well could I have added—sinister!

What the scientists were thinking

and doing during these weeks of December, 1952, and January, 1953, I did not know until later. Their fears —gropings—unceasing labor to verify their dawning suspicion of the truth—they withheld from the public. Until father's culminating discovery, which on February 10, 1953, he made public.

Christmas that winter was a depressing time for us all. I think, everywhere in the world, a sense of ominous depression was gradually spreading. A great catastrophe impending, even though unheralded, must inevitably cast its forerunning shadow. I know I felt depressed. Away from father and Hulda—alone out there in Indiana on my job, with father inexplicably too busy to let me join him.

Hulda's Christmas letter from Porto Rico was depressing:

> Miserable winter. Peter, it's positively cold. Imagine—we had it 54 degrees yesterday. In Porto Rico! Mrs. Cain says we wish you'd keep your icy blasts of the north to yourself.

Trying to be jocular, but Hulda, too, was depressed that Christmas. It was indeed a miserable winter. Extraordinarily cold, everywhere. For a week or two, the papers had been commenting upon it. Zero weather around New York and all out through Indiana to Chicago. A succession of gray, snowy days—gray afternoons with the twilight seeming to come in mid afternoon. And at nearly eight o'clock in the morning it was still the twilight of dawn. The newspapers commented on that, jocularly remarking that the weather man was making our winter days very short this year.

The weather, in truth, was so abnormal that it occasioned an increasing newspaper comment. Even by Christmas, Canada was enveloped by constant sub-zero temperatures, which occasionally swept down as far as Virginia with heavy snowfalls. Florida, in December, had its greatest freeze since 1888; damage to the fruit was enormous. In the West Indies, an unprecedented cool wave was experienced.

Everywhere in the north temperate zone was the same. And from South America we had the reverse reports. The summer in Rio and in Buenos Aires was unusually hot. Cape Town reported an abnormal spell; Australia and New Zealand were sweltering.

For every unexplained condition of annoyance something must be blamed. In the United States some enterprising feature man gathered the information that authorities considered the radio broadcasters were responsible for the bad weather. The World Press sent it out, and it was widely used.

Many persons—so it said—had addressed the Anglo-American Radio Commission and other governmental radio agencies stating that the myriads of ether waves—the "electric waves"—sent out by the broadcasting stations were the cause of the extreme weather conditions. The "ether" was disturbed, so it was claimed; who could say what dangerous floods, blizzards, torrid heat, wind storms, and icy blasts might not be caused if this radio condition were not checked? It was suggested that the world governments take action to restrict the output of broadcasters.

Newspaper jealousy of us, of course! It had been growing for years, ever since those early days when we first engaged in the audible dissemination of news. Our organization now was prompt in repudiation. The Amalgamated Broadcasters Association appealed immediately to the Federated World Weather Bureaus.

Within a week we were enabled to broadcast that the weather bureau physicists were emphatic in their declaration that the weather could not be blamed on radio waves. In order to affect the weather, radio would have to exert an influence on temperature, humidity or barometric pressure—which

emphatically it does not do. Even in radio laboratories where the waves are most intensely produced, there never has been any such recorded effect.

We also pointed out that in the past, freaks of weather were always complained of: the coldest day in the history of Washington, D. C., which this December of 1952 had almost but not quite equaled, was February 11th, 1899—which was long before there were any broadcasting stations.

Nor did any of this take into account the obvious fact that radio could scarcely be blamed for what seemed our abnormally short winter days. It was not fancy; it seemed an actual fact. And from the southern hemisphere reports gave reverse conditions. The days were growing unnaturally long; sunset and twilight extending abnormally far into the evening.

It occurred to me as strange that our A. B. A. never broadcasted a mention of this; that there was never any scientific, authoritative reports concerning it. Surely the scientists could determine with exactitude whether our sun were rising and setting at the times it should! They could. indeed! They could—and they were calculating it only too exactly! But, as I learned afterward, there was a world government censorship upon the whole subject.

THIS censorship was lifted on that memorable February 10, 1953, when father made his startling statement to the world.

On February 9th, my job in Indiana ended; the murderess was acquitted amid applause and public rejoicing. But the verdict only held a divided first-page place now with the planet Xenephrene. The new world had steadily been nearing the earth; it was now only twenty-odd million miles away—a magnificent, startling spectacle, a purple point of light blazing near the sun; with the naked eye it appeared twice the size of any star.

On the afternoon of February 9th, Freddie telephoned me from New York. I had never heard his voice so oddly solemn.

"Peter, your father wants you to come to Washington at once."

"What's up?" I demanded.

"Nothing. He wants to see you and me. You come to New York—join me here—leave to-day. Will you?"

"Yes," I agreed. "I'm through out here, fortunately."

"I'll wait for you, here at your place. I wouldn't try the planes, if I were you—not with storms like this—"

"No," I said. "Besides, they're jammed since the railroads are hung up."

"Wait your chance—come by train, it's—safer."

He was so oddly solemn! It wasn't like Freddie Smith to bother about safety—a dare-devil, if there ever was one. But he was right about the planes; the surest way to get to New York at the moment was to take it slowly.

For a week the whole northeastern United States had been locked in the grip of a blizzard. The railroads were hung up; the strain of traffic, and the fearful weather had been too much for the passenger planes. Every one was jammed; and several had failed to get through and were stalled in the storm along the way. But the railroads now were getting their tracks cleared; service was improving.

"I'll see you to-morrow," I told Freddie.

"Yes," he said. "I've got our accommodations on board the Congressional. Get here if you can."

I got through, and we took the Congressional Limited that February 10th for Washington. New York City was an almost unprecedented sight that dark-gray afternoon we left. A snow-bound Canadian city it might have been by its appearance. A heavy, silent fall of snow; thick, soft, pure-white flakes.

The north wind of the past few days had died away. The snow sifted almost vertically down between the

cañons of buildings. Without a wind, the afternoon seemed only moderately cold. Freddie and I passed a street thermometer at the corner where we had gone to join our taxi, which could not get into the cross-street. The temperature was five below zero.

Freddie caught my expression. He said, "This isn't New York cold. Can't you tell the difference? This is the cold of the north," still with that oddly solemn voice.

Our taxi with its clanking chains rumbled its way down Broadway and across Thirty-Fourth Street to the Pennsylvania Station. I had never seen Broadway like this. A white street, piled with soft, white snow which covered up its familiar configurations, buried its curbs, leveled street and pedestrian walks into one flat white surface. A strange Broadway; featureless, blankly expressionless, like a man's face without hair or eyebrows.

There was little traffic. Pedestrians in a crowd tramped the street's center. In the still cold the snow creaked and crunched under their tread. A few enterprising sleighs, brought down these past weeks from upstate, went by us loaded with people. The crowd was laughing, shouting.

At the shop windows, almost closed in by huge piles of snow left over from the storm of the week before, disconsolate proprietors gazed out from under the shadow of the overhead pedestrian levels. Three o'clock in the afternoon; the street lights were all winking on, turning the pure white of the snow a pale lurid green with their glare.

The crowd seemed taking it like a holiday, gay with shouts of laughter as it romped and shoved its way through the drifts. But there was no laughter within me. "The cold of the north," Freddie had said. It brought me a vague shudder.

"Look there." Freddie pointed to the second level at Forty-Second Street. At a department store entrance crowds were coming out and going in. A huge sign in moving electric lights gave the information that here Canadian winter equipment could be purchased. And as I gazed, a man in gaudy flannel costume of brilliant colors came from the store entrance. An advertisement, no doubt, He swung out to the pedestrian level on skis; poised, and came sliding gracefully down the incline to the main street level, amid shouts and applause from the crowd.

We humans adjust ourselves very quickly to new conditions. And, for all the pessimists to the contrary, the human instinct is to laugh . . . I saw a canvas sign over a small store, on a cross-street impassable at the moment with snowdrifts. It bore the ancient quip, *"Whether the weather be cold or hot, we've got to have weather, whether or not. Buy your Arctic overshoes here."*

New York City, that February 10th, thought it was all a good joke. . . .

FREDDIE and I had a compartment on the Congressional. We anticipated it would be nearly midnight by the time we got to Washington; Freddie flung himself moodily on the lounge as though he were prepared to sleep all the way, except when we might perhaps order in dinner.

Freddie at this time was twenty-seven. I had always liked him, though physically and temperamentally we were quite opposite types. I am typically Dutch, short and wide, heavy-set and stocky. But not fat. Built, as Freddie once told me, along the general lines of a young cart horse. And, as he has also remarked, I have the Dutch phlegmatic sparseness of speech, which in my case, he insists, often turns surly.

Freddie, not much taller than I, was slender almost to thinness. But wiry; I have wrestled with him, and he twists like an eel, with surprising strength. A sandy-haired, pale-blue-eyed, freckle-faced fellow, usually grinning, and with a swift, ready flow of speech.

His mind not only was alert, but

keen. Scientifically inclined; and an extremely good mathematician. He had made good at astronomical work from the start. As a clocker of delicate star-transits, in father's opinion he had no equal; and he could sit all day over tedious routine mathematics and never tire.

I eyed him now as he lay on the lounge in our train compartment. It was wholly abnormal for Freddie to be so morose.

"Whatever it is father's got to tell me," I commented, "it sits like lead on you, doesn't it?"

"Yes," he said abruptly. And he added, "He ordered me to say nothing, so I'm doing it."

I found father equally solemn. It was eleven o'clock when, after crossing the snow-filled Washington streets, we reached my home. Father greeted us at the door with what was a very sick attempt at a smile.

"Come in, boys. You're lucky to get here at all. Hello, Frederick. Brought your model? That's good—we'll look at it presently. . . . Hello, son—I understand you've been pampering a murderess."

In the study, when we had discarded our overclothes, his manner abruptly changed. We sat down, and he stood facing us, and then began restlessly pacing the little circular room, as though undecided how to begin telling me.

"Peter," he said at last, "you'll think it's queer that I've said nothing to you—my son—of this—this thing that is upon us now—this catastrophe to the world—"

My heart leaped. Yet it was hardly a surprise. Knowledge of it all had been coming to me little by little for weeks; fragments here and there, like the meaningless parts of a puzzle which now his words, adding nothing new, pieced together to make my premonitions a complete realization. He spoke swiftly, fronting me with his squared, heavy shoulders; his dark eyes holding me with his somber gaze.

"No use to worry you, son, or to frighten Hulda—you could be of no help—and we're all in it together—the whole world. . . . They've lifted the censorship. The time has come when it is best for everyone to know it—this inevitable thing. Peter, you can give it to your organization to-night, and to the world. The widest publicity—this statement from me and my organization—"

He stopped abruptly, seeming to realize the incoherence of his words, striving to master his emotions and tell me calmly. He seized a chair and sat facing me, smiling at Freddie; and he lighted a cigar.

But his fingers trembled. He was a man of sixty at this time; a squarely solid, commanding figure; a smooth-shaved face, square-jawed, dark, restless eyes, with gray-black, bushy brows and a shock of iron-gray hair. A crisp, forceful speaker. But he had not been so to-night. I had never seen him look so old, almost haggard. And the usual clear-white of his eyes was shot with blood.

I understood it as he talked; past weeks of anxiety, nights of sleepless observation at the telescope, watching Xenephrene, the new world; watching it come in to join our little solar family; observing by night—and all day busy with unending calculations of Xenephrene's changing orbit as it rounded the sun and took its place among us.

Watching. At first with interest, surprise, awe; then with a dawning fear. Then, his hurried conferences with other scientists. He had been three times to London, I now learned—and once, a consultation of astronomers was held at the Chan observatory, in Tibet.

And then, conferences of the scientists with the world governments, at which time the censorship was ordered. And father went back to his post, to observe and calculate the daily abnormal changes in our sunrise and

sunset. Until at last the truth could no longer be escaped. The future could be prognosticated to a mathematical certainty: the censorship must be lifted and the world told.

Father's voice, with its old dominating ring now, boomed at me.

"The world must be told, Peter. We cannot, dare not, hide it any longer. This new planet Xenephrene—I'll give you all the technical details; I have them here." He waved a sheaf of typewritten papers at me. "Your office can prepare it in any form you like. The coming of Xenephrene—its new bulk so near us—has disturbed, is now disturbing, our earth. You know it—everybody knows it instinctively, though they do not realize it or understand it."

"The weather—" I began; and my pounding heart seemed nearly smothering me.

"Yes—the w e a t h e r. And our queerly shortened winter days. All these abnormal conditions which have come upon us this winter. Xenephrene has affected us astronomically—in just one way. The inclination of the axis of our earth is altering! Do you know what that really means? Can you explain it to the public?"

"He can," Freddie burst out. "He will."

The axis of the earth! Our seasons —our winter and summer—our climate—our days and nights—changing, permanently changing? It seemed for an instant, nothing. And then it seemed a thought too amazing, too unnatural to encompass. The basic order of everything from time immemorial now to be changed? And as I listened to his swift, brusque words my head reeled with it.

The axis of our earth was slowly swinging so that eventually our South Pole would point directly to the sun and there become stabilized. This would occur on April 5 next. Our new seasons, our new astronomical year, would begin on that date.

"Can you realize what that will mean, Peter? When our South Pole points to the sun there will be a torrid zone in the southern hemisphere. The great Antarctic polar continent will blaze into a tropical glory. Patagonia, the Magellan Straits, Australia, the Federated Cape Provinces, far southern Chile and the Argentine—all in the blazing tropics. Six months of that, with days months long in which the sun never sets! Then swinging back to winter.

"The new temperate zone will be at our equator. Not very temperate. Snow and ice alternating with months of blazing heat. And all our northern hemisphere—it will have six months, beginning next April, of total darkness and frightful cold."

His voice rose to a grim power. "Ah, you're just beginning to realize what it will mean to us! New seasons, and new periods of day and night! Blazing noon at the South Pole! Dark, silent, congealed midnight in the north. Darkness like a cold black shroud over most of our northern hemisphere. Our greatest cities are here, Peter. London, New York, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, Peking—all from forty to fifty North Latitude. All will be buried for months in the darkness of arctic night!"

He laughed just a little wildly. "They think it is a joke now, this strange new winter which has descended upon us. They're beginning, in New York, to treat it like a Canadian winter carnival. Fun while it lasts, and then spring and summer will come soon again—because they always have before. But this time, Peter, spring and summer won't come soon again.

"The winter will grow colder. They have only seen its carnival aspect so far. But the cold of the north has fangs. It's a monster—a hideous monster whose congealing breath is death. It's lurking up there, ready to creep upon us. It's in Canada now—in north Asia, in northern Europe. You

don't know that because our government has been so carefully suppressing the news.

"They're laughing in New York because it gets dark so early in the afternoon. It's fun to tumble in the snow in the early afternoon twilight. But they won't laugh in another week or two. The blessed sunlight for New York is almost gone. Shorter days—still shorter—until soon there will be no day at all!

"Our huge cities here in the north, all buried in the snow and ice and darkness of a polar winter! The greatest catastrophe in the history of the world—we're facing it now! No power on earth can help us to escape it, for it's inevitable!"

CHAPTER II.

THE WHITE GIRL IN THE MOONLIGHT.

THE plantations of the Cains in Porto Rico lay back from the north coast, some thirty kilometers from San Juan. Bisected by the railroad and by the main auto road, they spread green and fragrant in the vivid sunlight. Rows of orange and grapefruit trees, stretching over the undulating sand, with pineapples between the rows of trees.

Here and there, thickets of banana trees, encouraged to grow and break the force of the trade wind from the sea; a tall spreading mango—a sapling perhaps back in the almost forgotten days when Spain ruled this island; clumps, occasionally, of giant coconuts rising on the low hillsides; trees with smooth brown trunks and feather-duster tops, the trunks all bent backward from the coast by the wind.

The main auto road, lined with its majestic royal palms, was oily black and sometimes very noisy; the railroad with its metal ties was a dark streak like a double pencil line amid the green of the trees. But the plantation crossroads were white ribbons of sand in the sunlight, and whiter still at night, under the white glory of the moon.

It was then—at night—that the magic romance of the tropics was to me always most poignant. At sundown the brisk trades were stilled. A quiet, brooding somnolence fell upon everything. The native shacks, palm-thatched, burned brown by the sun, turned darkly mysterious. Off beyond the distant coast, as it showed from the commanding height of the Cains' veranda, the sea at night was dimly purple under a gem-studded purple sky; and sometimes the moonbeams shimmered off there in the silent magic darkness. The scent of the orange blossoms hung heavy in the still air, exotic, stirring the fancy to a million half formed dreams that one may feel but never express.

Upon the highest knoll—an eminence of perhaps a hundred feet—stood the Cains' plantation house. A white road led up the slope to it. A broad, spreading frame bungalow, with a peaked tin roof, and a wide flat veranda around three of its sides, with coconut posts set at intervals. A bunch of bananas always hung there, ripening; a box, lying against the house wall, was filled with oranges at intervals by a native boy.

Beyond the house, at the edge of the knoll-top, a corral with open sides and a heavy palm-thatched roof housed the saddle and workhouses. The Cains' one concession to modernity—the garage, and a single small hangar for Dan's sport plane—stood well beyond the foot of the knoll. In the evening, lolling in the wicker chairs of the veranda, one could not see the garage, and if the traffic on the main motor road chanced to be dull, one might go back in fancy half a century, to when this magic land must have been at its best. It was still very beautiful. Sunlight and color and warmth.

But the blight, here as everywhere else in the northern hemisphere, was already at hand.

"To-morrow," said Dan, "we'll ride over to Arecibo. Want to, Hulda?"

"On horseback?"

"Yes," he said. "Of course. You don't think, knowing you as I do, I'd insult you with a car or a plane?"

Hulda can drive a car or handle a plane as well as any one. But for all our Dutch stolidity, there is a strain of romance in us. Hulda's greatest pleasure was riding astride the little Porto Rican horses; and though there seems nothing hotter on earth than a white sand road at noon in the cane fields, Hulda would always ride through them with delight.

"Good," she said, and laughed. "Señor Dan, that will please me much."

But her mocking laugh was forced, for this was February 10 of that fateful winter. An unknown fear lay upon Hulda, as on us all; and the cane fields on the way to Arecibo might have been hot other years, but they certainly were not hot now.

This evening, for instance, as Mr. and Mrs. Cain and their son Dan, and Hulda, sat in the living room of the bungalow, the shutters were all closed and a huge brazier of charcoal burned beside them for warmth. Already it had smoked up the ceiling; and Mr. Cain, despairing that the cool spell would soon moderate, promised his wife for the tenth time that he would get a stove from San Juan and rig it up all shipshape with a pipe—"Like in Vermont, eh, Ellen? Hulda, I'm going to radio your father to-morrow. This local weather bureau's too dumb to tell me anything. Your father ought to know—he's a scientist; they're supposed to know everything."

The Cains were what, a decade or so before, were called plain folks. New Englanders, Cain had made his money on a Vermont farm. Their only son Dan had grown to manhood; graduated from college with one of the new agricultural degrees; and partly because of Mrs. Cain's frail health they had taken Dan and established themselves in Porto Rico.

Dan now was the brains and the energy of the business. I had gone to school with Dan Cain. A big, rangy, husky six-footer, with crisp, curly brown hair, blue eyes and a laughing boyish sun-tanned face.

A handsome young giant, I should imagine any girl would love him at sight. Demure little Hulda—a brown sparrow of a girl—loved him, I felt certain, though nothing as yet had been said of any engagement between them. I rather hoped it would come to pass; and I think Dan's parents did also, for Hulda was very lovable.

LIFE often holds odd coincidences. At eleven o'clock, this night of February 10, I was in Washington with father and Freddie. What father was telling me I thought then the most important event of the world's welfare.

But at almost the same time, Hulda, in Porto Rico, was sitting in the living room with Dan Cain. And another event, wholly different in significance yet of equal importance to the world, was impending. The elder Cains had retired. Dan and Hulda, characteristic of them of late when alone, had fallen into sober discussion.

Dan was really perturbed over the weather. The temperature had gone far into the forties the night before. Florida citrus trees might stand that for a limited period, but it certainly was not good for Porto Rican trees. And the Florida citrus industry was wiped out this winter. It had snowed last week all over the peninsula; a fall of snow with a following freeze that had killed everything which the December freeze had spared. And now—into the forties in Porto Rico! Ten degrees lower would be freezing. If this kept on—

The sound of a pony thudding up the knoll at a gallop broke in upon Hulda

and Dan's gloomy reflections. They stared at each other.

"What could that be?" Dan was on his feet.

The pony came up to the front porch entrance, stopped, and on the wooden steps bare feet sounded. Dan flung open the door. The pale-blue vacuum light newly established in the Porto Rican rural districts was behind him; the doorway was a dark rectangle of brilliant stars and cold moonlight, and a rush of chill air swept in.

A peon was on the porch, dirty white trousers and white shirt, ghostly in the moonlight. He was barefooted and bareheaded. His little white pony stood at the foot of the steps in a lather of sweat, drooping and panting.

"Ramón!" Dan exclaimed. "What the devil! Come in here!"

It was one of the Cain's house boys. He came in, chattering, but not from the cold. His coffee-colored face had a green cast with its pallor. He was frightened almost beyond speech.

"What the devil!"

Dan shook the boy with annoyance. Hulda stood apart, staring, and a nameless fear was on her; an unreasoning shudder as though this thing—in its outward aspect the mere fright of a native boy, which probably meant nothing important—were something gruesome, horrible, unutterably frightening.

"Ramón—" Dan shook him again, and the boy suddenly poured out a flood of Spanish; broken, incoherent—Hulda could not understand it. She saw Dan's face grow grave, and then he laughed. But it struck Hulda then that the incredulous laugh had a note of fear in it.

"Ramón, *que dice?*" The boy understood English. Dan added, "Don't be a fool, Ramón! Tell me—"

Hulda gasped, "What—what is it, Dan?"

He swung on her, and as he saw her face, the solemn fear in her dark eyes, his laugh faded.

"Hulda, he says he was riding home from a fiesta over at the Rolf plantation in Factór. Coming back—you know the hills back there where the bat caves are—what we call our Eden tract? He saw something—a woman like a ghost, he says—a woman's figure that jumped—it's out there now!"

Ramón had shrunk against the wall, shuddering; the whites of his black eyes glistened in the blue glare of the vacuum tube.

"Ramón, you been drinking?"

"No! Oh, no—no, señor!"

"What—else, Dan?"

Hulda wanted to laugh. It was funny, taking seriously, paying attention to a native's devil story. Other years, an Americáno señor would laugh derisively at any peon who talked of a ghost he had seen in the moonlight. But not now; there was an uncanniness in the very air everywhere in the world this winter.

The boy was quieter. He told Dan more and Dan soberly translated it. A thing like a great round silver ball—big as a native shack—glistening with the moonlight on it as it lay in a coconut grove, a mile from the Cain's plantation house, near the hills where the bat caves are.

Ramón's pony had suddenly shied, and then Ramón had seen the gleaming white thing lying there. And then he had seen a figure—like the white figure of a woman or a girl—a white girl, with flowing white hair.

It was quite near him. Standing beside the sloping trunk of a big palm tree that grew on the hillside. Twenty feet away, perhaps, and ten feet higher than the trail along which he was riding.

Ramón was stiff with fear. His pony had halted; it stood with upraised head and pointing ears. It saw the white woman's motionless figure and suddenly raised its head with a long shuddering neigh of fear. The sound must have startled the white woman up there. Ramón saw her crouch; then she leaped from the hillside.

His pony bolted. And then he lashed it for home, fearing the thing was chasing him.

Dan was very solemn. "That doesn't sound like a ghost tale, Hulda. Ramón, saddle our ponies. Mine—*Parti-blanco*—and the señorita's. Not with the *aparejo*—with the man's saddle.

He glanced at Hulda, her trim figure in leather puttees and brown riding trousers; and her face was now almost as white as her white blouse.

"You want to ride astride, don't you, Hulda?"

She stammered, "You want to go out there—go and see—"

Ramón whimpered, "Señor, I'm afraid, here at the corral—if it followed after me—"

DAN strode to the porch. The broad spread of the plantations lay solemn and still under the cold white moon. The thatched roof of the corral was dark, with inky black shadows beside the building. The banana trees arching up over the house waved gently in the night breeze. Everything was sharply white and black. But there was no sign of any intruder, human or otherwise.

"I'll go with you to saddle the ponies, Ramón. We'll go—you want to go, Hulda?"

"Yes," she said. She felt at that moment too frightened to stay in the house without Dan, and thought of the elder Cains asleep in the adjoining room never occurred to either of them.

With sweaters donned against the midnight cold, they saddled the ponies and started.

Dan rode ahead, with Hulda almost beside him, and Ramón, his pony reluctant as himself, following after them. It was a brief ride, during which they hardly spoke. Down the knoll, past the silent garage; past the somnolent group of shacks of the plantation workers.

The road was narrow—white sand like a trail; coconut trees arched it in places, and beside it spread the tracts of fruit trees. It wound back toward a low-lying range of hills and up a steep declivity, where it turned stony from the rain water which daily washed down it.

Dan was flinging watchful glances around them. "Don't see anything yet, Hulda. Do you?" His voice was a cautious half whisper.

The sure-footed ponies picked their way carefully up the stony trail. They went through a little ravine and emerged into a small valley, a plateau almost flat on this higher land. Hills a hundred feet high fenced it in; its table-like surface of white sand was ruled off with the dark green lines of fruit trees. It was the Cain's two-hundred acre "Eden tract." It lay brooding and drowsy under the moon, without a sign of human movement.

Dan halted; Ramón's pony came beside him.

"Where were you when you saw it, Ramón?"

The boy gestured. He was trembling again. He held his pony forcibly from wheeling to run back. The other ponies seemed to sense the terror; they raised their heads; one whimpered; and they were all quivering. But Dan forced them slowly forward.

The trail skirted the hills to the left. Above it, halfway up a steep ascent, three black yawning mouths of the bat-caves showed. Hulda had often been in them with Dan; a guano deposit in them was used as fertilizer for the trees. Hulda saw them now, round and black, with the moonlight on the rocks beside them, fifty feet above the valley.

Ramón suddenly chattered: "There! You see it? *Ave Maria*—"

Off at the edge of the fruit trees, in the shadows of a clump of coconut palms, a great round thing gleamed. A silver sphere, like a white ball some twenty feet high, lying there. A broken ball! It was several hundred feet away,

but Hulda could see a black rift in it. A crack? A doorway!

She knew it then. Not with conscious reasoning, but she knew then what all this was to mean. A silver sphere lying there, with a black rift in it like a doorway. And a small black patch on its side—like a window!

"Hulda! Look!" Dan's hand went to her arm with a grip that both hurt and steadied her. The three ponies were standing with braced feet in the sand. Dan's flung up its head to neigh; but his fist thumped its head and stilled it.

And then Hulda saw the figure, as the native boy had seen it half an hour before. It was standing now near the trail, ahead of them; standing there between two orange trees; and just as Hulda saw it, the thing moved over, and stopped in the moonlight on the white trail, as though to bar their passage. It was not far ahead of them. Hulda could see it plainly. A white figure. But it did not shimmer; not ghostly—white only because of the moonlight on it. Uncanny, weird, yet not gruesome.

It was the figure of a girl; small, as small as Hulda. A slim, pink-white girl's body, with flowing draperies which in daylight might have been sky-blue. Long white hair flowing over pink shoulders.

Dan's grip on Hulda tightened; then he cast her off and his hand caught her bridle reins and held her pony firmly. Behind them Ramón and his pony were thudding away in a panic.

Dan breathed: "It—she sees us!"

The girl's arms went slowly up as though with a gesture. It seemed a gesture not menacing; a gesture of fear perhaps. Pale-white arms, of delicate human shape. They were bare, but as they slowly raised, the folds of the drapery clung to them.

Abruptly Dan called: "Hello, there—"

The figure did not move further. But the ponies were becoming unmanageable. Dan exclaimed hastily: "Dismount, Hulda! You'll be thrown off—I can hold them."

Hulda and Dan dismounted. But Dan could not hold the ponies. They jerked away from him. He and Hulda were left standing in the sand of the trail, gazing after the two terror-stricken little animals as they galloped away toward home.

Dan remembered later that there came to him then a fleeting wonderment. Why were these ponies so afraid of this white figure of a girl in the moonlight? From this distance there seemed nothing about the figure unduly to frighten an animal. The question was not answered until long afterward. But there were indeed things about this white shape which the ponies evidently saw and felt—things which were denied to Hulda's and Dan's human senses.

Hulda gasped: "Oh, they've gone!" She stood by Dan, clinging to him. The white figure in the road was gone also. But in a moment more they saw it again. Near to them now—not more than thirty feet away. It was standing off the trail among the fruit trees.

Dan murmured: "It's human, Hulda. Nothing to be afraid of—see, it's only a girl. You call to her."

Hulda's quavering voice floated out: "We see you. Who are you? We're friends."

The figure moved again; backward, floating or walking soundlessly but swiftly, as though with sudden fear.

"Come on," said Dan. He started briskly forward along the trail, with Hulda close after him. But within a dozen steps, he stopped. And then, to both Dan and Hulda came amazement, and the thrill of real fear.

The figure had been retreating. But the hill was close behind it. Suddenly it stopped; seemed to gather itself; to crouch; to spring. It left the ground, and came sailing up into the unobstructed moonlight above the orange

trees. Sailing up in an arc it passed almost directly over their heads and landed soundlessly in the road behind them!

As it passed overhead, outlined against the stars, they saw it more plainly. It seemed a girl of human form, cast in a fashion which might well have been called beautiful. She poised, not as though flying, but sailing. Face toward the ground, white hair waving behind her, arms outstretched, with the folds of her drapery robe opened fan-shape, fluttering like wings. There was a brief glimpse of her lower limbs, human of mold with the robe wound by the wind close around them.

A thing of beauty, had it not been so uncanny. She floated in a sailing arc as though almost weightless; and with a flip, dropped to the ground upright upon her feet. A fairy's leap! Soundless, graceful! Romantic, yet uncanny. A figure of enchantment from the dream of a child!

Dan tried to laugh. Fear seemed incongruous. As he and Hulda turned, the figure stood again in the trail facing them. And they could see it was a slim young girl, strangely beautiful, fearful as a fawn at their approach; yet she lingered, seeming—Dan wondered if his fancy were playing him tricks—desirous of conquering her fear and encountering them.

"Hulda—nothing to be afraid of. Don't move—you'll frighten her!"

They stood motionless. The white girl in the moonlight down the road took a step forward. They did not move. She came a little further. Paused. Then another step. Not floating. Walking—they could see the outlines of her limbs moving beneath the drapery.

And now they could see her face. Queer, strange of feature, yet in what way they could not have said. And certainly beautiful; gentle; anxious, and afraid. Youthful, a mere girl; and with those flowing waves of snow-white hair framing her face and falling thick over her pink-white shoulders.

She stood, twenty feet away. Dan and Hulda were almost holding their breaths. Dan murmured: "Speak to her again. Softly—don't frighten her!"

Hulda said gently: "Can you understand me? We're friends."

The strange girl stood birdlike, trembling. Hulda repeated: "We're friends—won't hurt you. Shall we come nearer? Who are you?"

There was a moment of silence. And then the girl spoke. A soft whisper of voice, ethereal as the fairy voice of a child's enchanted fancy; a wraith of sound, but it carried, and Hulda and Dan heard it plainly.

"*Zetta! Zetta! Zetta!*"

CHAPTER III.

THE CROWNING TERROR.

THERE was so much happening everywhere in the world during those fateful weeks that followed February 10, 1953—events so startling, amazing, so stupendous of import, and of such diversity that I scarce know how to recount them. Of necessity my mention of many must be brief; and my picture of the whole, I fear, will be at best incoherent.

Yet in that quality, at least, it will be a true picture; the world was incoherent, chaotic—everywhere a chaos of events unprecedented, uncontrollable. And in the chaos which swept Freddie and me away, the news from Dan Cain in Porto Rico, important though it was, at the time concerned us little.

Father was in constant communication with the Cains; and later, after father had gone to Miami when the Federal capital was moved there in flight from Washington, he went to Porto Rico.

The announcement that our world was to have such different days and

nights, and a climate so utterly changed, struck the public with horror.

It is not my purpose to try to detail or to picture it. The chaos everywhere; the paralyzation of industry throughout the northern hemisphere which so far had been proceeding by man's will against all the invading efforts of nature to wreck it; the panics that took place in all the northern cities —crowds of refugees struggling to get south; inadequate transportation; accidents; and a horrible crime-wave that swept unchecked over every one of the large population centers.

Human activities in our modern world are very widely diversified; more widely varied—and yet more intermingled, more interdependent—than any one realizes until there comes an upset from the normal.

There is, in these modern times, nothing that any one does which does not almost immediately affect what some one else is doing. Had the change come slowly, spread over a hundred, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand years as other great world changes have come and passed, conditions would have adjusted themselves. No one would even have noticed the change.

But this was happening in minutes where others had taken centuries. New York, London, Paris and all the cities of the north were doomed to six months of twilight and night and blighting cold. Snow now was upon land, millions of acres of land, where crops soon would have to be growing if millions of people were to have food. Yet now we know those millions of acres would for months be snow-buried.

Millions of homes soon would be without adequate heat or light; and the people without adequate clothing. Rivers upon which the great power plants depended were congealing into ice.

This for the north, with business, industry and nearly every human activity paralyzed by the sudden public horror. But in the south, from the Equator to the South Pole, lay the land of promise. Or at least the public thought so.

Life lay there; life and the promise of food and warmth and the blessed sunlight. For in the far Antarctic south, with the new light and heat coming, millions upon millions of acres of land would be springing into a new fertility to replace what the north had lost. But this, too, was a fallacy; for after a few months, the pendulum would swing back; the far south would go into night and cold.

Many hundred million people, suddenly giving up all their accustomed work in the world's activities and trying to move to another region! A migration greater than the sum total of all others in the world's history. In a hundred years of systematic, careful planning and execution it might have been accomplished without disaster. But now it was a panic, a chaos, a flight, with distracted governments trying to cope with it, impotent to bring even a semblance of order.

Our office of the Amalgamated Broadcasters was maintained in New York City until well along in February. With government affiliation, we broadcasted only what might be of help to the public: news of conditions, generally censored to allay too great a fear; advice as to what to do; information concerning transportation, and news from the south. In this work, Freddie now joined me. There were days—almost dark now except for a brief time before and after midday—when he and I were in our cold office, one or the other of us at the microphone throughout the twenty-four hours.

It was an office of incoherent men and disorganized service; without light, some of the time; with frozen and burst heating pipes and no one to repair them. We sat bundled in our overcoats, with snow piling against the windows.

News came of crowds surging in the dark, snow-piled streets; food giving out, with paralyzed transportation; news of raids by the public upon all the markets; news of people trampled to death hourly at every steamship dock, every bridge leading out of the city; uncontrollable crowds at the tunnels, the railroad and plane terminals.

State troopers vainly patrolled streets almost impassable by falling snow which now could not be cleared away; people froze in the cold with which they were not equipped to cope; crime was everywhere, with criminals, like ghouls, battening on the tragedy.

IN those terrible days there were few concerned with astronomy. Yet I recall that one of my orders was to detail—for such as might still be listening—a simple version of how, astronomically, all this was coming to pass.

"Perhaps," I broadcasted, "when we know the fundamentals of this change—the scientific reasons for it—the thing may hold less terror for us."

Useless words! Nothing could mitigate the terror!

"You all know in a general way," I went on, "the astronomical reasons for our alternating day and night—our succession of seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter. Yet if you follow me closely now, and picture what I tell you, the subject will be clearer to your mind, and you will understand the change which is now upon us. Some of you, our government has advised, should remain in the north and withstand the rigors of the new climate. New York City will not be abandoned! That is absurd! It is the sudden change, the upset to our normal routine, which has now caused suffering.

"When we are equipped for the new conditions, New York and other cities in its latitude will be perfectly habitable. We will have winter nights several months long, and an arctic cold. Then spring, and a summer with the sun giving us months of unending daylight. Those must be our productive months—we must grow food then, to supply the southern hemisphere, just as in the other months they must grow food down there for us.

"Do not be too hasty! We cannot all—every one on earth—rush at once to the Equator! Even there at times it will be too hot, and a twilight winter fairly cold. Cold enough, a month or two from now, to disorganize everything.

"It is your panic—your haste—which is our greatest danger. Be calm! Meet the conditions as they are. Help our government to maintain order, here in the north. The world's work must be done—the new conditions must be coped with sanely. We are not in desperate distress; only through panic can real disaster come!"

THESE were our broadcasted words of government appeal. And then I went on: "There is no need for panic. We want you to understand the astronomical reasons for our new climate. I want you to imagine yourself standing before your round, empty dining room table. Conceive that the room is dark and that you have placed, almost in the center of the table, a circular vacuum globe of yellow light. That represents the sun.

"Take now an orange, and through its center put a lead pencil. The orange is the earth. By holding in your fingers the ends of the lead pencil, you can rotate the orange. The lead-pencil then represents the axis of the earth.

"Can you picture yourself in your darkened dining room under these conditions? As you stand facing the round table with the light near its center, you hold the orange on its lead pencil to the right of you near the edge of the table. You hold the lead pencil vertical; its point, standing directly up to the ceiling would be then our North Pole; its eraser, pressed against the table edge, would be our South Pole.

"You will find now that the light from your 'sun' illuminates about half the orange—the half which faces toward the sun. The orange is lighted from the North Pole to the South Pole—on the sunward side. The other side is in shadow.

"Now, rotate the orange, holding the pencil exactly upright. You will see that the moving surface brings its shadowed side into the sunlight. This rotation gives us our alternating night and day.

"Still holding the pencil upright, begin now slowly carrying it with the orange around the edge of the table. That is the earth revolving in its orbit around the sun. You will realize, if you think of it a moment, that, *with the pencil held exactly vertical,* it makes no difference whether the orange is on one side of the table or the other. The sunlight on its surface is exactly the same in every position around the table. Under this condition, therefore, we would have uniformly alternating days and nights of equal length; and *no change of season.*

"You can see that the most intense light would always be at the equator, and the least intense, down to perpetual twilight, at the Poles. Thus it would always be midsummer at the equator, temperate to the north and south equally, and winter equally and always at both the Poles.

"But this, of course, was not our condition. The axis of our earth was not vertically upright, as I have asked you first to picture it. Conceive now that you hold the orange and pencil again to your right at the table edge. Instead now of having the pencil point directly upward, slant it off *to the right—away from the sun*—toward the edge of your ceiling where it joint the wall, for instance. To be more exact, you are to tilt it over until it is about one-quarter of the way to a horizontal position. Mathematically, this is twenty-three and a half degrees from the vertical.

"The top of the pencil—the North Pole—is now tilted away from the sun—the bottom is tilted toward the sun. You will realize now that the sunlit half of the orange is not from Pole to Pole. The light extends beyond and around the South Pole to the other side—and the light *does not reach the North Pole at all.*

"Rotate the orange with the pencil held at that tilted angle. There are points at and near the South Pole which do not leave the light; and points at and near the North Pole are always dark. That is our *normal* condition in December. In the northern hemisphere we call it winter; in the southern hemisphere they call it summer.

"Now move your orange around the edge of the table, halfway around until you are on the other side. If you have kept the pencil tilted at that same angle toward your ceiling corner, you will find now that its top is pointing *toward the sun.* All the conditions on the orange's surface are reversed. That is June; summer in the North, winter in the South.

"Those days are gone. We are now faced with an axis change—disastrous only because it is changing so quickly. And I want you to know just exactly what the change is. Conceive again your orange at the right hand of the table, with the pencil point tilted away from the sun at that twenty-three and one half degree angle. We were like that last December. But since then a new world has come into the solar system. Its coming has disturbed the old order of things with us. The eraser of that lead pencil—our South Pole—is moving up further toward the sun!

"Take the orange a short distance along the table edge, and tilt the pencil still further. That is where we are now, in February! Don't you realize that more of our southern hemisphere is now in the constant light, and more of the northern in the constant dark-

ness? And now, tilt the lead pencil further until it is horizontal to the table.

"The eraser—the South Pole—points directly to the sun! That is the position we will reach next April. Rotate the orange, holding the pencil level. You will see that the light remains on the southern half of the orange, and the northern half remains dark! On April 5, we will have no day and night!

"Six months later the earth will be halfway around its orbit. The axis will remain in that new fixed position. The reverse condition then will exist. Our North Pole will point to the sun! Light and heat in the North! Darkness and cold in the South! So do not be too hasty in trying to get away! These next few months will be bad, but after that we will learn how to weather them. We cannot all live on the equator! Stay where you are and help us fight it through!"

FUTILE words! But it was the panic of flight—the attempted rush of so many millions of people—the disorganization of all those myriad activities upon which life depends—which was our greatest danger.

Futile words! Impotent governments, themselves disingenuous, for they were all preparing for hasty flight to warmer, more equable regions! On February 22 the National Capital of the United States was moved from Washington, District of Columbia, to temporary housing in Miami, Florida. And even there, the great Florida city was disorganized, snow-covered, with very nearly zero temperature.

The deaths throughout the northern hemisphere that February of 1953 will never be counted. A million? Many millions—I would hesitate to guess.

There were some nine million people withiu the limits of Greater New York on Christmas. By mid February I suppose there were no more than a scant fifty thousand left—and these, most of them, were trying to get away. A dark, almost deserted, buried city—buried in a white shroud which mercifully hid its tragedy.

I caught one last glimpse of the sun—the one clear day; the sun at noon just creeping above the southern horizon and then plunging back. The Arctic night was on us.

I saw the roads between New York and Washington—the great highways for the through auto traffic. Refugees were trudging along them on foot, carrying lights in the darkness. Plunging through the snow; walking blindly southward when they could go no other way. Falling by the roadside; all the traffic lines were littered with frozen bodies, soon hidden by the snow.

We were not in Washington long; soon we were ordered to Miami. There was a gray twilight there, which, with the buildings arranged for temporary heating, were at least tolerable. And here we set up our headquarters. The first of March came. Father was in Porto Rico. I knew, by then, what strange things were transpiring there in the Cain's plantation house.

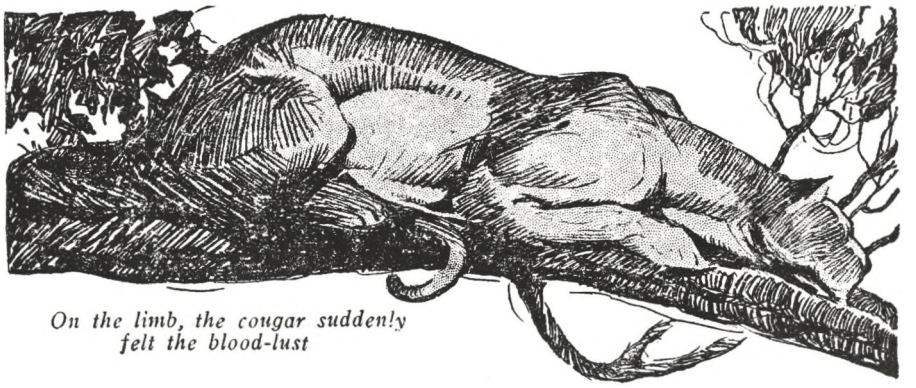
I knew, too, what the astronomers—gathered now at Quito, Ecuador as the best place in the Western world for twilight observation—had discovered.

Xenephrene was inhabited!

Father was convinced of it the day after that momentous February 10. But the news—and the news from the secluded little plantation house of the Cains—was withheld from the public. But on March 2, everything was disclosed. For our distracted world one culminating blow remained. As though all that had gone before were not enough, fate held one crowning terror.

On March 2 it was broadcast that a hostile race of people in human form had come from Xenephrene and landed on the earth! Invaders from this brand new world! Landed two days before, north of New York; and now were moving south upon the city!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



On the limb, the cougar suddenly felt the blood-lust

The Chinook

All's fair in love and a timber war, thought the powerful and unscrupulous Ludwig—but he badly underestimated young Dan Todd, of the Forest Service

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

A GOLDEN SLIPPER.

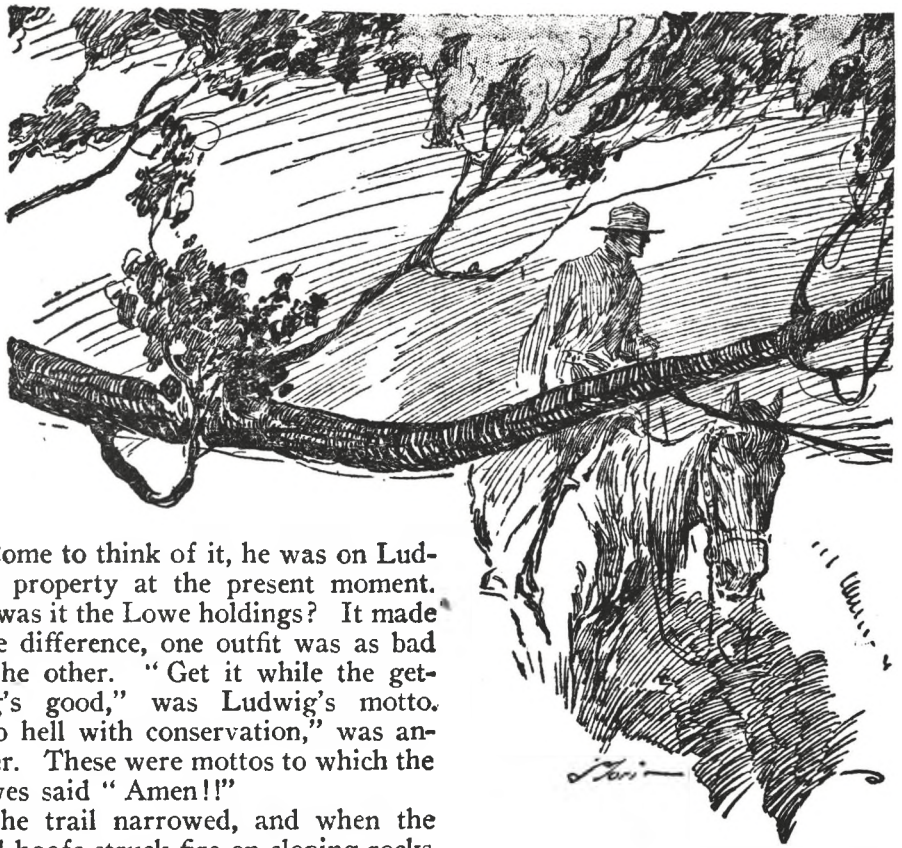
THE rain was falling in torrents. The moss and rot of the forest floor was like a sponge, into which the hoofs of the horse disappeared silently, but from which they emerged with a sucking sound. The rider sat humped up while water cascaded down the back of his yellow slicker and dripped from the stiff brim of his Forest Service hat. "Stay with it, Chinook, old hoss," the rider said cheerfully; "we'll soon be at Black Lake cabin!"

Chinook had already quickened his pace after the manner of horses knowing the day's labor was nearly done. This day's labor had extended far into the night. It was dark in the great fir and cedar forest even at midday, but now, at midnight, even Dan Todd's accustomed eyes saw little. He left progress entirely to his horse.

Once Chinook trembled and snorted. Todd knew they had just passed the draw through which cougars frequently descended from mountain to valley. This part of the trail ran along a timbered bench approximately halfway between the mountain tops and the blue waters of Puget Sound. Cougars dearly love horse flesh and horses know it.

This was but one of many thoughts running through Todd's mind. Other thoughts dwelled on the past with bitterness and on the future with hope.

They had warned him no Forest Service man could buck Sim Ludwig and remain in the service. Ludwig's influence was too far-reaching. The Service, proper, might be back of a man, but sooner or later he was removed. Todd had bucked Ludwig, and now he was on his way to some other occupation. Just what, he did not know. One thing was certain, he would no longer wear the uniform of the Forest Service.



Come to think of it, he was on Ludwig property at the present moment. Or was it the Lowe holdings? It made little difference, one outfit was as bad as the other. "Get it while the getting's good," was Ludwig's motto. "To hell with conservation," was another. These were mottos to which the Lowes said "Amen!!"

The trail narrowed, and when the shod hoofs struck fire on sloping rocks Todd dismounted. The trail followed a ledge for several rods, and a slip meant death. Dan led the way and Chinook followed. The man's feet, sensitive to the contour of the ground, could "feel" a trail in the dark, but here he used a flash light as a matter of precaution. As the light picked up objects ahead, a flash of gold struck his eyes and vanished.

"Now what!!" he exclaimed. "I saw gold as sure as—" The finger of light moved nervously back and forth, then came to a stop.

Todd reached down and picked up the last thing he expected to find on Flaming Falls Trail — a girl's golden slipper. It was a beautifully fashioned bit of footwear, and a pair might have cost anywhere from twenty-five to one hundred dollars. "Wonder who it belongs to?" he mused.

There was a streak of romance in Dan Todd that responded to the situation. Forester finds golden slipper; seeks girl who can wear the slipper; falls in love, marries and lives happily ever after. The old Cinderella story with a different setting. He dismissed the thought with a growl.

"Any girl that 'd wear a slipper like that couldn't mean a thing in the life of a scrub timber cruiser out of a job!" But he tucked the slipper away in his pocket, nevertheless. Ludwig's hunting lodge was located on Black Lake, a few rods from the Forest Service cabin, and it was known among the rangers that wild parties occasionally took place there. In fact more than one tired ranger had had a good night's sleep ruined.

He was recalling various stories when the sound of hurrying water

burst upon him. Todd had covered the distance between the ledge and the bridge in less time than he realized.

"No need of climbing aboard again, Chinook; might as well walk the rest of the way. Hello, here's a track in the mud, several of 'em. That girl was along here a few minutes ago, the water hasn't seeped into the heel holes yet. Now that's queer. She had one slipper on and the other off. Oh, well—probably they're all lit at the lodge and some girl lost a bet and had to run to the ledge and back; probably scared stiff, too, of cougars and bobcats."

Forty or fifty years previous a mighty cedar had fallen across the stream. Converting this into a bridge had been a mere matter of building an approach and hewing off the top of the trunk. The bridge was from three to four feet in width. A quarter of a mile beyond, the timber ended as abruptly as though cut with a scythe, as indeed it had—the scythe of the modern logger; electric logging engines, high leads and standard gauge railways.

HALF expecting to see the lodge ablaze with lights, Todd was surprised to find the entire clearing in utter darkness. Not so much as a flickering candle broke the gloom. Chinook sniffed at something off to the left, and the man, who was still afoot, pulled him back. "You're always getting curious over something; come on, it's raining harder than ever."

Obeying the woodsman's instinct to glance at all cabins he might pass during the day, Todd flashed the light on the lodge. The door stood open, the rain beating in. "Now that's queer. Ludwig's usually sober enough to close up the place when he leaves. I'll have to take a look at that." He did not stop, but continued on to the Forest Service cabin, snug, dry, fueled and well stocked with grub.

He pulled the pack off his horse, dropped it on the cabin floor, slapped the horse on the neck, signaling he could go to the shed, and then entered and built a fire. A click of hoof against stone was Dan's first warning Chinook had not gone to the shed, but was back-trailing.

He hurried out and whistled. The horse stopped, then continued.

"Best horse that ever leaped a log," the man growled, "but stubborn as they make 'em. Once he makes up his mind to investigate something you might as well let him do it. Now I've got to drag him out of the rain."

Flashing the light, Dan Todd trailed the horse to a point on the edge of the clearing. Chinook was sniffing—sniffing at something pink, lovely, and seemingly lifeless. In the half light it appeared to be the partly dressed body of a beautiful girl, but closer inspection disclosed the fact she was dressed in an evening frock of a delicate pink shade, and that her feet were bare and cut, her stockings in shreds. Dan remembered the golden slipper, then picked her up. She was cold, but it was not the chill of death.

She was not heavy for a man of his strength, even as a dead weight. Dan guessed she weighed a hundred and ten pounds, clothes and all. "And they wear so little clothes," he added, "you can hardly count them as weight."

Dan turned up the gasoline pressure lamp, hung a blanket over the stove, which by this time was red hot, then proceeded to remove the torn, sodden frock. It dropped to the floor, a crumpled, pitiful heap, that somehow reminded the man of the girl.

She seemed crushed and broken. Her face was beautiful, the rain had added to the curl of her light brown hair, her face held plenty of character of the sort that can be directed for either good or bad purpose, depending on the mode of life the owner wishes to follow. The ears were small, and of sufficient beauty to expose—so many are not.

He wrapped the blanket about her

and put the girl to bed. Then he piled on more blankets, filled up all of the empty bottles in the place with hot water, which he wrapped in towels and placed about her body and legs. Then, as an after thought, he wondered if there might not be a little whisky in the lodge. Stern measures were necessary if he were to ward off pneumonia.

She stirred uneasily and he delayed a moment. His hand dropping to his coat pocket, touched the slipper. He drew it out, examined it a moment, then reaching beneath the blankets, tried it on. If one made allowance for dampness, the slipper went on easily enough.

"Hers," he muttered; "guess I'd better find something before she gets in a bad way. Wonder what it's all about?"

In the excitement he had forgotten that it had been nearly twenty-four hours since he had rested. With flash light picking up the trail he legged it down to the lodge only to stop, as though transfixed. "Good God!" he exclaimed, and it was a prayer.

The body of a man in evening dress lay sprawled on the floor; a bullet hole in almost the exact center of his forehead. It needed but the briefest examination to determine that he was dead.

This was a case for the authorities and Dan did not step beyond the body. The flashlight picked up many objects of interest, however. The table had been set, a meal prepared for several people and partly eaten. The heavy odor of moonshine lingered; the room was still warm and there were footprints on the floor—small, incomplete footprints, somewhat damp, showing only the heel and the ball of the foot.

Again Dan took the golden slipper from his pocket and did a little comparing. "Made with this very slipper," was his verdict. "Now isn't that the deuce?"

Working his way along the wall so as not to disturb possible evidence, he picked up the telephone. A private wire ran from the lodge to town. The instrument was dead.

He closed the door and returned to the Forest Service cabin. The usual service wire connected the cabin with the outer world. It, likewise, was dead.

He glanced at the girl. Color had returned to her cheeks, but she was still unconscious. He caught up a portable instrument and flashlight and started down the trail. Twice he connected up only to find a dead wire, but the third attempt, some half mile from the cabin was successful.

"Hello," he cried, "this is Dan Todd at the Black Lake cabin. Connect me with the sheriff's office, please. Thanks!" Another delay, then a sleepy voice, very faint, inquired what was wanted.

"There has been a murder committed at Black Lake lodge," he shouted, "Ive left everything exactly as I found it and I'll stay here until some one shows up!"

"We can make it by sun-up with luck." The deputy was wide awake now!

Having performed this necessary duty Dan Todd trotted back up the trail again. By this time his patient should have recovered, he reasoned. And she had.

She was gone!

Suspecting kidnaping, or almost anything, in fact, he looked down on the floor for the wet footprints that everyone entering from without must leave. There were none but his own.

He looked about for a note or some clew as to her reason for leaving almost as soon as she regained consciousness. There was none. Todd's next move was to return to the lodge. He was prepared for anything now—the body missing, evidence destroyed. But nothing had been disturbed. The girl at least was intent on escape rather than destruction of evidence.

Somewhat belatedly he remembered Chinook had not been seen. He hur-

ried down to the shed that served as a stable. The stable was empty. "She's taken my horse!" he cried. "I wonder what else she got away with."

Checking up on the contents of his pack he noted the following articles missing. One pair of waterproof pants; a flannel shirt; socks, boots, slicker and hat. A pack he had noticed hanging on the wall was also gone, and with it a quantity of grub. He checked over the blankets and found two missing.

For several minutes he stood there, debating on his next course, then a slow grin spread over his face. "She'll be a sight for the gods. She's about five feet five, and I'm six feet three and she's wearing my clothes. Well, they're good clothes and will keep her dry, but she'll have a tough time walking in my boots."

CHAPTER II.

FLAMING FALLS.

DAWN was long in coming; the hours dragged and though Dan Todd nodded he did not sleep with the responsibility of guarding the lodge on his mind. He thought of the girl, too. Beautiful and determined. She might be one who enjoyed Sim Ludwig's wild lodge parties, but she did not look the type.

The romantic in his make-up again asserted itself and he found himself not only excusing her connection with the case, but actually defending her.

"There must be some way to explain it," he reasoned. "Still, the job was done with a small weapon—the sort a girl might carry. Oh, well, I'm not a law enforcement officer, so why should I worry. I've promised myself a long vacation in town with a trip to California and I'm going to take it. Then I'll come back and find something to do. I'd prefer some kind of a job that would worry Ludwig!"

It had stopped raining almost as suddenly as it started. The higher ridges, slopes and peaks were covered with a fresh fall of snow, but the lower levels were pouring cold, clear streams of water into the river that was now almost at the flood stage. The air held that wet freshness that only a rain-drenched forest can give. Dan breathed deeply and stepped outside.

The sun had just touched the topmost peak, changing it from white to pink. Dawn came leisurely in the lower levels and Dan's inspection was as leisurely. The empty shed reminded him of Chinook. The big black was certainly working overtime. He hoped the girl would go easy with him.

Again came the thought, "Who is she?"

His ponderings were broken in on suddenly. Half covered with mud lay a small automatic pistol. He picked the weapon up, washed off the mud which covered the butt and examined the clip. One cartridge had been discharged. There was the same imprint of the golden slipper in the mud near by, as if here she had paused to hurl the weapon away.

He experienced a strong desire to step on the imprint and destroy it. Almost in disgust he growled, "And why should I help some girl who probably went into the mess with her eyes open?"

The sheriff and his deputies arrived several minutes later after a hard ride during which both horses and a logging road-speeder had figured. The official was brief and to the point. Questions asked and answered, he opened the lodge door and looked around. "Any of you boys know him?"

"No," they answered.

He searched the dead man's pockets. "Robbery wasn't the motive. Plenty of money, watch and rings, too. Here's a card case. John Day Burke. I've heard of him, but can't place him."

"Connected with Ludwig, wasn't he?" a deputy suggested. "One of Ludwig's right-hand men. He usually has several around that'll take orders. Seems to me—"

But the sheriff was too busy studying the evidence. He did not voice his conclusions, but turning the matter over to the deputy coroner who had accompanied the posse, he directed his attention now at Dan Todd. "What did you find, if anything?"

"This!" He handed the automatic pistol to the official.

"Anything more?" Then, noticing just the slightest hesitation on Todd's part, he added, "Out with it. Don't keep anything back, Todd!"

"I'm not! I also found this!" He handed over the gold slipper.

"Where?"

"This side of the ledge in the mud!"

"That's the way she went, then," the sheriff announced.

"Don't be too sure of it, sheriff, Todd suggested, "I later found her unconscious in the rain; packed her to the cabin and put her to bed; went down the trail to telephone you and when I came back, a half hour later, she was gone. She took my horse, Chinook, with her, too!"

"Anything else?"

"Grub and clothes, blankets and pack!"

"All yours?"

"All except the grub and pack."

"Stick up your hand an I'll swear you in as a deputy—"

"But I don't want to be a deputy. I'm on my way to town, sheriff. This case—"

"Makes no difference what you want," the sheriff retorted. "As a member of the Forest Service you've probably sworn in many an unwilling man to fight fire; and properly so. Don't kick now, Todd!"

"I'm not kicking. I merely tried to avoid it. Now that I can't I'll go ahead and see the thing through. What do you want me to do?"

"You know the short cuts and trails better than any man in the posse. Clear out and head the girl off if you can. In the meantime we'll do what we can! Not wishing to speak ill of the dead, but from what I've heard of John Day Burke a pretty girl might well honestly plead self-defense."

THE short cuts Dan Todd knew were no place for a horse. Many of them were game trails, easy enough to follow, but cleared out to the size of a deer. He did not even take grub, except for a pocket filled with hardtack and cheese. "Taking a gun with you, aren't you?" the sheriff inquired.

"No. I wouldn't shoot a girl if I never brought her in," Dan answered.

Twice during the day he cut down to the main trail to see whether Chinook and his fair horse-thief had passed. They had! She was making good time despite the exhausted condition of the animal.

Dan slept in a shelter cabin that night and at dawn headed for Flaming Falls. At this point the trails forked and she might have taken any one of several. If she tackled the mountain pass, Dan could only wish her luck at this season of the year.

He worked down a ridge with the sun. Presently he stopped. Girl hunt or no girl hunt, here was a sight he never missed when in the vicinity. It was the sun striking Flaming Falls. The stream spilled over a ledge nearly a hundred feet high. The last mad rush of water was over a series of cascades so that when it leaped over the brink it was already lashed white. As the sun at certain angles changes a mountain peak to pink, gold and flame, so did the sun for a brief time each morning change the water to pink, deep red that suggested a flaming pillar.

He watched it, entranced as usual, and suddenly above the roar of water came the welcoming whinny of a horse. "Chinook!" he cried, and began to close in.

A new instinct the girl had developed since she was hunted warned her. She gave the surrounding brush and timber a quick, searching look, then,

seeing nothing, grew somewhat calmer. But her muscles remained tense. Somehow Dan was reminded of a doe poised for flight.

He stepped into the open, undetermined how to quiet her alarm, when she again looked up. She saw him and without an instant's hesitation leaped onto a log floating in the pool beyond the falls. A vigorous kick sent it into the current and beyond his reach.

Dan Todd's face grew deathly pale. He knew what she did not or, if she did, did not appreciate—the series of rapids four miles down. He prayed she wouldn't remain afloat that long, but would either go ashore or be spilled in safe water.

He ran to the bank and cupped his hands. "Don't do it!" he shouted. "The rapids! You'll be drowned! The rapids! Go ashore!"

She was crouching low, and if she heard him, which was doubtful, gave no sign. The jaw he had noticed as she lay unconscious on the bunk was set. She would see it through—regardless. He whistled sharply, and Chinook galloped to him. "You've done more than your share, old hoss, but you've got to do some more!"

Following a game trail, Dan galloped downstream at top speed. The horse could keep pace with the current in spite of frequent stops where the brush was thick, but it needed more than that to win. A short cut across a bend gave the necessary margin.

Dan glanced upstream. The girl was coming swiftly. He managed to get a log into the water and, with the aid of a long pole, shot out to intercept her. As she bounced by he drove his own pole to the bottom, vaulted and landed on the end of her log. With deft movements of his calked boots Dan steadied the log, then looked at the girl.

She was defiant. "If you come near me I'll jump," she threatened. "And—and—I don't care if I drown!" She presented an interesting picture in his oversized clothing.

"No," he said firmly, "you're not going to drown. I won't let you! If you jump overboard you'll merely be wet, cold, miserable, and—alive! There are rapids downstream that will tax the skill of the best white water man. I'm a poor one, incidentally. We go ashore here!" Narrowly watching the girl, he sent the log to within a few yards of shore. The remainder of the way was over a series of bowlders.

With a tired sigh she dropped to the sand, which at this point was dry, thanks to a brief period of sunshine. "What are you going to do with me, Mr. ——" She looked up at him questioningly.

"Mr. Daniel Todd!"

"Dan Todd? Huh! I've heard of you."

"Evidently nothing to my credit, Miss —" It was his turn to question.

"Miss Dorothy Lowe!"

"That explains everything," he grimly observed. "I've battled with you by proxy."

"Yes, and in the end you were whipped. I am familiar with the details of the case. By just what authority did you board my log and set me ashore?"

"By the authority of common sense," he answered. "But that probably isn't sufficient grounds for any Lowe, so I'll add, by the authority of a deputy sheriff arresting a fugitive from justice."

If he expected her to pale, he was disappointed. "I seem to be fated to have you interfere with my affairs. First, as a member of the Forest Service, you just about ruined an already wabbly logging and lumber business. Then, when I was in a fair way to die of exposure, you had to rescue me; almost undressed me in fact, and the next thing I knew I was wrapped in blankets, warm and alive. Good thing you left me a chance to escape.'

"My error," he admitted. "I

shouldn't have given you the chance. You are wrong in one respect. My actions did not interfere with your logging operations in the least. I merely enforced regulations for the common good during the fire season. On the side, it is true I worked toward conservation, but that is no crime. If your business is wabbly it is because of poor management and—crookedness."

She straightened up at that. "Wherein is the crookedness?"

"It is really none of my business," he answered, "and you won't thank me for telling you!"

"I insist. Of course if you are running true to form, as you doubtless are, and are merely talking because you love to hear your voice and the pearls of wisdom falling from your lips, then you have nothing of importance."

"If your brother would spend less time sporting around and more checking up on that guardian of yours, you'd know that poor timber is being cut and number one stuff left standing; that only about fifty per cent of your cedar logs ever reach market in your name; that—oh, what's the use of my talking?

"You've got too much chin and are too stubborn to listen to any one you dislike. Let's forget it. Why did you kill John Day Burke? You don't have to answer that question unless you wish. Anything you say may be used against you. I believe, substantially, that's the usual statement the arresting officer makes."

"Then you are not accustomed to making arrests?"

"No! I was forced into service because of my knowledge of the region. I'm on my way to California for a vacation I've been trying to take for five years."

"You've plenty of time for it now," she pointedly observed. "Well, what next?"

"You don't choose to answer my question about the murder."

"Don't use that word, it makes me shudder. Why did I kill him? There are times when it is necessary."

THAT was the Lowe of it, he decided. It had been necessary and that was sufficient. No regrets whatever. What a cool little customer she was. Nothing to admire, and yet— He softly cursed himself. "I was hoping you would deny it," he said.

"Why?"

"I don't know. God knows we have nothing in common. In environment, training and desires you are an ornament. I'm what some term an impractical fool with an ideal. That's beside the point, however, I've wanted to help you ever since I picked up a sodden, crushed figure and wrapped it in warm blankets." A trace of humor flashed into his eyes. "It's the mother instinct, I guess."

"Thank Heaven," she cried, "you've a sense of humor. Really I don't believe you are entirely hopeless." Immediately she grew serious. "I wonder just how strong you would go for me. I need help. Of course you are dumb, at times, Mr. Todd, but you are honest. Every one admits it. In a word, you are a man who means well!"

"No greater indictment can be returned," he retorted.

"I won't hang for the killing of Mr. Burke, but I am afraid I'll have to serve a prison term, if I'm not acquitted on the grounds of self-defense. Suppose I turn over my timber affairs to you. It can't lose much more than it is now losing; my brother is not practical, but I won't permit any one else to say it. At least," and her voice grew a trifle contemptuous, "you'll conserve my holdings. Will you accept?"

"But your guardian—"

"My guardian was John Day Burke. I became of age two days ago. I can, legally, appoint a manager if I see fit."

"I'll accept, providing I have a free

hand for one year. If I fail to show a profit it won't cost you a cent."

"I'm not asking for a profit. I'm asking to break even." She extended her hand. "If my offer is accepted, shake on it!"

They shook hands, then, by way of warning, she added: "Understand I am not in sympathy with your ideals, and as a type of manhood you make me sick, but it's a tough old world for those not watching their own affairs, and I am going to be where I can't." Half to herself she added, as though deriving strength and courage from the thought: "It's a sacrifice, but it's worth it."

A soft light came into her eyes, lingered and was gone, replaced by the businesslike harshness of a few moments before. "And so," she concluded as if she had not stopped, "I am picking the one honest man I know—impractical as he may be."

He stood up. "We may as well start back. You ride Chinook; I'll walk along behind."

"Why did you call him Chinook?"

"He's warm and friendly; a friend brought him to me from the South on a cold night. You know the legend of the Chinook Wind, it always comes at night, is warm and friendly—even though it does melt the snow and floods the lower country."

"Chinook," she mused, "warm, friendly, and it comes in the night when it is cold." By a quick intake of breath she hinted at the emotion aroused within her breast. "And Dan Todd, warm and friendly came in the night. And how cold I was."

CHAPTER III.

DAN TODD TESTIFIES.

A SMALL, wooden courthouse, a traveling judge elected by the district, a jury of grim citizens and a packed court room marked Dorothy Lowe's trial. The air was heavy with the odor of clothing in which men worked hard and perspired; the steam radiator clanked frequently and without cause; the prosecuting attorney did not relish his task, but stuck to it.

At no time had Dorothy Lowe been in jail. The charge, manslaughter, permitted bail. This had been immediately supplied by Sim Ludwig, whose timber holdings adjoined the Lowes. The best attorney in the State had been employed by the defense. He insisted on a plea of not guilty, and this in spite of the fact the girl had admitted to Dan Todd and others that she had shot in self defense.

While the Lowes and Ludwigs were cordially disliked because of unfairness toward their employees, the dead man's standing was such that sympathy swung toward the girl. John Day Burke's various deals had made him wealthy in money, poor in friends.

The girl had told her story briefly.

"Mr. Burke, the guardian of my brother and myself, invited us to a dinner at Mr. Ludwig's lodge. It was to be more or less formal and we were to receive a report of his administration of our affairs. There were angry words between all of us over certain items. He resented our doubts, and one thing led to another.

"My brother and I decided to leave. It was raining and we hurried to our car, which was parked on the skid road. He forgot something and started back. I was afraid the quarrel might be renewed and followed. In some manner I became lost and Mr. Todd found me. That is all."

"Miss Lowe, did you or did you not return to the cabin at any time after you left it?"

"I did not return at any time after we left," she answered.

"I will call Mr. Todd," the prosecuting attorney announced.

A few moments later Dan Todd was seated in the witness chair wishing he were dead. He had not heard the testi-

mony, but realized the importance of his evidence. "Tell the jury what you found."

Dan told of the golden slipper and the automatic pistol, of his horse finding the girl, and what followed. The prosecuting attorney grew tense. "Were there footprints near the body?"

"Yes."

"Small or large?"

Dan growled inwardly. Damn his persistence. "Small," he snapped.

"The footprints of a woman with a very small foot?"

"Yes."

"Damp footprints, as though she had just entered the building?"

"Yes."

"That is all, Mr. Todd, unless the counsel for the defense wishes to cross-examine you."

The defense was given an opportunity just then. From a seat behind the girl leaped a young man of twenty-one or two. His face was deathly white, his eyes were blazing like twin coals of fire. His voice was tense with emotion.

"Lies!" he snarled. "Todd lied! my sister lied! I killed Burke—self-defense. When Dorothy said she got lost she spoke the truth. I thought she was safe in the car. I shot him with the automatic pictol and tossed it into the brush. After that I don't remember what happened!"

The court room was silent. The court reporter's pencil, which had been flying over the pad, came to an expectant pause. He looked up, tense, ready to take down anything else.

It was not long in coming. The girl's emotion came to a violent outburst. "Bob! Bob!" she cried. "How I love you for that! But you're not going to take the blame on your shoulders for my crime!"

She whirled on the jury, silenced her attorney's protest with a gesture, and in a voice that was close to a sob said:

"It was Bob who missed the lodge; I found it. Burke had been thinking over some of our charges. He was afraid—mad at the thought of exposure. He did not realize what he was doing, but as he came toward me there was murder in his eyes.

"I shouted for Bob and the answer was the moaning of the wind in the timber, the patter of rain on the roof. I struck out with my fists; then as he caught my wrists and pinned my hands to my side I felt my little automatic pistol in my coat pocket. I jerked away and—then—" She sobbed. "Oh—I can't tell it, but—I'm guilty! I'm guilty!"

Bob Lowe roughly shoved his sister aside. He leveled a slim, well-kept finger at the jury. "Are you going to believe that? She's the finest sister in the world. I know you hate me because I've wasted my time, drank and been worthless, but—I'm man enough to take the blame for what I've done. I'm here, before you, pleading guilty!" He turned to the court. "Guilty, your honor; sentence me!"

The court looked down on Bob Lowe. "Be seated, young man. Your spirit is commendable, but it is your sister who is on trial. The trial will proceed."

The prosecuting attorney, quick to see his advantage, said: "The State rests!"

"The defense rests," the girl's attorney announced. The harm had been done and could not be undone. He was relying on the present emotional state of the jury for an acquittal.

The jury retired with the court's instructions ringing in its several ears.

DAN TODD approached Dorothy Lowe. "Get out of here!" Bob snarled, clenching his fists, "you testified against my sister."

"I told what I was asked to tell and no more," he retorted, looking at the girl. "I've come to offer my resignation in fairness to both of us."

"Why?" she inquired. A strange girl indeed, always doing the unexpected.

"I testified against you," he answered.

"You were under oath; you are honest. What else could you do? Go ahead and keep the camp and mill running. I'm satisfied."

"I'm not," Bob cut in. "We don't need him. Sim Ludwig will help us."

Ludwig nodded. "Always at your service, Dorothy. What you are paying him for I can do in fifteen minutes each day. I'll do it gratis, too, so that the timber country may be rid of such an obstructionist."

"Thank you, Mr. Ludwig. I'm bound by a year's agreement. Besides, you are taking it for granted I am acquitted."

"You will be in a short time," Dan said quietly.

Every one present looked sharply at the big forester. There was something in his tone to arouse interest. "Why?" the girl demanded frankly.

"Because neither the jury nor any one else believes you killed Burke. I don't. Never have!"

"But I did!" she cried, on the verge of a panic. "But I did!"

"No, you didn't," he insisted.

Bob Lowe stood up, threateningly. "You're saying what we all believe," he growled, "but you're annoying my sister, now get out!"

Dan bowed and withdrew. Denied his chance to resign, which was offered not through fear, but because he believed the girl would desire his resignation, Dan was now ready to fight it through to a finish.

And what a fight it would be! Bob Lowe was against him; so was Sim Ludwig who was always against anything and everybody interfering with his affairs. And Dorothy Lowe? In a way she was against him, but she desired an honest man in charge of her interests and to that extent she was for him. A month had passed since he had taken hold and the books were showing a profit. What was more, a hundred per cent of the cedar cut reached the Lowe booms in the bay. And that was something that had not happened for several years.

He wondered why he was doing it. It wasn't his fight, he was out of the service. Yet at heart he knew he would never be out of the Forest Service. His name might not be on the records, but in spirit he would always be fighting for green timber.

The situation was a challenge to any red-blooded man. A girl who was out of sympathy with his ideals, yet who employed him because he was honest and could show a profit; a powerful lumberman who knew how to crush opposition; a girl's brother who was openly hostile.

He had given her a way out, she had refused it, he was glad. His thoughts were broken by an abrupt rapping on the jury room door.

A bailiff answered. Several minutes elapsed and court was called to order. How the time drags, each minute an hour. There is so much senseless red tape. Why can't the jury foreman look down and tell the defendant to go home? But no! The foreman must hand the verdict to the clerk, who hands it to the judge, who reads it to himself and returns it to the clerk to read. Dorothy Lowe's soul was in her face as she waited. The clerk in a singsong voice read:

"We the undersigned jury find Dorothy Lowe not guilty."

A gasp of relief from the girl; a smile of sympathy from those in the court room, then the drawn look returned. "And that means," she whispered, "they'll look around for some one else to—try?"

"It means the case is closed," Ludwig assured her.

"Closed," added Dan Todd, "until evidence is produced as to the real criminal." With this, spoken almost defiantly, he walked from the room.

There was much to be done and he was for doing it while he had the chance.

CHAPTER IV.

"GET DAN TODD!"

THE finest thing that the wives of the loggers, sawmill men, and shingle-weavers ever said about Dorothy Lowe was her devotion to her brother. It, in their eyes, amounted to something beautiful. The girl's confidence that within Bob Lowe's shell dwelled a man was supreme. Privately they knew him to be an arrogant rotter with too much money and too much education. As for her, she was cold-blooded and a snob, but they loved each other. That made up for a lot.

There is always an inside story and it was whispered among the women that "there had been a wild party, Burke had become rough as was his custom; Bob had killed Burke and Dorothy had taken the blame, knowing public opinion was so strong against her brother that a jury would undoubtedly convict him."

They also discussed Dan Todd. He was popular among them; of them, in fact. "Only this morning my Bill says to me, says he: 'Helen, Dan Todd aims to keep the mill and camp going steady. But to do that he'll have to cut in on Sim Ludwig's business and that means war, so we may have work and we may not a month from now.' That was my Bill's very words." She sighed. "Oh, well, if we only get some of the back bills paid up I'll not complain!"

Helen's "Bill" had undoubtedly called the turn. Dan Todd had gone into the market and bid low on several big jobs before Ludwig realized what it was all about. His office manager was the first to present figures.

"And, sir, it came at a bad time. Todd's profit will be low, but he'll keep his crew together and that's what he wants. It means we'll have to shut down. The situation is just the reverse of what it was when Mr. Burke was managing things. Then it was their mill and camp that ran short time."

Ludwig glanced at the figures and frowned. An empire of timber was almost in his grasp three months previous, then the Lowe children had to celebrate their twenty-first birthday. Burke would listen to reason and thus enable Ludwig to dominate the market. What with his spruce and fir and the Lowe's cedar he could talk business with any of them—few such stands of timber left so close to tidewater.

He jammed on his hat and stalking down to the railroad track ordered out a speeder. A few minutes later he was chugging into the timber at a brisk rate. Slowing down and finally coming to a stop Ludwig hurried down a narrow path and stopped at a cabin almost hidden among the trees. A half mile away ran the Forest Service trail, following the line between the Ludwig and Lowe holdings. The occupant of the cabin was in a position to watch the trail and river.

Ludwig did not enter the cabin, but stood a safe distance away and yelled. On the porch, enjoying the sun, lay a full grown cougar. The cat seemed harmless enough, but Ludwig was taking no chances. Presently the door opened. A man bulking large and dark filled the doorway. Recognizing his visitor his attitude changed from sneering contempt to an almost fawning manner. He grinned, caught the cougar by a collar and dragged it to a cage. "Hello, Mr. Ludwig!"

"Hello, Yates! They're opening bids in Seattle next week for nearly five hundred thousand dollars' worth of cedar lumber. It's going to Japan. Have we got that much floating around Black Lake?"

"No." He grinned. "Give me time and I can get it."

"Don't be so sure. Have you considered Todd?"

"Sure!"

"Figure out some way of getting him, Yates. He's popular among the rabble so it 'll have to be done in a natural way. A fall over a cliff or—"

Yates shook his head. "They might find the tracks of the man that pushed him over. That's no way to get rid of a popular man. How much time have I got?"

"I don't want that cedar bid to go in," Ludwig answered, "you've got until next Tuesday night!"

Yates looked at the cougar. "Did you ever hear tell of a man walking along a trail and a hungry cougar dropped on him? No? Well, it's liable to happen any day if a cougar is hungry enough."

"I thought cougars were afraid of men?"

"I know of one that ain't."

THE whine of a saw eating its way into a log to the accompaniment of the "Pouf! Pouf! Pouf!" of the steam engine is sweet music to a lumberman. Steam was pluming up from the exhaust; the air being crisp it lingered. The dread expression in the men's eyes had gone, Dan Todd noticed. He rubbed his hands. "Lord, I wish it were mine!" he exclaimed.

"And if it were?"

The voice came directly behind him. He flushed and turned. "Good morning, Miss Lowe!"

"And if all this were yours?" she repeated. "What would you do with it?"

"Just as I am doing," he answered.

"And that is what I want you to do. The men seem contented."

"They are, but don't forget the women who have a heck of a time trying to make ends meet when work is not steady. I've told them if we can get the business we'll keep things going."

"And you a conservationist?" she suggested.

"Timber was made to cut," he replied. "My quarrel is with those who will do nothing toward reseeding the cut-over areas."

They watched a log move slowly down the pond as the boom man's pike pole forced it from the others. A steel conveyor moving under water, caught the end and started it upward. After that the timber knew no idle moment.

A man moved levers and a nigger with hands of steel picked it up and slammed it about as though it were a tooth pick. He was the head sawyer, who can make or break a lumberman when the margin of profits is narrow.

The log rushed forward and a whining band saw ate off a slab. Back it came again and the next slice was a board. Again and again it was repeated. Conveyors hurried the log, now lumber, away. Thus in six minutes' time a log that had taken six hundred years to grow was cut up.

The girl and man watched the process in silence. They had learned what many learn—that many are not as bad as they are painted. She had regarded him as an impractical dreamer, but honest. She needed honesty. In turn he had regarded her as a spoiled little snob, beautiful but dumb.

Time had proved each wrong. She turned impulsively to him. "Mr. Todd, I'm sorry for some of the things I said when we first met."

"All is forgiven," he said, smiling. "In turn I'm sorry for some of the things I thought, but did not express."

"Others are not so considerate," she said seriously.

"Meaning?"

"People in town! They sneer behind my back and I know what they are saying, 'Little killer!'"

"But you didn't kill him."

"I said I did. Do you doubt my word, Mr. Todd?"

"Yes, I do, but only in that matter. I've my own conclusions and I am working on the case. When I find the guilty party—"

"Please don't!" she pleaded.

"I can't do otherwise," he insisted. "In any event it will be self-defense and not difficult to prove."

Abruptly she changed the subject. "I was warned to-day not to bid on that Japanese contract. I was told it will be difficult to collect!"

"The terms are cash, f. o. b. ship's tackle. That means when the stuff is on the dock ready for the steamer we'll be paid. We can't lose. If we don't bid, this will have to stop."

With a wave of his hand he indicated the activity. In the distance a woman was hanging out a row of kiddie's clothing. They could not hear her, but she was singing. "And when this stops she'll be too busy worrying to sing."

"That is all I wanted to know. This is the first time in years this mill has showed a good profit and I can't understand it. Everything is running so nicely—"

"Which is warning for me to watch out. This smooth sailing is resented in certain quarters. That resentment will take form sooner or later. It has started already."

"Yes?"

"That warning against bidding. But I'm going ahead. My bid will be in by Tuesday night."

Bob Lowe sauntered into view. He had never forgiven Todd's testimony against his sister. "Came down to drive you home, sis," he announced, "ready?" He glanced briefly at the superintendent. "Hello, Todd!"

"Hello," Dan returned, as brief. He knew an enemy when he saw one.

Brother and sister walked down to the car together. "Ludwig wants to talk to you, Dorothy. Listen, as a combination our holdings would become a power in the West. Overhead would be less, profit more. I'm for listening to him."

"We're making a profit now, every one seems contented, and the hate, yes, Bob, that's the word, hate, that so many held for us has died down somewhat. We are regarded as people. I rather like it." She regarded him seriously. "I wish you'd go to work in the mill!"

"What, under Todd? Not in a thousand years. Kick Todd out, combine with Ludwig and I'll put on overalls and work my head off."

She turned to him quickly. "Will you?" she asked. "I'd do most anything if you would!"

"You've done a lot for me already."

"Yes," she said softly, her face paling, "I've done a lot."

"And I'd do as much for you. Will you consider a combine?"

"Yes, Bob, I will."

Later, when Ludwig helped the girl into his car, Bob Lowe smiled softly "They look great!" he cried. "There's a real combination. Damn that fellow Todd." He spoke now between set teeth. "He's influencing sis in some way. Damn him! She was never influenced before. Still, maybe after all she's stringing him along. Yes, that's it, she's stringing him along. When he's working for her he's not raising the deuce."

A GRAVEL road, trees on either side, whose tops met; glimpses of blue water and snow-capped peaks—Puget Sound after a winter's rain. The car moved leisurely. Ludwig finally spoke: "Bidding on the big job? If it's not a fair question, don't answer it. I try to be fair."

"I know you do, Sim! Yes, we are bidding. Is it wise?"

"Unless you go too low, then it's disaster. They're requiring a hundred thousand dollar bond to insure performance. Why not a combine? We could get a good price. Now it will be competition."

He eyed her narrowly, guessed her thoughts and continued. "It would be great for Bob. He's for it. The lad has the stuff if it's developed. I can do it. He's reached the turning point in his career. And, he's not happy with

Todd running things. Combine? Can't we make it more than a combine, Dorothy? I've loved you for two years now; ever since you returned from school—grown up."

He slipped his arm about her. "I love you, Dorothy," he repeated.

"I've always admired you," she answered, "but as to love—I'm afraid not, Sim."

"You are going to love me," he insisted, "together we're going to work for Bob's betterment. And then—you'll give me that chance."

"Yes, to help Bob. As to a combination, that requires thought. You must prove to me and to Dan Todd that it will be worth while."

He snorted in disgust. "That damn fool! I couldn't prove white was white to him. But if you want business statistics, I'll give them to you. If I can't show a larger margin of profit than he can I'll quit the lumber business and make him president of my company. Read this when you have time. Every cent made right here at the home mill."

He drove on to where the road turned off and a sign warned:

BEWARE—LOGGING TRUCKS!

Trucks bearing great logs were moving over a timber roadway, consisting of a sort of planked track, each a little wider than the wheel. It was cheaper than steel rails and a truck could go up steeper grades. "One way of lessening the overhead," he pointed out. There were others, too. No doubt of it, Sim Ludwig knew the lumber business. She was impressed, and he was satisfied with the day's drive when he dropped her off at home.

Dan Todd was waiting for her with a weekly report. She glanced at the figures, then, somewhat timidly, he thought, suggested the combination. He listened attentively. "Combinations are good or bad, depending on the parties. Did he give facts and figures?"

"Yes!" she handed him the report. He studied it with interest. "Better showing than I can make," he admitted. Presently he whistled. "Where'd he get all the cedar?"

"Off his land, I suppose. He has a nice stand of cedar on that flat!"

Todd changed the subject somewhat. "Before you combine there are some things you should know. In some respects Ludwig's cedar output reminds me of the widow's cruse of oil. Some day in the near future we'll look at the cruse. Understand, you are to do whatever you think best. I am always willing to step out, though you employed me for a year."

Again she left him with the impression he knew more than he was disclosing. Beyond doubt Ludwig and Todd were bitter enemies. Which should she believe, Ludwig the practical, whom she had known for years, or Todd the dreamer, commanding, handsome, as straight as a fir tree, whom she had known unfavorably by reputation for two years and personally for two months?

It was a question she alone must decide. And always in the background was the desire of her brother. They would do anything for each other and take the consequences. She decided to do nothing that day, but wait until she had had a good night's rest.

Dorothy did not fall asleep immediately. Various phases of the situation returned again and again to demand solution. What was the secret of Dan Todd's influence over her? Was she in love? Impossible. She had loved no man except her brother. Was it the instinctive sense of womankind that so often points the right course? Or what? Toward midnight she dropped off to sleep.

Down at the mill office Dan Todd was laboring over a bid blank. Over an item he paused. "Maybe I'd better have another look at the Lowe cedar before I go quite that close on logging costs! Can't afford to go into the hole.

Still I should know what it will cost without looking."

CHAPTER V.

COUGARS TALK.

THE "getting" of Dan Todd had been delayed too long to suit Ludwig. The first thing necessary to his submitting a bid was the knowledge his enemy would not bid. He spoke briefly to Bull Yates who dominated everybody in Ludwig's employ but Ludwig.

"You haven't landed that bird yet, Yates!"

"How can I land him when he's at the mill all the time? He's afraid to stick his nose in the timber."

"We'll see," Ludwig promised. "You be ready to-night to act!"

Five o'clock that evening Ludwig called Dan on the telephone. "This is Robertson at Camp Five. The line's down and I had to come down the trail a mile to telephone. You'd better come out and decide whether to build that skidroad up the draw, which is pretty soft, or go to the expense of building a bridge across. Can you come up to-night?"

"No, I'm afraid not, Robertson."

"Then I'd better lay off the crew. There's nothing for them to do."

That brought Todd to time. He dreaded the breaking up of any crew that worked well together. "I'l make it some way," he promised, "don't know what time I'll get there, but to-night, sure."

Then just to be sure Todd did not phone back and check up, Ludwig cut the line he had tapped.

It started to drizzle late that afternoon. Night found the wind roaring from the northeast, the shore line lashed white with surf, and a snowstorm raging in the mountains. Loggers were praying it would not extend down to the camps and cause a suspension of operations.

The storm increased and creatures of claw and fang that preyed at night slunk from cover to cover and found the pickings poor indeed. Here and there they scented out huddled creatures of the day and made their kill.

Bull Yates moved through the timber almost as silently as the cougar at his side. Presently he stopped above a deer run, found the wind to his advantage and with a quick, upward flirt of a whip ordered the cat to the overhanging limb of a tree. A chain was fastened to a spiked collar about the cougar's neck. The spikes turned inward and made it possible for the man to control the cat, which, being no fool, soon learned that absolute stillness was the way to avoid pain.

An hour passed and then, without sound, a two-point buck bounded into the run. Coming with the wind he did not scent the cat. His main thought was a protected thicket just ahead in which he could avoid the force of the storm. The cougar grew tense with excitement. Murder without warning; escape without leaving a clew was the code of this pair. The man's instincts were as deeply aroused as the cat's.

With the silence of ashes falling from a cigar, the great cat dropped. Its timing was perfect. The impact snapped the buck's spine and crushed him to the wet trail. A single bawl of fright, then silence, save for the moaning of the storm in the tree tops; the snarls of the cat and the laughter of the man.

Yates slowly pulled the chain and drew the cat from its kill. "No venison steaks to-night," he said softly; "that buck's for me. It was just to get you worked up. You'll eat horse meat if you're lucky."

He dragged the snarling cat a half mile down to the main trail, then, walking in water to conceal his own footprints, Yates forced the cat to follow along a bobcat trail paralleling the stream.

At length he stopped; tossed a line

over a limb and climbed up hand over hand. Spilling several drops of catnip oil on the limb, so that it would work into the cracks of the bark, he slid down the rope, removed it, unsnapped the collar and with a crack of the whip ordered the cat up the tree.

Training told. Never did he send the cat up without rewarding it with catnip. The cougar knew. He scrambled up the tree and the man, his timing as perfect as the cat's had been a moment before, listened and heard the click of a horse's hoof against stone. Yates worked his way upstream, wading at times waist deep, heedless of the icy water. But frequently he stopped to listen intently.

ON the limb, licking the catnip, the cougar suddenly froze. The blood-lust was running its course unchecked. Aroused by the buck episode, denied its kill, it was in a dangerous mood when the catnip quieted it somewhat. But within the cat's veins the blood ran hot.

The oncoming scent the cougar instantly identified. Man and horse! It was afraid of the man and might have retreated, but caution gave way to blood-lust. It waited, tense, a creature of claws, knotted muscles and blazing eyes. It gathered itself and sprang. The man, not the horse, saw the danger almost as the cougar jumped. He screamed in the horse's ear, drove his spurs into his flanks and at the same moment swung him around.

The cat's paw scraped Chinook's fore leg, slightly drawing blood. The horse reared so far backwards Todd slid from the saddle. The next instant, with a scream that chilled the man's blood, the horse was fighting off the cat.

Failure had stripped the cougar of much of its confidence. The man-fear returned in a measure. It slunk into the brush, while in a panic the horse galloped down the trail.

"Close shave!" muttered Todd. "Now I wonder—" He played his flash light about. "I've heard Bull Yates trained his cat to bring him down deer out of season. Why not a man—" But his experienced eye saw not the slightest sign of human tracks.

Afoot! Todd swore. Robertson and his crew would have to wait a day. No need of going ahead. It was quicker to go back and there was always the chance he might catch Chinook. This he did not rely on too much. The horse was in a panic. It might run until it killed itself. Unpleasant thought, for man and animal had gone through a lot together.

Every foot of the trail was familiar to Dan Todd, and it made little difference whether it was dark or light. He walked instinctively around, over, or under obstacles and reflected on the future.

A glow stole through him as he thought of Dorothy Lowe. It was not her beauty that impressed him so much as her amazing loyalty. What was hers she fought for. A girl after his own heart, and he had never expected to find her in that stratum of life.

And how she was fighting for her brother. No sacrifice too great. "In turn, that's the only decent thing in Bob," he mused, then he began thinking of the business. If they did submit the low bid the future was anything but clear. It spelled defeat for Ludwig, and the fight would really begin.

Failure to complete the job would mean ruin for the Lowes. Ludwig would see that the job was never completed, if possible. All this would happen under cover. In the open he would be the fair-square rival in love with Dorothy. That was the way he worked.

The same warning instinct, so highly developed in those who spend their lives in the wilderness, that caused him to "feel" the cougar's presence, again spoke. The drip of rain, the rush of

air through the top sounded like water; the roar of the real water of the stream blended and drowned ordinary sounds, but instinct cannot be silenced by noise. He grew tense instantly and looked from right to left without turning his head.

Even the best generals agree the best defense is an offense. A crouching figure behind a trunk took form and on the theory no well-wisher of his would crouch in the darkness, Dan Todd's fist lashed out suddenly. A man grunted and dropped, completely surprised.

Todd whirled about and backed up to a tree. Three figures magically appeared. Their plan of action was similar to Todd's—a fierce offensive.

Dan picked the slighter of the three and knocked him down, thanks to a long reach. It was a clean knockout, the knuckles of the forester's big fist catching the other squarely on the point of the chin. He folded up like a tent and dropped, face downward.

"I've used up all my luck in those two punches," Dan growled under his breath, "now for the real fight!"

He left his tree, for the footing was none too good, and began slowly backing up, blocking what blows he could and dodging the others. As long as he kept one of his opponents before him, his chances were good. A flank movement meant instant defeat, for either of these fighters was a good match for any man.

Twice he caught one of them with all of his strength, and the only result was a sagging of the knees and an immediate recovery. When the trail broadened out he sidestepped and began retracing his steps once more, holding to the narrow part.

Something struck his heel, then hands gripped his leg. Too late he realized the second man he had knocked down had regained consciousness and was intent on tripping him. He shook his boot furiously while keeping the others back. The man stuck to the leg.

Lunging forward, Dan staggered his nearest opponent with a blow, then turned and drove his boot into the man beneath him.

"Let go," he shouted, "or I'll drive these calks into your chest."

The answer was the sudden sinking of teeth in the calf of his leg. He drove his boot downward, the other grunted and let go. The steel calks had gone through the heavy clothing and left a brand for all time on the man's chest. Whenever he stood before a mirror, he would remember this night's battle.

Branded though he might be, he was, in a sense, victor. His interference had given his companions time to close in. Before Dan could turn, a strong arm closed about his throat. "Get him!" a voice panted in Dan's ear. "In the stomach!"

The other closed in, measured the distance and drove his fist into the pit of the forester's stomach. Dan Todd dropped as though dead. Two of them followed him to the ground and began the process of putting him out of business for some time to come. A third with calk marks on his chest, lay on the ground and wondered; the fourth was still out.

CHAPTER VI.

MISSING.

THE mill foreman knocked gently on Dorothy Lowe's door. "I'm worried, miss," he said when the girl answered. "Dan Todd's missing."

"Missing? And in the midst of preparing his bid for the big contract? We were to visit our cedar holdings to-day. Are you sure?"

"His bed wasn't slept in last night. His horse, scratched up from bucking the brush, came in with the saddle under him. That horse was in bad shape, he'd covered a lot of country."

The girl entered the house and called to her brother: "Get up, Bob; something has happened to Dan."

He growled sleepily. "Since when have you been calling him Dan?"

"This is the first time," she replied, "but I've been thinking of him as Dan for a long time. I'm worried."

"He's not worth worrying over. He'll show up. I'll be down as quick as I can dress. Probably he's off on a bust. You know how these he-men of the woods are."

"Nonsense!" she retorted. "Too much important business ahead for to leave now. I think he may have had an accident!"

He joined her presently and together they made further inquiry at the mill. The saws were humming, and the "nigger" was dumping huge logs about as usual, but the men were asking questions.

Uptown they encountered Ludwig. He was carrying a heavy envelope and just entering the post office. He smiled and tipped his hat, then, pointing to the envelope: "Wouldn't you like to know my figures, Dorothy?"

"No!" she replied, "I am worried about Dan Todd. We haven't our bid ready and he hasn't showed up!"

Ludwig said something conventional, but his mind was obviously on something else. He eyed the envelope in his hand and then mailed it.

"So the big boy didn't show up last night, eh?" he observed as they parted. "Well, don't worry. He'll be around in a couple of days. He doesn't look on the wine when it is red, but he sure does love to look on the moon when it's white—if you get what I mean."

Perhaps, after all, some such thing had happened. Ludwig was not taking it seriously. She waited until noon, and then telephoned the logging camps. The broken wire had been repaired and communication was open. "I want a thorough search made of every trail," she directed, "and I plan to look about myself."

"I'll help you, sis," Bob offered. "You're worried, and that's the reason I'm lending a hand."

Men worked back and forth through the woods without result. Ludwig telephoned over that he was sending some of his men to aid. "You'd do as much for me, Dorothy. I think we'll find him holed up in some cabin, lit!"

"Thanks, Sim!"

It was dusk when the girl started back from her second quest that day. Strange, how important a man can become to an organization! She had thought some of a combine and with Todd gone it seemed the only open course. "And yet—" she said aloud.

"And yet?" answered a voice. She started nervously, then laughed. The voice had come from a cliff—the echo of her own. The trail thickened and she grew somewhat worried. Perhaps she was lost.

A few yards beyond, a snag had been cleanly cut off with an ax. She recalled it now. Dan had cut that so she could crawl under without tearing her clothing. She was on the short cut. Abruptly she looked down and a strange chill swept through her. There were bloodstains under the log. Some one, bleeding, had crawled under it recently. In a panic she hurried down the trail.

There he lay in a clump of brush, a sodden giant in torn clothing and battered face. "Dan!" she cried. "Oh, Dan!"

He did not answer. She whipped out an automatic pistol and fired the agreed signal. Three shots, to be answered by two.

The reports seemed to have penetrated his senses. Slowly he opened his eyes. "Dorothy," he whispered.

"Yes, Dan!"

"God! Don't touch me. I hurt all over!" A chill ran through his frame. "Fire!" he muttered, "find dry stump. Wood inside!"

She searched and presently returned with an armful of dry cedar. Again she fired the automatic and listened. There was no answer save the echo following along the mountain range.

The fire blazed up presently and she added more fuel. "What happened, Dan?"

"Four men jumped me and I came out second best. Near as I can figure they knocked me out, beat me up, then heaved the remains into the river. Cold water revived me. I have been conscious and unconscious ever since. Trying to get to the Maple Creek cabin. It's a ways down the trail."

He lay close to the fire, enjoying its warmth. She was furious. "Who were they?"

"They were masked. I left a private mark on some of them. Will settle later."

"Masked, eh? The cowards! Four against one. Why did they do it?"

"I'm in the way," he answered quietly. "Let's see, what day is this? Oh, yes, bids are opened to-morrow." He closed his eyes and rested. So close was he to the borderline of utter exhaustion the effort of a few words left him flat.

"Once," she presently observed, "I used your dry clothes, but you can't use mine! If I only dare leave you long enough to get help."

"Don't! I'll be all to the good in a day or so. Now I want—rest!" He dropped off to sleep instantly. She let the fire die down somewhat, shifting it along so his clothes would dry out. Moving him was impossible. Except for the eyes, he was in fair condition about the face. Most of the beating had been around the body, where injuries are likely to be permanent. Not murder, but total disablement had been the motive of the attack.

Nor was he free from his enemies even in sleep. Frequently Dan muttered threats, and once he leaped to his knees and began to strike out with his fists. She gently forced him back, and her touch seemed to quiet him.

She reloaded the weapon and made ready to fire when he awakened. In the meantime there was nothing she could do but keep the fire going—and think. The hints she had heard that any warfare in the timber country would be nasty were borne out. Masked men, brutal beatings, four against one. But there was no thought of quitting in Dan's mind. It would be cruel to tell him it was too late to submit their bid. She would not have to tell him—he would remember.

There in the darkness, with strange shadows dancing against the dark trunks of the trees she hovered over him, as, no doubt, some ancestor hovered over her beaten champion in a darker age when men fought with clubs. Just then the finishing school and silk clothing seemed far removed from Dorothy Lowe.

"SIS! Oh, sis!"

Dorothy awakened with a start. The bruised giant still slept; the fire had burned low. She listened, then heaped on fuel. The fire blazed.

"Sis! Thank God!"

"Where are you, Bob?"

"Down here. I've been about crazy. Thought I saw a light up there, but couldn't tell until you put on more wood." Bob Lowe came from the shadows of the bank below. "Oh! So you've found him!"

"Yes! Cowards! They masked themselves, then tried to break him. I mean just that, Bob. Whoever they were, they did not want to beat him, they wanted to break him up. He may never be the same again. And you thought he might be drunk." Her voice, indignant, rose high.

Dan Todd stirred. "Oh, Dorothy! H-mm!" He blinked his eyes, then groaned. "Hello, Bob. I'm stiff!" The flames made his eyes deep with mystery and at times they seemed to burn with a sort of flame as he looked up at brother and sister. "Bob, more wood! Get some heavy stuff that 'll burn slow!"

As the youth moved away Todd called the girl. "Little stream down

the trail. Will you get me a drink? Knock in the top of my hat and bring it in that. Take the flash light. Thanks!"

Bob Lowe returned first and dropped his burden on the fire. "Anything else?"

Todd hesitated. "Yes, unbutton the top button of my shirt. It's choking me."

As Lowe kneeled to comply, Todd's eyes blazed. His hand shot up, and, though it cost him great agony, he did not falter. Fingers, swollen and bruised, caught the younger man's collar. There was a rip of fabric, and Bob Lowe's chest was exposed. In a half dozen places the tanned flesh was punctured by calk marks. Neither man spoke. A few yards down the trail came Dorothy Lowe with water.

CHAPTER VII.

LOW BID.

IN the office of a Seattle lawyer three well dressed and quiet Japanese gentlemen watched the clock. At last one of them spoke. "The time has expired. We will open the bids?"

Ludwig, showing the effects of a hard all night ride, shifted his feet nervously. "How many bids, gentlemen?"

"Two!"

Ludwig was puzzled. He had good reason to believe his was the only bid. As luck would have it, his was read first.

"At the estimated quantities and grades," the lawyer droned, "the Ludwig people bid four hundred and ninety thousand dollars.

"The second bid," the lawyer continued, "is that of the Lowe Lumber Company."

Ludwig gasped and looked sharply at his companion, Buck Yates, who for the occasion had left his cougar home, but wore a gun in a shoulder holster. "Wonder how that got in?"

The lawyer was speaking. "At the estimated quantities and grades, the Lowe people bid four hundred and forty-nine thousand dollars even."

Ludwig stood up. "Is there a certified check with that bid, as required?"

"There is! Is any representative of the Lowe Company present? No! Peculiar. Oh, well, we will notify them by telephone."

"In case the Lowe people are unable to carry out the contract at any time," he informed the Japanese, "we stand ready to fill any portion of the order at our bid price."

The Japanese thanked him, and one of them, in perfect English, added: "We will take advantage of your generous offer, sir, should occasion arise!" They bowed, indicating that Ludwig might withdraw.

Outside of the building Ludwig turned to Yates: "When do you suppose that bid went in? I know for a fact he was figuring on it two days ago. He was working on it the night we sent in that fake call from Robertson. I can't figure it, unless—say! I get it now. He put in the lowest bid he dared, then figured to check up again and, if possible, put in a supplementary and lower bid. You heard what the Jap said?"

"Yes, they'd fall back on us if Lowes failed to make good," Yates answered.

An interruption came in the form of one of Ludwig's friends. "Why so glum. Been accused of murder? Or is it a toothache?"

"Came out second best on a five hundred thousand dollar deal," Ludwig retorted.

"Too bad. Say, speaking of murder. That was a pretty girl that bumped off Burke. Know her?"

"Very well!"

"And she really did it?"

"Undoubtedly," Ludwig agreed. "Why?"

"Then she's a cold little devil. Her conscience isn't bothering her, from

what I hear. Somehow I figured it different."

"In what way?" Ludwig was deeply interested.

"I'm probably barking up a tree, but I figure the brother turned the trick and she's protecting him. That pair'd do anything for each other, they say."

"That is one way of looking at it," Ludwig answered. He waved a farewell, climbed behind the wheel of his car and started for home. He thought he had moved fast, but in each instance Dan Todd had moved faster. "I wonder," he presently mused, "if Todd's been found yet?"

"Yes," mumbled Yates, "I wonder! Say, my cat didn't miss him far. There's a claw furrow on that horse's leg."

Ludwig learned a number of things when he had reached home. Dan Todd was not expected to live. Where was he? Some said he was in the Lowe home, others claimed he was in a cabin in the woods, in too bad a shape to move!

Ludwig reached for the telephone, called the Lowe home, but there was no answer. He changed his clothing and, with Yates, boarded a speeder and headed for the upper country, where cedars stood as thick as grain.

There was much for him to congratulate himself over. His logging roads extended within a half mile of the Lowe timber. To reach the big stand of cedar they must either rent his roads, which he would not do; use Black Lake and the river, which he could stop because it was not navigable water and a portion of it ran entirely through his place, or, and this was the only course—build a road to the timber, which would eat up the profits.

Try as he would, he could see no outlet for his rival—except the combine. And this he was now in a position to enforce. With a rush it came over him Todd had played into his hands without realizing it. But, in the end, if the forester did have something up his sleeve, it was still in Ludwig's power to break the Lowe Timber Company.

Ludwig returned to Black Lake. Its surface was dotted with fine cedar logs —hundreds of them. On a moment's notice he could start those logs to his mill and have a steady stream of lumber pouring into the hold of some vessel flying the flag of the rising sun.

In a pleasant frame of mind he returned home. Again he called Dorothy Lowe's residence; again there was no answer. It was queer, he thought.

FOR several moments after Dan Todd had torn Bob Lowe's shirt open and disclosed the marks of his calks, neither man spoke. Dan was too exhausted from the effort, Bob too dumfounded at the unexpected exposure. Finally he spoke. "Don't tell her, Todd. I know what she thinks."

"Why shouldn't I tell her?"

"For her sake you shouldn't!"

"Something in that. Well, for the first time in my life my silence can be bought. It'll cost you plenty. Will you pay it?"

"To the limit. Shh! Here she comes!"

Dorothy made a rim in the top of the hat and Todd drank after a fashion. The water was cold and pure, fresh from the snowfields above. It gave him new life. Yet when he stirred it was agony. A doctor would have tugged away at his jaw and said, "Internal injuries. The outcome will be in doubt for several days."

"What shall we do, Dan?" The girl regarded him with a worried look. She had seen the gray come to his face when he moved unexpectedly.

"Get me down to the Maple Creek cabin," he said. "Cut a couple of poles, make a stretcher, let one end drag and pull the other—Indian fashion. I can stand it!"

Bob Lowe, frantic to please now that Todd had identified him as one of

his assailants, worked with a will. The completed job was somewhat crude, but it served the purpose. Dorothy led the way with the flash light, Bob dragged the stretcher. There was no pain after the first jolt, for Dan Todd had fainted.

When he regained consciousness the girl was hovering over him and there was a soft bunk beneath his battered body. But there was a strange sensation, or perhaps lack of it, that worried him. His legs seemed half dead, half alive.

While Lowe built a fire his sister started for the creek for water. Again they were alone. "Where's Dorothy?" Dan inquired.

"Gone for water!"

"Then we're alone!"

"Yes!" Bob Lowe acted like a man before a judge for sentence. "What do you want to keep still?" He shifted uneasily. "I'll pay anything within reason to keep her from knowing I had a hand in this."

"Who was with you?"

"I won't tell!"

"That's something in your favor. I hate a squealer. You don't need to tell. I left a mark on most of 'em. How strong will you go, Lowe?"

"Five thousand dollars! That's my limit. Take it or leave it!"

"I'll leave it," Dan answered. "You've got a lot to learn, Bob, about men and life. Here's my price. Put on a pair of overalls and go to work Learn the logging and lumber game from the ground up Then you won't have to rely on me, or combine with Ludwig. You can stand on your own hind legs."

"I think the merger with Ludwig is the thing," Bob growled. "To get that cedar we'll have to build roads. Working with Ludwig will make that unnecessary.

"She'll be here in a minute. I'll pay your price; but remember, I have never liked you and never will. Any time I can get rid of you I'll do so. I'm ashamed of the beating up, hiding behind a mask. I didn't know they were going as strong. Anyway, I didn't have a chance to do much; you put me out early in the fight. Now we understand each other. Enemies—open enemies."

"Yes. You're my open enemy, Bob. I'm your friend as long as you'll hit the ball."

And then Dorothy entered. "I'm going to town," she informed them.

"Not at this time of night," Todd protested.

"With the flash light I can find my way. You need a doctor. Bob can take care of you. You'll have to be moved around some and he's stronger. I think you should have a warm bath, any way."

As was usual when she took a stand, Dorothy Lowe had her way. A half hour later Bob was bathing the bruised body he had had a part in creating. Here were toe marks caused by the impact of heavy boots, there the marks of naked fists. The primitive fights of the camps are not pleasant. On the spine was a blue, hard lump that gave him a start. It suggested a fracture. He wondered how long before the doctor could get there. What would he say; what action would the sheriff take?

While Bob worked and worried, his sister hurried through the timbered valley that was hers. She was afraid—afraid of the very silence and the soft rustlings of furred creatures slinking about their nocturnal affairs.

Well toward morning she left the timber behind and looked down on the little lumber settlement. In the distance a lighted house twinkled. The whine of saws came from her own mill. Dan Todd had created enough business to run a part-time night shift.

He was talking of planting trees in cut-cover land. He said she would take another profit in her lifetime from the land. This would come from second-growth timber cut from the land

for ship and yacht masts, telephone poles, piling and bridge timbers.

She called the doctor on the nearest telephone, sent him on his way, then returned home for a brief rest. In the morning she planned to return and care for Dan Todd. He had been hurt in her fight. Investigations would be in order too.

As she was just reaching for the light switch the telephone rang. She answered it; it was Ludwig. "Sorry to call you this time of the night, Dorothy, but I've been worried. I saw a light in your window."

"Mr. Todd's been found, beaten nearly to death by a gang of cowards." She breathed rapidly at the thought. "I've sent the doctor out and Bob is caring for him."

"Not serious?"

"Very serious. He doesn't realize it, but I think he is paralyzed from the waist down."

"Too bad! Too bad! Of course, I've always held he was an impractical obstructionist, but I don't like this rough stuff. Now for something more cheerful to you, Dorothy. My congratulations on winning the big contract."

"What! We didn't have our bid in, did we?"

"Very much so. You are low, with a fair chance of breaking even if you build a road to your timber, and a nice profit if you care to merge with us. But more of that later. Think it over. Good night, dear!"

"Good night, Sim!"

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER CONTRACT.

DURING the next two weeks several amazing things happened. Bob Lowe went to work! He did not make a pretense of it, but shed his fine clothes, donned overalls, and got slivers in his fingers.

"I can't get over it," Dorothy exclaimed. She was in the rôle of nurse; Dan Todd was the patient. "Some influence for good must be working on Bob. I didn't expect him to begin right down at bedrock, but I am very happy over it."

"Maybe he's in love," Todd suggested, enjoying an inward laugh.

"He might be," the girl admitted. Dan Todd knew that the youth was in love—with his sister.

The contracts came, the bond insuring performance was signed, and still Dan lay helpless in the Maple Creek cabin.

The girl was worried, partly because of his condition, and partly because it was time cedar logs were pouring into the mill. In the offing Ludwig waited, reminding her of the advantages of a merger. Another week, then: "Feeling any better, Dan?"

"About the same. Why? Worried?"

"Yes, about you and about the business."

"Quit worrying about me," he replied; "I've a hunch I'm going to feel better when the weather changes." His face became somewhat mysterious. "It's been pretty cold. I think if we had warmer weather—say, a chinook—it'd make a great change in me. A chinook is due."

"It is late!"

"Dan, I've decided on a merger—on my own terms. It includes a permanent position for you and—"

"Forget me," he said. "I wouldn't care to join the new layout. I wouldn't be needed in Ludwig's scheme of things. And, besides, I would be fighting you, through him."

"You've fought me in the past!"

"No, merely your representative, who was Burke. You—are different. I'm glad I found it out. So, Dorothy, I don't want to fight you. But I will if conservation is involved. One thing, before you agree to combine with Ludwig, give me a chance to explain some things—give me twenty-four hours."

Again came the impression he was keeping something from her.

She saw Ludwig that afternoon and agreed to consider his proposition seriously. He returned home well pleased. "She's got to come to me," he cried when he saw Yates. "They need a pond full of cedar logs, and the only stuff that's coming down is what floats down the river. They'll have a hell of a time this summer when the water is low. Bull, I've as good as won that girl."

"If she comes in she'll bring Todd with her. He's got a contract."

"Of course. But Todd's got self-respect and pride. No man with those elements will stay with me when I don't want him to—contract or no contract."

That night he called the Japanese firm's attorney on the telephone. "The Lowe people haven't more than thirty cedar logs in their pond right now," he informed them, "and no sign of increasing their output. Their superintendent is flat on his back—paralyzed. We are ready to help you out. We've got the logs. Black Lake is full of 'em."

The attorney thanked him and the following morning called first Bob Lowe and finally Dorothy. He talked pleasantly, but at length and firmly. "It is not that we wish to be hard, but time is an important element, Miss Lowe, and delay will cost my clients considerable money. In turn they must charge that cost to you."

"I understand," she answered.

With his usual perfect timing Ludwig "happened" to be in sight when Dorothy came from the office. She was on her way to see Todd, but he headed that off. "Here's my proposition, Dorothy, and you'll notice I've made provision for Todd—if he ever recovers, which, frankly, his doctor doubts. But, dear, you realize I must know. I've got to drum up some business if you don't go along with us. Once this is done I can't offer you the same terms. Look them over; ask Todd if you wish, you'll find them fair."

"Give me twenty-four hours to decide," she replied.

That morning she carried the proposition, which was in contract form to Dan Todd.

The girl could never look at his lifeless lower limbs without shuddering. Once so strong and capable, now they lay like twin pieces of dead wood, good only to cause ridges in the bed coverings. Once she had dropped the clock on his right leg and he did not know it happened.

HE knew by the expression on her face a crisis was at hand. As she leaned over to hand him the contract, the bobcat skin serving as a rug slipped, throwing her forward. She fell across his legs and felt them wince from the impact.

"Dan!" she cried. "Oh, Dan! You felt that!" She looked at him searchingly, her face holding the mixed emotions of hope, doubt and fear. Tears came slowly from her eyes. "Oh, Dan, aren't you happy?"

"I felt it!" he admitted "Let me read the contract while you fill the water bucket—if you don't mind."

As she started for the creek Dorothy suddenly realized the weather had changed. The wind, which had been from the north was slowly swinging southward. "But it's not the Chinook," she mused, "the Chinook comes at night."

She grew a bit thoughtful and smiled softly. Dan Todd had come into her life on a cold night and he had come from the south. She was just beginning to realize how great was her joy over his partial recovery.

She dipped the clear water from a deep pool and the act sent a trout scurrying upstream to cover. There was a song of peace in the creek that morning. On another occasion it had brawled heedlessly along reminding

one of the headstrong rush of an ungrateful child.

As she entered the cabin the water bucket slipped from her hand to the floor. "Dan Todd!" she exclaimed, "you are up!"

"Yes, I'm up," he answered. During the brief time she had been at the creek he had dressed. "I've read the contract," he added, "the time has come to finish the fight. Within forty-eight hours many things will happen."

"But you should be in bed," she protested.

"I am as good as ever. Perhaps I haven't been entirely fair to you. During the fight I was kicked in the back and a vertebra shifted slightly, causing partial paralysis. It happened once before during my football days. The doctor slipped it into place and after a week's rest I was as good as ever. I knew the moment I was on my feet the battle would start and I wanted conditions of my own choosing. I've stayed in bed when anyone was around, but I've done some prowling at night."

"You speak of battle and we've a big order to fill. And you never did tell me how that bid happened to be there on time?"

"I was afraid we might be blocked the last minute and so I sent it in a week ahead of time, intending to follow it with another bid if I could bid lower."

"Two jumps ahead as usual. But, Dan, can't we have peace in this land? Isn't there enough business for both?"

"Yes, but Ludwig won't let you have peace!" He blurted out the cold statement.

"You don't know him, Dan!"

"That's it, I do. You don't!" He saw she resented the trend the conversation had taken. Warmth left her, she grew cold—icy.

"Now for the rest—" he began.

"I don't care to hear more, Mr. Todd. A rival in business, yes, but he won't carry war to me! I'm going to have peace if we have to combine for it. He was right. He said you always wanted trouble."

"Granted! Where he's concerned. Now, Dorothy Lowe, you are going to listen to me." No one had ever spoken to her like that. It surprised her. "We win this fight in forty-eight hours or maybe lose it in the end. I'm not going to lose a bit of the advantage I've gained. You're going to hear some things. You didn't kill John Burke. I've said it before. I repeat it." She started to protest, but he silenced her. "And neither did your brother!"

She gasped at that. "No one believes he did!" she cried nervously.

"Yes, many do. And you believe it! You also believe it was self-defense and you are positive that if tried he would be convicted merely because he's a type these people don't like. Isn't that the truth?"

She refused to answer and he went on: "And so you accepted the blame to save him. In turn he believes you were forced to kill Burke in self-defense. But, even so, he was willing to go to the pen for it. You wouldn't let him take the blame, nor would the court. Oh, I know the load you have each carried, and neither dare speak of it to the other. For that, Dorothy, for that fine trait of character I'd go a long way for either of you."

"Then," she asked in a strained tone of voice, "who did kill John Day Burke?"

"I know, but I can't prove it. Until I do— Well, there's something important we must attend to now."

With a lunch in the pockets of his coat, Dan Todd led off with something of his old time swing. It had served his purpose to remain in bed, but he had resented every hour of it.

For the most part he took seldom used trails and short cuts until presently they stood on a ridge overlooking Ludwig's stand of cedar. A portion of it had been cut. "Stand here and count the stumps," he suggested,

"each stump represents a tree; each tree several logs. I'll count, too!"

The girl was an hour completing the count, for she wanted to be accurate. "Three hundred and five," she announced.

"Near enough, I got two hundred and ninety-nine. Now we'll have a look at Black Lake."

They walked down to the scene of the tragic night when Burke had been found dead in the lodge and Dorothy unconscious in the rain. The lake was dotted with logs, some of which had been there for months, others recently.

"There are logs representing, roughly, nearly four hundred trees. Remember only approximately three hundred have been cut from Ludwig's place. Besides that, Dorothy, he sold a lot of cedar during the year. In other words, aside from his sales he still has more logs in reserve than he could possibly have cut from his own land."

"Where did he get them?"

"That requires another walk—to your own holdings. We'll work along the bank and—"

A STRANGE voice broke in:

"Just a minute, Todd, you're supposed to be sick!"

"I was sick," Dan answered, facing Ludwig who had suddenly come upon them. The man sensed his rival had made an unexpected move. His face was a study. Dan looked at him sharply. Did he catch a glint of fear in his eyes, as if Ludwig realized powerful forces were closing in on him? If so, such an expression was instantly gone.

Ludwig turned to the girl. "What cock and bull yarn has he been dishing up? Not that it makes any difference, for nothing he can say will hurt my standing, but—"

"You are naturally curious," Todd said. "We have been discussing the merger of the Ludwig-Lowe interests. I have taken the negative—"

"As usual."

"As usual where you are concerned," Todd agreed. "We are wondering—or rather she is, for I know—how you happen to have more logs on Black Lake than you could possibly cut?"

"Are you suggesting—" Ludwig advanced with a snarl on his face.

The show-down had come at last. In rage, man and woman alike will say more than when cool-headed. Out of Ludwig's own mouth Dan Todd prepared to convict him. "I'm saying," he said, "that Burke was a tool of yours. I'm saying that half the cedar logs cut from the Lowe timber lands 'accidentally' dropped into the south fork of Flaming River and floated down into Black Lake. That you paid him to permit this. I'm saying that every log on Black Lake is, by rights, Dorothy Lowe's."

"Try and get 'em!" Ludwig shouted. Facts and figures were against him. "Try and get 'em! We're ready for you in a court of law or a free-for-all fight."

"You are usually ready for a free-for-all," Dan retorted, "and the ratio is about four to one."

Dorothy shot a quick glance at Dan. So he did know who it was that beat him up!

"Try and get 'em!" challenged Ludwig. "I'll show you up for what you are. Make you the laughing stock of the Northwest. Dorothy, are you going to believe this rot?"

"We plan to get them, Ludwig! There's a lot of business to be finished up in the next twenty-four hours. Getting Miss Lowe's stolen logs back is one of them. Oh, sure, undoubtedly some of the logs came from your place, but you should have kept them apart—or branded them!"

He turned to the girl. It was best to leave an enemy on the defensive. The blow had been dealt so quickly and with such force Ludwig had not yet had time to think and cloud the

issue. "Come on, Miss Lowe," he said.

As though in a dream the girl followed him. How swift and telling were Dan Todd's blows. At last she spoke: "Dan, do you think Mr. Ludwig killed John Burke?"

"Fearing exposure when it was time to make a report to you, Burke might have committed suicide, you know. But I don't think he did." And that was all he would say until they reached the upper waters of Flaming River.

Most streams fork and the stream is larger as a result, but Flaming River was the reverse. There were many forks higher up, but for several miles the main stream flowed along fed only by small creeks. Then it struck a rough area and split. A fourth of the water ran along an ancient channel and emptied into Black Lake, from which it eventually flowed on to the Sound. The larger northern fork ran directly to the Sound, emptying at a point half a mile from the south fork water. It was said that miners after placer gold, sixty years before, had diverted the water in order to work the gravel in the south fork, which was the natural course.

When they were on the ground Dan Todd pointed. "See, Dorothy, how simple it is?"

High above them stretched a network of cables. A donkey engine's whistle gave a sharp blast and through the air, sixty feet above the south fork, swung a cedar log. It moved on, was picked up by another lead and carried to the north fork where it was dropped in the water. "Your logs," he said. "Wait, there'll be another before long!"

When the next log was over the south fork Todd shouted an order. The cable slacked away and presently the cedar floated. A man scrambled down the bank and removed the cable, the log floated leisurely down the stream, bumping from bank to bank, and presently vanished. "It's on its way to Ludwig," Dan said. "See how simple it is!"

"And you've known this for a year?" she demanded. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You must remember I believed Burke represented your ideas in logging matters. They were opposed to mine. I couldn't see that it made any difference if Peter was robbed to pay Paul. Besides, I had no definite proof —merely rumor. Now you know everything. In case something happens you'll know what to expect; how to proceed!"

"In case something happens," she repeated, "to you? Oh, Dan, hasn't enough happened already?"

"Nothing is going to happen," he said quickly. But the way she looked at him thrilled Dan Todd. It is queer how love sneaks in when no one is looking and Cupid shuffles the cards. "Dorothy!" he said in a low tone filled with emotion. And then something did happen.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHINOOK COMES.

JIM LUDWIG was looking at a wall and seeing considerable handwriting. He realized that two months ago he had underestimated Todd's abilities. The man's injuries had lulled him to a sense of security, then in a twinkling that security had been kicked from under him.

"And I said too much," he growled, "Dorothy sees through my game. But that brother is still under my thumb. I've got to get hold of him; but first I must protect these logs."

He called a foreman. "Get a gang of men to branding those cedar logs. Another thing: be ready for a raid from Lowe's loggers. Send a man down the line and if anything looking like a sheriff heads this way to take legal possession, telephone up and we'll take care of him. I'm going to see Bob Lowe.

After that I'm going up to Yates's cabin."

Then he took a speeder and headed for town. He found Bob on a boom working logs up to the conveyor. "Bob, come here a minute! Things look bad for me. That is, Todd's twisted facts and your sister believes them. You're sticking to me? You'd better!"

"I'm sticking to you as against Todd. You'd better clear out, it doesn't look right to the men to see you around. It'll put me in wrong."

"I'll let you know what I want you to do. And, Bob, in case Todd shows his teeth at you, remember my teeth are longer than his and I've got claws besides. I'm telling you now, for if you weaken I might not be around to tell you." Ludwig hurried away.

Again the speeder was called into action. He noted men were working on the Black Lake logs as he passed, but he did not stop until he was opposite Bull Yates's cabin. Bull had already been advised by telephone that "the boss is coming and he's wild."

The cougar was tied up; Yates was ready for anything. He had experienced such moods before. But this was the worst of the lot, as he saw at a glance! "I told you to get Todd," he shouted, advancing in a threatening manner, "and you failed!"

"I thought he was got," Yates answered. "Is he running around loose again?"

"Yes!"

"I'll finish him this time!"

"You'd better. If you can't do a fancy job, do a bum one: I've got money enough to clear you on a self-defense plea. But get that man or we're ruined. Round up your men in the woods; bring 'em in. There may be a fight at Black Lake. If so, we're on our own ground and that's self-defense."

He was gone, leaving Yates in a sullen mood. He never blamed Ludwig for anything that happened. Instead he blamed the man who riled his employer up. He walked over to the restless cougar. "Horse meat, sure!" he growled.

AN hour after Ludwig had left Bob Lowe, Dan Todd burst in on him.

"Come on to the office, Bob, I want to talk to you."

Sullenly Bob followed. A packet of mail lay on Dan's desk. The top letter, bearing a British Columbia stamp caught his eye. "Excuse me a minute, Bob, there's a letter I've been waiting six months for!" He read it quickly, smiled, then passed it over to the younger man.

"Read it, Bob, and you'll understand I'm not alone in my conservation ideas. These men have seen the forests go in other countries and are planning to profit by it. In the letter was an offer that would attract any young man. A summer cruising timber in the shadow of snow-capped peaks. There would be camps by trout streams; bird shooting in season and, best of all, life in the open. After that would come the finest logging equipment and a mill to be built at tide water. You see, Bob, they want an estimate of the annual growth and they plan to cut just that amount, and no more."

"Why don't you take it and leave us alone," the youth growled. "We can get along without you."

"Listen, Bob. Give me a chance, won't you? You've not got a thing on me. I've something on you. I've fought clean from start to finish. You haven't! Now listen to this. Dorothy and I are going to be married. For your sister's sake, make the best of it."

Bob Lowe's face went gray. He gasped, then shaking a fist under Todd's nose, he cried. "Marry Sis, eh? You? Over my dead body. I mean that, damn you! Before I'll see her tied up for life to trash like you, I'll kill you if I have to stab you in the back or shoot from underbrush!"

"A truce, Bob, for forty-eight hours. After that I'll get out. That's all I

want. I'm going to get it if I have to hog-tie you. But if you're half as loyal to Dorothy as you say you are, then you'll fight beside me. Keep an eye on the bay and if you see any logs floating there bring 'em in to the boom. If you can't do it alone, get some help."

When alone, Dan shook his head sadly. "I may have to beat some sense into that young fool yet. It's going to be tough on Dorothy if he's at outs with me. I thought he had brains enough to see which was the right and which was the wrong side of a question."

Dan ran up the steps of the Lowe home and rang the bell. "A letter, Dorothy," he cried. "Read it over and tell me what you think. See you tomorrow sometime."

"Where are you going now?"

"Up beyond the forks of Flaming River." He looked at the sky. The wind was shifting toward the south; the air was warmer. "I've got to get a move on."

"Going alone? I wish you wouldn't!"

"The job I have in mind is a lone wolf's job. The enemy won't be expecting me to strike in just that way."

"In what way?"

He leaned close. "The walls have ears," he said, "so I'll whisper!"

"Oh, Dan!" she exclaimed. "Who would have thought of it?"

"Anybody with a lick of sense," he answered, "it is the only way." Then he was gone.

Dan Todd had hardly left town before the telephones along the Ludwig logging line began to ring. Bull Yates fairly leaped to his instrument, for it was his call. Ludwig's voice came crisp and commanding:

"Dan Todd just left on Chinook. He must be going far or he wouldn't take the horse. Keep your eyes open. I'll have the other stations check up as he goes along. It's a fine night. Good-by!"

"Yes," Yates muttered, "it's a fine night for a murder!"

From time to time he received telephone calls. At last he got up, his manner grim, satisfied. "Todd's passed the last station, he's going up to their forks camp, sure!"

He fastened a chain to the cougar's collar and set forth. The wind had died down; the moon was shining. How silently the cat moved, he noticed; just the brush of the fur against the thicket, a soft sound audible to only the keenest ear. His own footfalls were almost as silent.

He did not take to a stream this night. There wasn't time, but he had discarded his boots for moccasins. Such footwear was not logical in this country, but they could be burned up. Besides, it would take an Indian to track him down.

The silence was broken by the snort of a horse. He gripped the whip and unsnapped the collar. "Up," he ordered. "Up!" The cat hesitated, then ran up a tree and out on a limb. The eyes, gleaming in the moonlight, took on a sinister flame. He had forgotten that on a still night sound travels far. The horse was farther than he figured. The cat hadn't caught the scent yet.

Yates grew nervous and drew the whip back. Why didn't that horse hurry? Why did the cat look at him so steadily. Was it possible that the creature—? "God!"

Yates shuddered and for the first time experienced fear. The steady, threat in those flaming eyes above had broken down his nerve. Fear! It is something invisible. We cannot put our finger on it, yet it bridges space and wild creatures sense it.

The great muscles grew tense. The cougar had not forgotten his cruelty, any more than it had forgotten that in the pen at the cabin was catnip. As a man runs risks for the things he desires, so did the cat return to the cage for the catnip—returned, knowing the cruel collar awaited.

Yates moved backward slowly. He must get beyond reach of that threatened leap. Where was the horse?

Todd, confound him, had stopped for the black to drink! Something struck him behind the legs. Yates sensed it was a snag, but a movement of the cat stampeded him just when he should have gripped his nerve and stood still. He clutched at a branch, missed and fell.

The fall of something living is the signal for wild creatures to attack. Thus they prey! The cat sprang to the ground and at the same moment Yates got to his feet and ran. Through a brief stretch of moon-splashed forest he raced, screaming in terror. Each moment he could feel the crushing impact, the claws, the fangs at his throat! He knew the process, for he had watched the cougar bring down bucks.

Silence! He ran from it, knowing its menace. Gleaming eyes from a thicket, the silent rush to a log, the brief run along the timber's length, another leap to an overhanging tree, and then—

Yates leaped a split second ahead of the cat. The paws struck the ground as he left it. He ran to a rocky point and turned, a creature at bay. Behind was a sheer drop of seventy feet to a deep pool in the river. In front, the cat.

Even then, had he really been a man of courage and rushed at the cat, the cougar would have retreated. But he was afraid, and the cat knew it. Of the two cowards the cat was the lesser, hence the braver. Confidently it advanced. Slowly. Surely. Its problem was to bring down the man without going over the brink. It gathered for the spring.

From Yates's throat came a scream that matched the cat's. He turned and leaped! The mist-drenched walls of the gorge echoed with another scream as he shot downward, hands above his head, fingers clutching again and again at the air.

Water leaped high from the point where he struck, then settled back, foaming. The cat peered down with gleaming eyes, but nothing came to the surface. The stream rushed on to the sea. The cat turned and vanished in the timber. For an hour or more its hunting was aimless, a criss-crossing quest that might bring a scent.

Presently it rushed across the trail, caught the horse scent and whirled like a flash. The odor was recent, maddeningly fresh. Almost heedlessly the cat followed.

DAN TODD pulled up his horse and looked about. "Chinook, I've got to leave you for a half hour or so, but we'll play safe and be sure no cougar followed." Dan doubled back afoot and examined the trail. There were no cat tracks. "Guess Bull Yates isn't out to-night. Just as well for me—I've got troubles enough."

Carrying a small pack on his back, Dan began climbing a timbered hogback. When he emerged snow was under his boots and a scene beyond description stretched around him. Above, the snow lay deep on ridge and valley. Moonlight gave it a silvery aspect, more like something seen on the stage than something actual. A green carpet of timber rolled away toward the waters of the Sound.

Fifteen miles away a lighthouse gleamed. A narrow path of gold came from the light, across the waters to the timber. It almost met the silver thread breaking the blackish green of the forest—the thread that was Flaming River.

He looked below and an exclamation escaped his lips. Chinook was rearing violently. Even as Dan guessed the cause the cougar burst from the brush that ringed the clearing. The scream of the horse, always terrible to hear, floated upward. Throwing his full weight backward, the rope snapped and Chinook was free. His was the courage of a range stallion running wild. He whirled and faced his enemy, and the cat, surprised at the offer of battle, grew wary, and slunk into the brush.

While the horse trembled, now on the verge of panic because of the uncertainty, the cat ran several hundred feet, rushed from a thicket and leaped. Its claws struck the saddle and held. A hind claw dug into Chinook's flank.

Unable to aid, Dan could only watch from the ridge while the drama of the wild unfolded. The moon and the surroundings changed the fight to something shadowy, like the softening of a picture for the effect. Only the screams of the horse broke the illusion and told of the cruel conflict.

Chinook reared high, almost shook the cat free, then came to earth with a thud. He bucked frantically, keeping the cat so busy hanging on that it could not start its offensive. This was no frightened buck beneath its claws.

Suddenly the horse broke into a gallop. He vanished into the timber, and with loudly beating heart Dan Todd stood tense, waiting. The screams no longer came, only silence and the rush of a gentle breeze. It was warm, blowing from the south; the chinook that always comes at night, according to legend, warm in spite of the snowfields over which it swept. A twisted scrub, burdened with snow, suddenly shook itself free and lifted a green top, as if to observe the coming of summer.

The scream of the horse again! It chilled Dan as the breeze had warmed him. As he looked Chinook hurled himself against a cedar snag and the cougar, hurt by the impact, dropped off.

"At him, boy!" yelled Dan; "get him while you've the chance. Quick! There he comes! Too late!"

But Dan was wrong. Chinook reared and his hoofs caught the cougar in midair. The cat squirmed backward, almost got free, then was pinned to the ground with both hoofs. It slashed out viciously and drove its teeth into the horse's fore-leg. When Chinook reared again the cat was still clinging to the leg.

Again the horse screamed. This time there was more of anger, less of fear. The cat was ready to quit. It broke loose and skulked for the brush. On the very edge the horse caught it again.

Down came steel-shod hoofs and tawny fur was driven into forest muck. A shudder ran through the cat, it half stood up, then dropped. Again and again came the hoofs, until fur, sod and brush became a crimsoned, formless mixture. To Dan Todd's ears came the shrill whinny of the victor.

"It's been long in coming, old hoss," he cried, "but luck's breaking our way at last. You've won your fight and the chinook's come."

To the south great banks of black clouds were rolling across the sky. Light was wiped from the valley, silver was replaced with inky black; only the light house with the path of gold across the water remained. A splatter of warm rain struck Dan's face. He grinned, worked his way along the face of the mountain until the north fork waters rushed almost below him, then he stopped; dug deep into the rocks, snow and dirt; tamped a charge of powder in place, lit a long fuse and ran for the timber.

Minutes passed, then the earth trembled. Rocks and débris leaped from the mountain face and a mighty slide started downward. Dan Todd faded into the timber. The rain now was coming in torrents. And, curiously enough, the snow was melting from the mountain tops downward. For this is the way of the Chinook.

CHAPTER X.

CEDAR LOGS.

LUDWIG was humped up on a speeder, while the rain beat against his face and ran in a steady stream down the gleaming slicker he was wearing. The speeder stopped at Black Lake and Ludwig ran for the shelter of the lodge. His mill foreman was already there. He had been marking certain logs that were to be cut later.

"South fork's rising," he shouted above the rattle of rain on the cedar roof. "Never saw it come up so fast. That snow's sure going off fast!"

"Heard from Bull this morning?"

"No, guess the line's down. Couldn't get a rise out of him!" The foreman, a man named Secord, limped toward the telephone.

"How's the foot?"

"Thought it might be blood poison, it was bad for a long time, but it's better. Todd drove his calks right into my instep that night. Left his brand all right. I've got to get him for that. Seen the kid?"

"Yes," Ludwig answered, "he's with us!"

"Should think he would be, after what Todd did to him. If he'd of got blood poison in that chest—good night. Queer Bull don't answer!"

As he hung up, the telephone rang. Secord answered. "The devil you say. I'll tell the boss, he's right here!" He hung up and turned to Ludwig.

"A big gang from Lowe's mill left before daylight. They must be headed this way. The mill's shut down!"

"We're ready for them!" Ludwig indicated a shed on the opposite side of the lake, filled with rough men, smoking. "Let 'em come! That stream's sure rising. Hear her roar?"

"Water's got to go some place," Secord returned, "there's a pile of snow in those mountains; the sides are steep and water comes down fast."

A current had already appeared in the lake, which was long and very narrow! The logs were moving slowly toward the other end. At this point there was something of a narrow neck and the water moved fast and disappeared in the outlet.

Abrupt activity among the men in the shed caused Ludwig to hurry across the bridge to the other side. A man met him half way. "Mr. Ludwig, Bull Yates's body was found a half hour ago in the stream. Four of the boys are bringing it in."

"The devil!" A shade of worry passed over Ludwig's face. "Any marks on the body?"

"Only the calk marks he got that night in the fight with Todd. Todd's calks got him in the flesh above the knee when he went down."

"Yes, I remember. Todd branded all of us! Say, what's wrong here?" A wave of water spilled over the footbridge and the structure began groaning from the force. The lake had risen a foot, he noticed. A moment later a small log demolished the bridge completely.

Another wave sent the men to higher ground. The logs had formed in a mighty jam. Ludwig was pale now. "If the water gets much higher, or if the jam breaks everything will go. Every log in the lake will be in the bay within an hour."

"They'll strand down on the bar," some one suggested.

"Bar — hell!" Ludwig exploded. "There'll be six feet of water on that river bar inside an hour."

A logger, his clothing torn from frequent and violent contact with the brush, ran into the clearing. Not being able to cross the stream he cupped his hands and roared above the storm: "No water going down north fork. Everything's coming down here. Must be a slide—" His final words were lost.

Ludwig ran to the telephone.

"Get a locomotive up here as quick as you can," he ordered, "bring powder, caps and fuse!" He bellowed for his foreman. "Secord, tell that gang to be ready to hop a flat car with picks, shovels and axes. Tell 'em they're battling for their jobs. If those logs go we can never get that Jap contract; Todd and his men will have 'em in their mill pond in no time!"

No one realized more than Ludwig that the shoe would then be on the other foot. Whereas now he had them and it was up to Todd to prove title; yet if the Lowes got possession he

would have a hard job proving his right to the logs. In fact, he had sense enough not to make the attempt. On those logs hung the future of both companies. One would ascend, the other descend.

The locomotive came puffing through the rain an hour later. It hooked onto a flatcar loaded with men, and started upstream. Once, where a bridge was smothered in water, men got out and tested it, then the locomotive moved slowly across. That bridge would not be there when they returned. Its hours were numbered.

With a grinding of brakes the train stopped. Men piled off, carrying equipment, and followed Ludwig's lead down a pack trail. They broke across the Lowe clearing, then took the north fork bed, which was dry except for pools packed with excited trout.

Not a man in the group was prepared for the sight that greeted them. The slide blocked the stream and along its base, as well as on its crest stood dozens of Lowe's loggers. They were armed with pickhandles and clubs. There was doubtless a gun or two among them, but such weapons were not in evidence.

Ludwig ran up, his attitude threatening. "Todd, you're drowning me out!" he shouted.

"You challenged us to try and get the logs you stole and we're trying!" Todd retorted. He came down and met his enemy on even ground.

Ludwig was breathing hard. "You're going to stand aside and let us clear away that slide or—or we'll break heads until you'll listen to reason."

"Come ahead, we're ready for you!"

Ludwig looked around. They seemed to be ready for him. If those at the base of the dam found the going too rough, they could retreat to more advantageous ground. There were rocks to roll down, to say nothing of the pickhandles. Presently Ludwig's eyes saw a familiar figure. "One friend at least," he muttered, "Bob Lowe's in the mob! If he only has sense enough to crack Todd over the head!"

Ludwig turned to his men. "Stay where you are, boys, we'll talk this over!" Then walking back he added in a low tone: "If you value your jobs, clean 'em up. Lay off the rosy-cheeked lad, he's one of our crowd. That's Bob Lowe. Most of you know him. He may pretend to break a few heads, but it 'll be for effect. Ready?" A roar of approval answered him. "Then at 'em!" he cried.

There were guns in both parties, but each, with an eye to future consequences from the law, waited for the other to produce them.

THE first rush drove the defenders back, then those on top came down like a wave. In a brief time the slide was the scene of several dozen small fights. Here a defender won, there an attacker gained a brief foothold.

Ludwig worked his way toward Bob Lowe. "Knock Todd in the head!" he shouted. "I'll keep him busy." Thereupon he rushed toward Dan, to keep him occupied in front while some one got him from behind.

But Dan was taking no chances. Defensively at first, then with furious aggressiveness he met Ludwig's attack. They stood toe to toe, slugging with naked fists. In the excitement Ludwig began a crafty retreat, drawing Todd out. A Ludwig man leaped in behind and lifted a club, but before he could bring it down a Todd man had laid him low.

Some one cracked Dan behind the ear and he went down. Because of the wet weather Ludwig had worn shoepacks. As Ludwig stepped back the imprint was clear and distinct in the muck. Dan Todd eyed the track in a dazed manner, then he shook his head to clear the fog a blow always creates. Again he looked at the track. He got

to his feet to find Ludwig advancing to finish him. He retreated. "Get Ludwig!" he cried. "Get him! He killed John Day Burke! Get him alive if you can!"

Above the uproar a few heard the cry. And yet, so evenly matched were they, that as one man started for Ludwig, usually another was there to block him.

The logger had heard the charge. He whipped out an automatic pistol only to have Dan Todd hurl a handful of mud into his eyes before he could aim the weapon. The next instant some one had knocked it from his hand.

He partly cleared his vision and turned to run. Dan made a flying tackle and brought him down. With a tug born of desperation Ludwig jerked away, leaving Dan sprawled in the mud. But Dan Todd was grinning. He held something priceless in his arms —one of Ludwig's shoepacks. He tossed it to Bob Lowe. "Hang onto it, Bob, that'll prove who killed Burke. I've got the rest of the evidence, now all I need is the man."

But the man was retreating swiftly. While his men fought off pursuit, Ludwig forced another to remove his boots. "I'm going to need 'em," the logger cried, "you can get along!"

Hastily lacing them, Ludwig made a run for the stream. "Fight it out, boys," Dan yelled, "I'm after Ludwig. He's on the run; they'll follow. Tie into 'em!"

And down came the Lowe crowd, swinging right and left. For a moment the Ludwig men held, then the center of the line broke. The gang turned and fled, every man for himself, with Todd's crowd in hot pursuit. Above, the skies sprayed the fighters; behind them the angry waters leaped on a dam that held.

Ludwig looked apprehensively behind. His gun was gone and with it his confidence. Escape was his sole thought. He ran to the river bank and with the help of two of his men launched a cedar log.

As the current caught it, he leaped aboard. Down to Black Lake; then a speeder to town and from there a fast launch to British Columbia. He had friends who would look after his affairs.

The log rolled at times, but he had served his day as a white water birler. The old art of balance remained. He crouched low as the log rushed between the piers of the railroad bridge. The bridge was gone; the iron rails snapped in two.

He looked back and swore. A dozen rods behind came Dan Todd, poised lightly on a smaller log. He had it in a smother of foam in the middle of the stream where the water ran swiftest. His balance was perfect; his jaw determined, his eyes flashing. His hat was gone and the rain had changed his thick hair to a mass of disordered curls. A romantic girl would have called him handsome. He was! But to Ludwig he was an avenging devil.

Ludwig forced his own log into the white water and the race was on. Again and again both men were forced to call on all their skill to remain on the logs. Walls towered high at times. Again the country leveled out somewhat, but it was all timbered. A buck, head held high, watched the race with amazement.

Dan noticed how he merged with the background as he stood there. Queer thought to have when a man might be engaged in a life and death struggle a minute hence. Dan always could find time for beauty—natural and feminine. Twenty feet separated them as they rushed into Black Lake. Black River would have been a better name. It was now a wild part of the river a little wider than the rest. Above the roar of stream and storm came the thunder of moving logs.

The jam had broken!

Cedars that were six feet through and made a powerful loader grunt to

handle, were tossed about like tookpicks. Yellowish brown water spumed up between them. Here a log was sucked down; there another shot up, dripping from the depths. And into the center ran the streams bearing its débris and two humans. Ludwig stood poised like an athlete and when his log struck he leaped to the jam. From log to log he skipped, while hard on his heels came Dan Todd.

Suddenly he turned. He knew he was whipped and escape was impossible. His face changed with the inward reaction. With a sudden leap he gripped Dan Todd and his yellow teeth bared in a fiendish smile. "You win, Todd, and you lose. We're both going to hell!"

Swaying they fought it out, and this time it was Dan Todd who wanted to be free. Once they slipped between the grinding mass of cedars they were done. Contact that would hardly squeeze water from the bark would kill a human being.

All of Dan's strength went into a single punch. Ludwig's jawbone snapped; the knuckles of Dan's right hand broke through the flesh. He felt the sting of the dirty flood water as it struck the wound. Then he stooped and picked up Ludwig.

With the man thrown over his shoulder Dan worked his way to the edge of the jam, then leaped in. Waist deep he struggled the hundred feet separating him from shore. He pitched Ludwig downward, as he might have heaved a fence post from his shoulder, then slumped down on top, panting.

"Well, you boys settled it!" Dan looked up into the sheriff's eyes as the latter went on, "Toughest fight I ever saw, and Ludwig quit. Always figured he had a streak of yellow if it could be brought to the surface. You was a fool, Dan, to drag him out after him trying to drown you."

"I had to drag him out. That kind of a death wasn't fated for him. He's going to swing. He killed Burke. I had a motive from the first, but no proof. Now I've got the proof.

"Found shoepack tracks that night at the scene of the crime. There was a queer three-cornered cut, such as might have been made by stepping on a broken bottle, in the middle of the left sole. I found that pack to-day—on Ludwig.

"The accounting was due, sheriff, and Burke was in a jam. He was ready to throw himself on Dorothy Lowe's mercy and make a clean breast. That had to be stopped. Ludwig knew he would go over the road for stealing logs and so he stopped it—with Dorothy's little automatic. That's how it happened, wasn't it, Ludwig?"

Arrogant in victory, Ludwig was a mongrel in defeat. "Yes," he growled, "that's what happened. Why didn't you let me drown myself?"

"It was too clean a death, Ludwig," the sheriff answered. He scratched his head. "I was on my way up to the forks to settle a riot when I saw you two come down the river. I waited to see the finish. Now I suppose I'd better take this cuss back and let the riot take care of itself."

"The riot's all over, sheriff, it ended in our favor! I'll go down with you, though. May as well send a doctor up to patch the battered heads. This hand of mine needs a little attention, too."

"That hand's got kick enough in it, Dan, to win a world's championship."

"Can't take the time, sheriff. I've got a big job on hand in British Columbia and I'm due there to-morrow. I'm afraid I won't make it!"

CHAPTER XI.

BOB LOWE'S REVENGE.

AS Ludwig was taken to jail Dan looked out onto the bay. Here was a sign to gladden the heart of any logger. Scores of ponderous cedar logs were floating about and a

fleet of tugs and gasboats were towing them to the Lowe booms. Even the tide was helping.

He stopped at the Lowe home. Dorothy was gone. He left a note:

DOROTHY:

I must leave for British Columbia to-morrow. Won't be able to return for at least a month. Will you go with me?

As ever,

DAN.

P.S. Am returning to the forks to start north fork in its proper channel. Your logs are all in the bay. Black Lake is empty.

An hour later Dorothy Lowe found it and as she read it Bob came in, dripping from his ride to town. He looked over her shoulder and read the contents at a glance.

Gosh, Sis, do you really love that long drink of water? Huh! He's not good enough for you. Huh! Women are sure queer. And you used to have good sense!" He stalked from the room, but returned. "You know I've got something to say about this. I'm the only male member of the family. A bride has to be given away, and I'm going to do any giving that's to be done in this case."

"Bob, don't be unpleasant," she pleaded.

"I feel that way," he answered and walked leisurely to his room, leaving a trail of water behind him. In the distance he saw Dan Todd, riding Chinook. "I wonder where I can find that bird when I want him. Some of the boys should know!"

And while he was pondering on this angle of the situation "that bird" was galloping to the forks. There was much to be done and little time in which to do it. In ones and twos, victors and vanquished were making their way back down the railroad tracks and trails.

Here and there he found a foreman or straw boss and to each he gave orders as to his course for the next several weeks. A few sticks of powder were sufficient to blow an opening in the slide—the stream did the rest.

He worked late, slept in one of the camps and fretted most of the following day because there was so much to be done and the line to town was down. A logger should be used to that, but there are times when little things prove annoying to a man in love.

Toward evening the break was repaired and a few minutes later an excited voice demanded Dan Todd. "Better get down here, Dorothy Lowe's been kidnaped!"

Dan swore, then collected his wits, "Is Ludwig out of jail?"

"No!"

"I figured he might have escaped and got his revenge. I'll be right down!"

He saddled Chinook and galloped down a trail intended only for a slow pace.

As he rode, his bitterness toward Bob increased. He remembered the threats Bob had made. But the threats had been against him, not the girl.

He smiled softly some time later. Here was the spot she had found him and here, Maple Creek cabin where she had nursed him after the beating.

Chinook snorted and a man leaped for his bridle. Other men, at least a dozen of them, swarmed over Dan Todd. His struggles were futile and a voice shouted. "We've got him, Bob!" Then a light came on in the cabin.

The men released their victim and he looked around. All were masked except Bob Lowe. He stood alone, smiling in triumph. "I'm giving orders, Todd," he said, "and you're obeying them. You're leaving the country to-night. Get off those clothes and put on these!"

To Dan Todd's amazement he was given the full evening dress he had worn at college. "Not this stuff, boys," he pleaded, "I can't go wandering around to-morrow in this outfit."

"Get 'em on and shut up!" Lowe ordered. "If you don't, the boys will put 'em on for you, won't you boys?"

Their growling response indicated they would enjoy carrying out Lowe's suggestion.

He dressed slowly, taking considerable care while his active mind searched for a way of escape. "Tell me this, Bob, is Dorothy safe?" he asked. "They phoned me she had been kidnaped."

"She's in good hands, if that's what you want to know. Later she'll be turned over to a party I think can handle her. She's headstrong, you know, and it will take a strong man to handle her. But remember this, what I do is for her own good."

"You think it is," Dan snapped.

"And my thinking it, is good enough —for me."

Later Dan was blindfolded, placed on Chinook's back, taken some distance and then transferred to a car. After a brief ride he stepped out to find the rough planks of a dock under his feet. "Step down," Lowe ordered.

Dan obeyed. A great log, afloat, sagged beneath his feet. Murder? The thought came to his mind. They must have expected resistance, for they held him tightly. He decided to take somebody into the water with him when the rough stuff started.

The bandage was jerked from his eyes and he blinked at several lights. An orchestra struck up the wedding march. Dan gazed around. He was standing alone on a mighty cedar, except for a minister. The mill pond log boom was covered with friends. Coming towards him was Dorothy on the arm of Bob Lowe, who was likewise dressed in evening clothes.

Bob was very solemn and as he drew near, growled, "Not a word out of you, Todd. I'm running this wedding. I'm giving the bride away and I'm best man." He almost grinned, but checked this sharply. "Another thing, don't drop the ring into the bay."

And Dan who had battled his way through to victory now obeyed with the utmost meekness. He seemed dazed at the unexpected turn in affairs. Only the minister's words, "I now pronounce you man and wife," convinced him he was married.

He seemed to wonder what to do next until the voice of a big undercutter shouted, "Well—go ahead and do it!"

Belatedly Dan kissed the bride. Then Bob Lowe thrust forth his hand. "Put her there, old boy, if you care to. I'm sorry I made such a fool of myself. I stick to my friends and it was hard to believe Ludwig wasn't a friend.

"Then the other day, fighting side by side with you, changed me. After that I was as strong for you."

"Bob, old scout, you did the job up brown. And—there's nothing to forgive. You're on the job—stay on it. With a few old heads to help you along you'll make good. And—"

The undercutter's voice broke in "Say, my wife's romantic. She claims you don't know how to kiss a bride. Go ahead, Dan, and kiss her like they do in the movies. That's it—take your time, lad, take your time."

"Heck," Dan growled, "I suppose I've got to do it."

The girl smiled up. "And don't you want to, Dan?" she whispered.

"Darned tootin' I do," he answered and did.

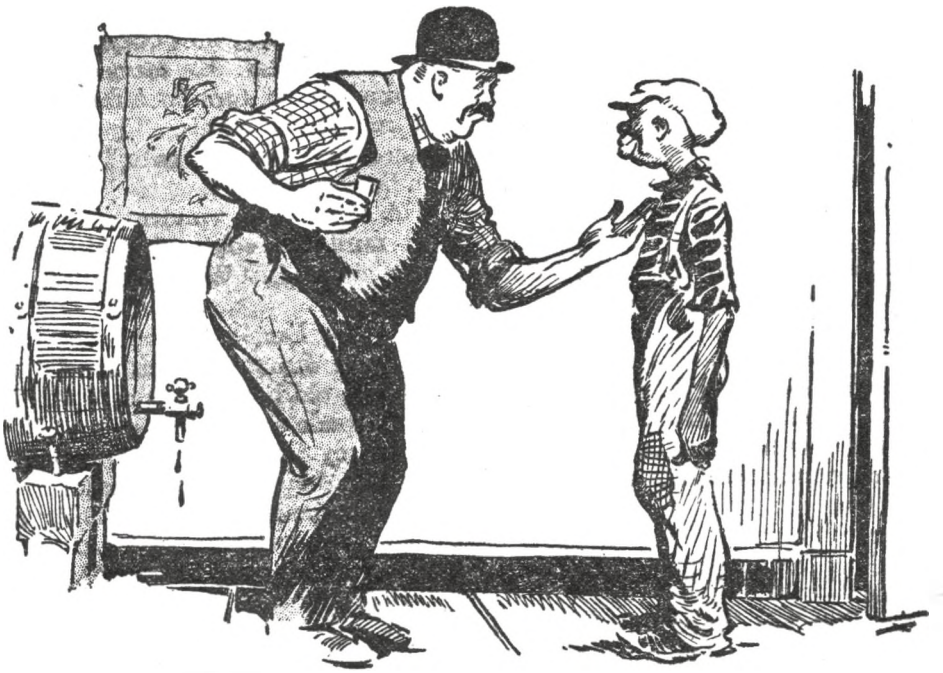
As they shifted their position slightly the log wallowed with unexpected violence. Quick work saved Dan and his bride from going into the bay, but there was a splash nevertheless, then the log steadied.

"What happened, Dan?"

"The best man just fell into the bay," he answered, "and they're fishing him out."

High above, the Chinook lazed its northward course, its breath as gentle as the girl's, its caress as tender as the man's.

THE END



"Boy," he said solemnly, "you've sold a barrel of whisky!"

Still Waters Run Cheap

Yo ho, ho, and a barrel of booze—which starts things moving altogether too fast for one darky

By TOM AKERS

"Ol' train a-comin' down de railroad track;
Ol' en-jine comin' down de railroad track—
Goin' to take me 'way, but ain't goin' to bring me back.

"When a woman gits blue she hangs her haid an' cries;
When a woman gits blue she cries an' wipes her eyes—
But when a man gits blue he gits on de train an' rides!"

TIGHT EYE, also known derisively as the "Virginia Creeper," lifted his voice in doleful song in the back room of the Palace Pool Parlors as he slowly manicured the cuspidors. He was far from home and desperately unhappy. The little Kentucky town which happened to be his present habitat was, he reflected, "no place foh a po' boy." So he sang, plaintively, after the manner of his race.

"Tight Eye!" came the rasping voice of "Bull" Cardigan, proprietor of the Palace Pool Parlors, from the front room. "You Tight Eye! Get a move on you! You're the laziest, orneriest, slowest, triflingest nigger I ever seen! You hear me?"

"Comin' right on, Cap'n Bull! Jes' soon as Ah gits me dese heah cusspeeders clean, suh!"

And Tight Eye rattled the spittoons in simulated industry.

"You'd better, if you don't want me

to break your black neck!" warned his employer.

"Cap'n, yes, suh!" cheerfully came the response.

But Tight Eye was not cheerful. Lugubriously he resumed his song:

"Goin' to lay mah haid down on de railroad line;
Goin' to lay dis haid down on the railroad line—
Train come 'long an' pacify mah min'—"

"Dog-gone! Sho' is got de train ridin' blues! Craves to git me some rest, settin' down. Sho' wisht Ah had me a ticket back to Nohfolk, wheah Ah come frum. Craves to go ridin' on de railroad. Virginny boun'! Dat's me! Kaintucky home, Ah's gone! Seems like all ol' Cap'n Bull thinks about is keepin' a boy on de jump. All de time it's 'Tight Eye, do dis,' an' 'Tight Eye, do dat.' Ain't got a minute to mahself.

"White folks keeps callin' me Tight Eye an' Virginny Creepah. But some day somebody gwine to call me outen mah name wunst too often."

Muttering and mumbling to himself over his fancied grievances, the general factotum of the Palace Pool Parlors gathered up the spittoons and carried them into the front room or hall proper.

"Nigger," said Bull, his much feared employer, "I ought to knock you loose from your feet. Did you do that work over at the house this morning?"

Tight Eye rolled his eyes warily.

"Yes, suh," he replied. "Ah roke up de leaves an' swope off de porch like de ol' miss tole me, an' Ah—"

"All right! All *right!*" growled Bull. "Get busy and take the cloths off those pool tables and brush the tables good. You never touched them yesterday. You're just a dead loss, that's what you are. I'll be back pretty soon."

Left alone, Tight Eye cogitated. He had enough of Bull Cardigan and his everlasting work. A boy never got a chance to rest. He had the "itchin' foot" and craved to ride on the railroad train. But how? A boy had to have some money before he could do that.

"De way things stan's now," soliloquized Tight Eye, "money is de mos' thing Ah ain't got. Got to skum me a scheme to git me some dough."

Whereupon he went into executive session with himself and did some exceedingly heavy thinking. By the time his employer returned, his scheme, as he expressed it to himself, "was skum." All it needed was a little elaboration as to details. Wherefore, at the first opportunity, Tight Eye slipped out of the back door of the Palace and down the alley to where dwelt—and sometimes worked—his close friend "Jug Head" Chenault, who, when not in funds, followed the carpenter's trade. Him Tight Eye found taking things easy.

"Jug Haid," he demanded, "does you crave to make some money?"

"Money," replied the other, "is de fondes' thing Ah is of. What's dis talk 'bout makin' some?"

"It's like dis," explained Tight Eye confidentially. "Does Ah git us a barrel, kin you put a false haid in it, 'bout two or three inches down—one dat will hold watah—an' den put back de 'rig'nal haid like it wus befoah?"

"Sho' kin, boy. Whut us gwine do wid de barrel?"

"Ah 'splains dat," continued the plotter. "Us gits us a whisky barrel frum de ol' 'stillery, an' puts in de false haid. Den we fills up de big en' of de barrel wid watah an' plugs up de hole.

"Den us gits some sho' nuff whisky—'t'won't take much—an' puts it in de little end 'tween de false haid an' de reg'lah one. Us marks de end dat got de whisky in it. An' dah we is!"

Jug Head looked puzzled. "Is we?" he demanded. "How come?"

"Sho' we is," explained the other,

patiently. "All us got to do den is find a white man to buy dat barrel. Ah taps it foh him an' draws de lickah sample. White man buys de barrel. Us gits de profits. How's dat?"

As the simplicity of the plan gradually dawned upon Jug Head's slow mind a wide grin lit up his ebony face. "Hot damn! Dat's de beatenes' thing Ah evah seen!"

"One thing Ah been studyin' 'bout," went on Tight Eye, "an' dat is how we gwine to git some good whisky. Bootlaiger ain' trustin' no nigger."

"Nevah min' 'bout dat!" interposed the now enthusiastic Jug Head. "Ah fixes dat. Dat's mah meat. Mah maw, out in de country, got a dimmyjohn of whisky hid in de cabin. Ah takes me some tongs an' goes out dah an' gits it."

"Tongs?" said Tight Eye. "Whut's dem for?"

"So Ah kin say Ah ain't teched a hand to dat ol' dimmyjohn," explained Jug Head. "You know Ah's a church membah an' can't tell no lie. Wheah at is de barrel?"

"Ah rustles it," was the reply, and Tight Eye forthwith faded into the great outdoors.

THAT night, as Bull Cardigan counted the cash, preparatory to closing up, Tight Eye approached diplomatically. His air was mysterious. His grin was ingratiating. He shuffled his huge feet and coughed behind his hand. Bull, sensing a touch, ignored him as long as possible. Finally the negro could keep silent no longer.

"Please, suh, Cap'n Bull, kin Ah speak to you a minute?" he pleaded.

"Well, what is it now, you black ape?" snarled Bull ferociously. "You can't get any money, if that's what you are after."

"'Tain' dat! Naw, suh. 'Tain' dat, edzackly," said Tight Eye, whispering. "Ah wants to ax you how much a boy could git for a whole barrel of sho' nuff, hones'-to-Gawd whisky, like dey use to sell befoah de wah?"

Bull's eyes popped.

"What?" he exclaimed incredulously. Then, cautiously lowering his voice: "You mean what is a barrel of prewar whisky worth?"

"Cap'n, yes, suh, dat's it. How much would it be in money if a boy foun' a barrel like dat?"

Bull did some rapid mental arithmetic. Good moonshine, he knew, was worth about two dollars a gallon in that locality. Real whisky—if any—would sell for anywhere from five dollars to ten dollars a quart. A barrel, he recalled, would hold about thirty gallons, allowing for evaporation. If this liquor Tight Eye had was worth drinking, it would bring close to fifteen hundred dollars a barrel, retail. He decided to inquire further.

"Nigger," he demanded, "what's all this about a barrel of whisky? What makes you ask how much it is worth?"

"Well, suh," explained the other, more mysteriously than ever, "you know dat nigger Jug Haid down de alley? Seems like Jug Haid's white folks dat live out in de country done gone 'way somewheah, an' lef him in charge of de place.

"De othah day he's kinder projeckin' 'roun' out dah in de attick, an' come 'cross a doah up dah leadin' into a little cubbyhole sorter place. Dey wusn't no key, but Jug Haid open de doah, an' in dah, 'way back in a cornah undah de raftahs, all covahed in cobwebs an' sich, he foun' a whole barrel of whisky dat nobody didn' know wus up dah. Jug Haid 'lows dat barrel been hid sence long 'foh de wah. So he tole me 'bout it an' ques' me to find out how much is it worth."

Bull's beady eyes were greedy with cupidity as the simple Tight Eye unfolded his amazing story. He had personal knowledge of too many similar incidents to doubt the truth of the narrative for a moment. Casually, how-

ever, he concealed his interest with a noncommittal grunt.

"Well, now," he said at length, "it's hard to say what that liquor is worth. Not a whole lot. Probably most of it has evaporated after all this time."

"Naw, suh, cap'n! Naw, 'tain't! Jug Haid say de barrel heavy an' plumb full!" interposed Tight Eye.

"It is, is it? Well, if you two niggers can get it here without anybody seeing you or knowing anything about it, I'll give you two hundred dollars for it," said the crafty Bull, knowing that such a sum was practically beyond the comprehension of the negro.

Tight Eye licked his dry lips. "Two hundred dollahs in *cash?*" he asked breathlessly.

Bull appeared to consider.

"Yes," he assented at length, "I'll give you two hundred dollars in real money for it."

"Cap'n, yes, suh. Gits de ol' barrel heah to-morrow night, sho!" And the dusky schemer evaporated with a celerity astonishing in one deserving of the Virginia Creeper nickname and reputation. Tight Eye had work to do and places to go.

IT was pitch dark the following night when a rickety wagon, in the bed of which reposed a bulky parcel covered with a patched quilt, paused in the alley back of the Palace Pool Parlors. Two indistinct figures, blacker than the shadows which concealed them, quickly transferred the wagon's freight to the hall's back room, covered it with its quilt, and the vehicle rolled on.

Unaided, Tight Eye removed the quilt from the barrel, set the barrel upon the standards he had prepared for it, and quietly inserted a spigot in the head. Then he slipped into the pool hall and summoned his boss.

"Cap'n Bull, heah 'tis, jes' like Ah tole you," he whispered. "Is you got de money?"

"Wait a minute, nigger! Hold your horses!" huskily answered the crafty Bull. "How do I know what I'm buying. Let's sample that stuff."

So saying, he returned to the "soft" drink stand in the main hall and presently came back with a glass. First hefting the barrel to see if it was really full, he turned the spigot and drew a glass of the amber fluid.

Carefully, critically, he sniffed the aroma—then put it to his lips. First he took a tiny sip. Then another. Then a gulp. And then, with a grin, he drained the glass.

"Boy," he said solemnly, "you've sold a barrel! That's the pure quill!" Going quickly to the front room, he took a roll of bills from his safe and returned to the waiting Tight Eye. "There's your money," he said, handing the bills to the pop-eyed negro, "just like I promised. That's good liquor, all right, and it's worth every cent of the two hundred dollars I'm paying you for it."

Quickly Tight Eye pocketed the roll.

"Cap'n, yes, suh," he replied, and turned as though to leave.

"Don't you go away," warned Bull quickly, a sudden thought shaping itself in his brain. "I'm going to have several of my friends in here to-night to sample this liquor, and I want you to wait on them."

"Yes, suh, boss," assented Tight Eye, rolling his eyes.

This did not fit in with his plans for shaking the dust of that locality from his No. 12 shoes. No way around it, though, so far as he could see. Better call in Jug Head. Maybe the two could scheme some way out of this jam. So he sneaked down the alley, and presently the two conspirators returned, happy in the possession of more money than either of them ever had seen before, but fearful of what might be in store for them if Bull and his friends should drink too much.

"Dey ain't but two gallons of whisky in dat barrel," mused Tight Eye, "an' if dem white folks hits bottom

de fus' night, wheah at is dis nigger gwine to be? Ol' Cap'n Bull kill me, sho' as you bawn."

However, there appeared to be nothing to do but to await eventualities. It was almost midnight before the last patron left the Palace. At last Bull and his specially invited cronies prepared to enjoy to the utmost the treat promised them. Shutters were put up, blinds tightly drawn, and chairs ranged around a table piled high with sandwiches, pickles and other good things. Glasses were set out, and Tight Eye summoned to draw the first pitcher of whisky.

Bull had explained that he had some "special stuff" and thirsts were whetted to a keen edge.

As the amber liquid gurgled into the glasses pleased anticipation shone in every face. The first formal drink was taken in solemn silence.

"Ah-h-h-h!" gustily sighed one, smacking his lips. "That's real whisky!" A sentiment in which the others heartily concurred.

With what to the watching Tight Eye seemed inconceivable rapidity, the first pitcher of liquor was consumed. Summoned to draw another, the negro dawdled, killing all the time possible.

"You Tight Eye," warned Bull, "if you don't get a move on you I'll skin you alive! Hurry up with that liquor." And the Virginia Creeper, doing his best to live up to his sobriquet, took up the empty pitcher and returned to the rear room with the speed of a racing snail.

"Hopes dem white folks gits drunk good an' quick," he muttered. "Dem's de whisky drinkin'es' men Ah evah see. Ol' Cap'n Bull don' know it, but dis heah lickah ain' gwine las' long. An' neithah is Ah."

Almost as quickly as the first, and far too soon to please the worried Tight Eye, the second pitcher of whisky vanished.

A third and then a fourth went the same way. The situation was getting ticklish. Hastily Tight Eye and Jug Head conferred.

"Jug Haid," finally said the other, "dis lickah's runnin' powerful low. Slip 'cross de creek an' git us a quart frum de bootlaiger. 'Tain' no use tryin' to git good stuff like dat othah. Dem men in dah ain't gwine to know de diffrumce now, no way. De main thing is time. Does dey git to de bottom befoah you gits back, put a lily in mah han' to-morrow, kase Ah ain't gwine to be no moah." Whereupon Jug Head vanished with five dollars in his black paw and anxiety in his heart.

The next half hour was fraught with untold agony for Tight Eye. At the last visit to the barrel the final drop of whisky had oozed from the faucet, and Bull had reproved him bitterly for failing to fill the pitcher.

"It's dark back in dah, Cap'n Bull," Tight Eye had explained. "Thought ol' pitchah was full."

Now that same pitcher was getting dangerously empty again, and Bull and his friends were going strong. It didn't seem possible, mused the negro, for humans to hold so much strong liquor, but these friends of Bull's were copper-lined, used to the most potent, poisonous moonshine.

Just as Bull roared at him to come and draw another supply from the now exhausted barrel, Jug Head slipped through the door like a black shadow and saved the situation, for a little while, at least.

"How *kin* dem white folks drink all dat lightnin' an' not pass out?" whispered Tight Eye indignantly, as he watched the final and decidedly ultimate quart disappear down the throats of his employer and his cronies. "Somethin' gwine to happen an' happen soon! Craves to git me some air."

So saying, he slipped into his coat, made sure the roll of bills was in his pocket, and prepared to flit.

"Tight Eye, you lazy ape, come

here!" yelled Bull, somewhat thickly, from the front room.

"Cap'n, yes, suh! Comin' right on!" was the frightened reply as the negro shuffled slowly toward the open door.

"Get a move on you, boy! Draw us some more liquor! You're the laziest, triflingest nigger I ever seen in all my days! I ought to kill you!"

Slowly Tight Eye picked up the empty pitcher and slowly he started toward the back room. His movements were those of an exhausted tortoise, but his brain raced like an airplane engine.

Entering the rear room, he saw that Jug Head had vanished. "Bettah do some vanishin' mahself," he muttered as he rattled the pitcher against the spigot.

"Boy," came Bull's exasperated roar, "if you don't bring that licker here I'm coming after it myself!" His chair scraped on the floor as he pushed it back from the table.

Tight Eye set the pitcher down.

"Yes, suh, Ah's comin'!" he responded, snatching up his hat and stealing toward the back door.

Stealthily he turned the knob, easing the door open in silence. With a backward glance he stepped through the dark opening and into the arms of the "law."

"Po-leece!" gasped the startled negro as he glimpsed the glittering star and brass buttons confronting him.

"Go ahead, nigger! We're after bigger game than you!" gruffly said the policeman.

Tight Eye, needing no second invitation, slipped into the shadows of the alley.

At the same moment there came a thunderous blow on the front door of the Palace, shattering the lock, and instantly the place was filled with officers. Bull and his cronies, starting for the rear exit, met other policemen, and halted, dismayed.

"All right, Bull! We've got you this time!" exclaimed the burly sergeant in charge of the raiders. "Heard there was a big booze party here to-night, so we dropped in for a visit. Put him in the wagon, boys!"

As the protesting Bull and his companions were hustled, none too gently, into the waiting patrol wagon, the exploring sergeant found the whisky barrel in the back room.

"Here you are, men!" he shouted. "Here's a whole barrel of liquor in here! Take it along! Guess there is no doubt about having the goods on Bull this time, with all that whisky as evidence."

Ruefully Bull saw his precious barrel loaded into the wagon and later carried carefully into the police station. His cronies, after being booked as witnesses, were released, but Bull was locked in a cell and left alone to reflect that he was in real trouble at last.

It would, he decided, take everything he owned to get him clear and perhaps he would have to do a "stretch in stir" besides.

MEANWHILE the police busied themselves completing their case. The sergeant who had conducted the raid was proud of his job.

"Evidence," he exclaimed boastfully to the night lieutenant, "is what we didn't get nothing else but! Whole barrel of it! Had it in his back room, bold as brass. Just let me draw you a little, so you can see for yourself."

Taking up a water glass, the sergeant went to the barrel and turned the spigot.

Result—nothing.

Puzzled, he attempted to tilt the barrel. Something clearly was wrong. He could hear the *glug-glug* of liquid in the barrel, but nothing would run out. Strange!

"Loot," called the sergeant, "come here a minute. I don't savvy this!"

Hastily the lieutenant responded, and the two examined the barrel close-

ly. Finally the sergeant pulled out the spigot and thrust an inquiring finger into the hole.

"Ouch!" he exclaimed as the end of his finger brought up sharply against a solid obstruction. "There's another head in this thing. Let's tap the other end."

Promptly this was done, the spigot inserted, and the two policemen watched with bulging eyes as they drew off a glass—not of whisky, but pure, clear water.

"Well, I'll be hornswoggled!" gasped the lieutenant, as he realized the full import of the situation. "That's a fast one Bull pulled on you, Clancey. Not a drop of evidence! You might as well turn him loose!"

"You mean we got to spring that guy?" gulped the sergeant.

"Spring him is right," answered the other. "What you got to hold him on?"

So it was that, a few minutes later, the sergeant unlocked the door of Bull's cell and invited that worthy to help himself to a lot of air.

Bull was incredulous.

"Ain't you going to make a case against me?" he demanded. "You mean I'm free? How about that barrel of liquor?"

Suspiciously the big policeman eyed him.

"That was a damned fine brand of pure *water* you had in that barrel!" he growled out of the side of his mouth.

Bull's eyelid flickered. He thought he understood now. Anyhow, he was released, without a trial or even mention of the raid in the newspapers. He figured his liberty cheap at double the price. His pool hall license wasn't even to be revoked. Pretty soft, at that.

"Oh, very well!" he grinned, turning his footsteps toward the scene of the recent raid.

Now, Tight Eye had seen his employer fall into the clutches of the law. He knew something of that business himself, and he figured that Bull was good for a stay behind the bars for at least several hours before he could raise bond. So he was taking his own time about getting out of town. For the first time in a good many hours there was not a cloud in his sky. Trouble seemed remote indeed. He would just step across the creek and see that bootlegger about a little dram of drinking gin to keep him from getting lonesome on the train. Reaching this decision, he turned the corner and looked up, to fix a hypnotized gaze upon the towering form of the man he feared most to meet—Bull Cardigan.

"Oh-h-h-h, Lawdy! Ah's a gone nigger now!" he said to himself as he looked wildly around in search of some avenue of escape. "Ol' Cap'n Bull gwine kill me dis time, sho'!"

"You Tight Eye!" spoke Bull, less harshly than usual. "Come here to me, nigger."

Hesitatingly, the badly scared negro approached.

"Boy," said Bull, "it's a good thing for both of us that you got such good liquor for me. I figure I owe you another ten dollars." And he handed the amazed Tight Eye a bill.

"Cap'n, yes, suh!" he mumbled. "Ah always tries to do de bes' I kin."

"That's right," assented Bull, "but I expect you'd better get out of town for awhile. Maybe the police might want to ask you some questions."

Tight Eye rolled his eyes in apparent fright. "Yes, suh, boss. Ah aims to ketch me a train to-night," he gulped.

"All right, boy. Come back when you feel like it. Always got a job for you." And Bull, well pleased with himself, strolled on.

Tight Eye, still rooted to the spot, looked first at the departing Bull and then at the ten-dollar-bill in his hand.

"Fo' Gawd," he gasped, "luck done come mah way at las'. Somethin'

gwine to happen to me, though, if Ah don' git out of dis town quick." And he shuffled rapidly toward the railway station.

BULL CARDIGAN and one of his cronies who had been present at the raid sat talking confidentially in the Palace Pool Parlors several hours later.

"Sure, they sprung me," Bull said. "Sprung me without taking a dollar. That stuff they took for evidence was fine liquor, all right, but I never thought it would get me the break it did. And say, what do you think that big harp Clancey said when he turned me loose?

"'Bull,' he says, 'the stuff in that barrel is *water!*'

"Water! Say, ain't that a hot one?" And he winked wisely across the table at his companion, who gravely returned the wink.

Many miles away, in the day coach of a Virginia-bound train, Tight Eye sat gazing out into the darkness, his fingers thrust deep into a pocket and caressing a fat roll of bills as he crooned softly to himself:

"Ol' train a-zoomin' 'long de railroad track;
Ol' en-jine rollin' 'long de railroad track—
Goin' to take me 'way, but ain't goin' to bring me back."

THE END

Waterspouts

IN the South Seas, so calm and peaceful at times, occur the waterspouts that cause so many ships to vanish.

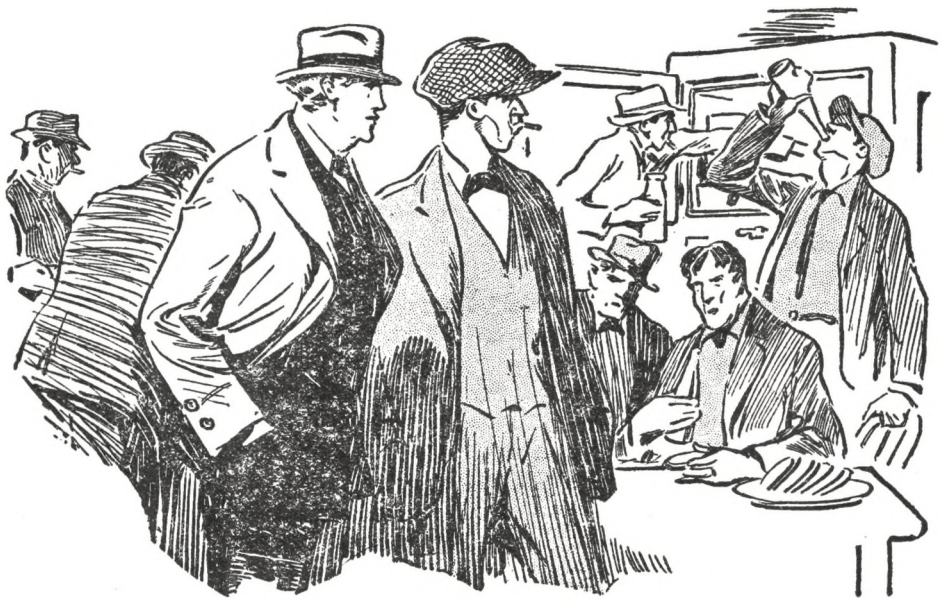
Once on a trip from the Celebes to the Philippines we encountered one. There were terrific squalls from the northwest around to south, with dead calm between squalls. A wild, confused sea was running, caused by tide rips and the wind blowing from so many directions. It looked like the end of creation; low black clouds that our topmast plowed through, and rain that came down in solid sheets.

In the midst of the entertainment a waterspout took shape, forming before our eyes in a dead calm. Within five minutes a southerly squall came along, driving the solid column of water, which was all of thirty feet in diameter, straight for our schooner.

At the base of the waterspout the sea boiled and swirled. White foam in big patches left the tops of the waves and disappeared aloft as they were ground up by the rapidly revolving water and air inside the spout. The top of the column was joined to the black clouds in a huge funnel-like shape, swaying and gyrating like a big, black tentacle. Straight for us it came.

We got out our rifles and fired shots into it, as we had heard that was the only way to break them, but we might as well have fired at the moon for all the good it did. Well, we waited, our eyes popping out of our heads. The crew seemed petrified. But the southwest squall blew itself out before it reached us. Westerly squalls blew it away. Other southerly squalls blew it our way again, until it seemed endowed with human intelligence and was playing with us like a sportive pup. Finally a strong northwester came along and blew it away until it gradually disappeared before our eyes as it had formed.

Captain Mansfield.



They were a representative collection of big city bad men

The Crime Circus

'Hands off!" decreed the Powers that Be—but irresistibly Gillian Hazeltine felt himself drawn to the side of the game little red-head who single-handed and unafraid faced a hostile world

By GEORGE F. WORTS

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GILLIAN HAZELTINE, ablest trial lawyer in the State, and known to the underworld, whom he so cleverly defends, as the "Silver Fox," at last chooses between the two beautiful Murphy sisters, Dorothy and Marguerite. He proposed to lovely brown-haired Dorothy, but is amazed when she demands that he give up his practice in criminal courts. He protests that it is his life work, that he wants to defend the under dog; at last he agrees to give up criminal practice for her sake.

At that moment Click Gorner, gangster and a client of Hazeltine's, bursts in with the news that he and Nicky Anderson saw Ben Lewis, night club owner, murdered; and that political forces are framing innocent Violet Dearing. Hazeltine refuses to take case. As Gorner leaves Hazeltine's camp, he is shot down by machine gun fire from a passing black car. A few minutes later Hazeltine gets a gruff anonymous telephone warning to keep off the Dearing case. He thinks he recognizes the voice as belonging to Mike Rafferty, gang leader.

Two more people telephone him, advising him to steer clear of the Lewis murder case: one is from Governor Brundage, shrewd and crooked politician; the other from Adelbert Yistle,

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State's attorney. Both hint that the affair has tremendously dangerous political ramifications.

Meantime Gillian continues to assure Dorothy that he will not take the case; but in self-protection he sends Nicky Anderson to Chicago, with orders to round up a gang of gunmen and return to him, whenever he got a message "Sell cotton."

Wally Brundage, the Governor's collegiate son, calls at Hazeltine's lodge, and begs him to defend Violet Dearing, whom he loves. He claims that his father has hounded her out of several jobs till she finally became a bootlegger, and is now attempting to railroad her to prison, because he feared Wally would marry her. Hazeltine maintains he won't touch the case, but consents to see Violet and advise her.

He finds her a beautiful red-haired girl, clever, plucky, and confident that he will help her. She tries every appeal to him, finally picturing what a glorious spectacle he could make of the trial, with a beautiful, innocent girl being railroaded by sinister forces, and the whole State involved. She suggests holding the trial in a stadium, making a crime circus of it. He smiles, but still refuses to defend her. As he leaves her cell she bravely says: "What a fight we could have put up together."

CHAPTER V.

FAIR WARNING.

GILLIAN left her and went out into the night court, where Wally Brundage was waiting.

The athlete sprang up with an eager grin. He clutched Gillian's arm.

"How is she?"

"She is bearing up wonderfully," said Gillian dryly, and wondered how a girl as clever as Violet Dearing could possibly have fallen for a man as shallow-minded as Wally Brundage.

"You're going to take her case?" the young man persisted.

"I am not, Wally."

"Then," the young man declared, "I'll tell you just what I think of you. I think you're a rotten crook and a shyster! I've a damned good mind to knock your block off!"

"As long as we're exchanging personal opinions," Gillian swiftly retorted, "I'll tell you what I think of you. I think you haven't brains or guts, or you'd have married that girl and taken her out of this town before she got herself into this mess!"

Wally Brundage did not strike him. He started sputtering. He was still sputtering when Gillian left him and, entering his roadster, drove to his house.

The tinkling of the telephone bell at his bedside wakened Gillian Hazeltine at a few minutes after eight. Before answering it, he poured himself a tumbler of ice water from the thermos pitcher on the bedside table, swallowed it leisurely while the bell rang. The cold drink completed his awakening process.

He crisply said "Hello!"

Dorothy Murphy—an angry, bitter Dorothy—was at the other end of the line.

"Gillian, you lied to me!"

"What, I lied to you, darling?"

"You told me you weren't going to handle this Dearing case."

"I told you the truth. I am not going to handle the Dearing case."

"The papers say you are!" she cried. "They all say you are!"

"How do they say it?"

"They say that Violet Dearing has consistently refused to see reporters and has referred all of them and all other inquiries to her lawyer, Gillian Hazeltine."

"I can explain that," he attempted to soothe her. "Those papers were printed at midnight. Until midnight Violet Dearing was certain that she could retain me to handle her case. I

went down to the jail and convinced her that I could not and would not handle her case."

"I wish you would read the things that Adelbert Yistle said about you!"

"He would say nasty things about me, dear. But aren't you a little sorry for misjudging me?"

"I don't trust you," the girl answered.

"Don't trust me?"

"You—you're so sly!"

Cold pearls of perspiration formed on Gillian's broad, square forehead. He could only say, "Why, Dorothy—Dorothy!"

"You are! You're sly and calculating. I don't think you love me. I don't think you love anybody in the world but yourself—or ever will!"

He said gravely: "What you're saying in so many words, Dorothy, is that you aren't sure that you love me. Isn't that about the size of it?"

There was a long silence at her end of the wire. Finally:

"I think we ought to consider each other a little longer before we do anything decisive."

"I thought we were going hunting for a ring this morning," said Gillian sadly.

"Not this morning," Dorothy decided. "Good-by."

The line clicked; it was empty. Gillian thoughtfully replaced the receiver on its hook; poured himself another glass of ice water and swallowed it.

Something, he decided, had happened to change Dorothy from the clinging passion of last night to cold and detached disapproval.

Being a logical man, he cast about for logical reasons. His first response to this probing was to leap from the bed and pace across the room to the large mirror above his dressing table. He let the shade up to the top; morning sunshine came flooding in. He peered at himself; discounted the dark stubble on his cheeks and chin.

He didn't, he vowed, look a day older than thirty, even at this hour of the morning, when every one looks his worst. His dark, rippling hair was sprinkled with gray, but that, he had repeatedly been told, merely heightened his distinction. He was, as all men are, vain. He knew, without being told, as he frequently was, that he was handsome—a strikingly handsome man. His eyes were clear and bright and a-sparkle with youth. His face was unlined, except for the deep saturnine grooves which extended downward from his nose, and they had been there since twenty.

He turned frowningly away from the mirror. Why, he wanted to know, had Dorothy Murphy suddenly turned against him?

Gillian rang for Toro, and the butler presently appeared with the morning papers and a special delivery letter.

"You can get my bath ready," said Gillian. And looked quickly through the papers.

In them, he believed, lay the explanation of Dorothy Murphy's distressing change of heart.

Headlines screamed that Ben Lewis had been killed by Bootleg Queen. Drops asserted that Gillian Hazeltine had been retained by the beautiful murderess.

He looked carefully over the front page of the Greenboro *Morning Journal,* because he knew that that was the paper the Murphy sisters read over their breakfast. And on the front page he found what he believed to be the explanation of Dorothy's sudden about face.

It was an interview given out by Adelbert Yistle, the prosecuting attorney. Adelbert Yistle had, in Gillian's opinion, a mouth several sizes too large for his ears. He had been Gillian's opponent in countless court-room frays, and he had emerged from these battlefields a sadder but never a wiser man.

Occasionally, when such sensational events as this took place, he was the

victim of a phenomenon which Gillian described as "another rush of nothing to the head." Publicly he took such occasions as this to belittle and insult the Silver Fox.

On this occasion he said, among other things:

"It has been brought to my attention that Gillian Hazeltine, sometimes known as the Silver Fox for a reason that requires no explanation to any intelligent man, has been retained to defend this notorious underworld figure, Violet Dearing.

"I may say with all confidence that the case against the Dearing girl is so strong, so complete, that not even the trickiest kind of Hazeltine defense—than which there is nothing trickier—will save her from the electric chair.

"A reputable citizen, commissioned by the mayor to investigate vice conditions in this city, chanced to be in Ben Lewis's gaming establishment, the Silver Slipper Club, and was about to enter the office of Ben Lewis, when the Dearing woman rushed past him and fired the two shots which resulted in the death of the notorious gambler.

"So familiar am I with the methods of the Silver Fox that I can, in spite of the damning case against her, hear him rising in court and saying, 'Defendant pleads not guilty!'

"Once again we are brought face to face with a condition so grave that the taxpayers of this State should be alarmed. We are about to witness Gillian Hazeltine, the showman, conducting another court room farce! It will be, of course, a long trial—the Silver Fox sees to it that his trials are always long. We will see the State spending thousands and thousands of dollars, so that Gillian Hazeltine may cavort before the public.

"We will see the newspapers harvesting riches. We will see the telegraph companies harvesting riches. We will see Gillian Hazeltine adding to his plunder and his notoriety. We will see Violet Dearing, if by some miracle she is freed, going into the motion pictures at a fabulous salary. We will see the deplorable spectacle, in short, of the State taxpayers footing the bill for a big show—for which it receives not a dollar of the millions of profits the big show makes—for others!"

GILLIAN read no more. He had learned the source of inspiration behind Dorothy's change of heart; moreover, he was interested in that last paragraph. It sent his mind back to a pair of deep-blue, fearless eyes under a shining cap of red hair.

"What a fight we could have put up together!"

In the light of the new day, and in the light cast by Adelbert Yistle's extremely unsportsmanlike interview, her suggestion of a crime circus did not seem so preposterous. It tickled Gillian's sense of the ridiculous—staging a popular murder trial in the Lincoln Stadium; charging, say, ten dollars for "ring-side" seats—a dollar in the bleachers!

He found himself chuckling. Then his glance fell upon the special delivery letter. He opened it and read:

MY DEAR MR. HAZELTINE:

I have bribed a guard for paper and pen and ink. A thought occurred to me after you left: Any girl who would impose such unfair terms upon as great a lawyer as you are will be certain to crack under the strain of the next few days. I will bet a box of superb cigars against a pair of pure silk stockings—size eight, lisle toes and tops not wanted—that you will take my case before a week has passed.

Why? Because I interest you so much.

You are not the kind of man to fall in love seriously with a girl who would make you give up the great work you do. She must be a terrible sap.

I await your reply with the most intense interest.

Cordially yours,

VIOLET DEARING.

Greenboro Jail, October 10th.

Gillian entered his office, which adjoined his bedroom, sat down at his

typewriter, and laboriously picked out with two fingers the following brief composition:

MY DEAR MISS DEARING:
I will bet you a box of the best pure silk size eight stockings available in the civilized world against a Pittsburgh stogie that, before you are once again a free woman, you will have told Wally Brundage to roll his hoop.
Why? Because you are too bright. You've made your point!
Yours for the freedom of the shes—

Gillian signed the letter "The Silver Fox," addressed and stamped an envelope, and gave it to Toro to be mailed immediately.

His phone began ringing while he shaved. It continued to ring while he bathed.

He answered it when he had rubbed himself completely dry.

A reporter for the Greenboro *Daily Pictorial* wanted to know if he had anything to say about Adelbert Yistle's scorching comments in the morning's *Journal.*

"Only that Mr. Yistle's comments were slightly premature," was Gillian's reply. "You can tell your readers simply and sweetly that I am not going to handle the Dearing case; that I have not entertained the slightest intention of handling the case. Do I make myself clear?"

"You do, Mr. Hazeltine," the reporter laughed. "The papers all are going to rewrite that interview and play it up for all it's worth. I guess he's put his foot in his mouth again."

Hardly had Gillian hung up the receiver when the bell began ringing again. He put it to his ear to hear the rasping voice that had so irritated him at his camp last night.

"Hazeltine?"

"Yes."

"I'm givin' yuh one more warnin'. I told yuh last night to keep your hands off this Dearing case. I see by the mornin' papers you're goin' to defend that girl. I've found out yuh went down to the jail last night to see her."

"And I'm warning you, Rafferty," Gillian angrily interrupted, "that two can play this game. One more word out of you and I'll have your gang mopped up. I can do it, and you know it."

There was a somewhat lengthy silence at the other end. Then:

"Keep out of this, Hazeltine, or your name is mud. You know what happened to Click Gorner. Don't let it happen to you. That's all."

Gillian jiggled the hook. He presently obtained the attention of Central and put in a call for the residence of Chief of Police Bellows. When the gruff voice of that prominent official responded, Gillian said:

"Mr. Bellows, this is Gillian Hazeltine. Twice in the past twenty-four hours I have had anonymous telephone warnings to keep away from the Dearing case."

The chief of police chuckled.

"Then why don't you keep away from it?"

"I've announced publicly," said Gillian, "that I do not intend to defend the Dearing girl. I may change my mind. Whether I do or not, I am requesting a police escort until this trouble simmers down."

"Mr. Hazeltine, I can't let you have it."

"Why not?"

"Tell me who's been sending these threatening messages and I'll make an arrest."

"His name," said Gillian, "is Mike Rafferty."

"I don't believe it," said the chief.

"Why don't you believe it?"

"Why—why—" Mr. Bellows sputtered. "It's preposterous. Mike Rafferty—"

"It chances," Gillian wearily interrupted him, "that I know probably as much of what is going on under the crust in this city as you do. I know Mike Rafferty's gang got Click Gorner

last night. I know Mike Rafferty has just been talking to me. Twice, now, he has threatened my life. Are you going to give me a police escort?"

"The safest thing for you to do, Mr. Hazeltine," responded Greenboro's highest police official, "is to duck out of town until the smoke clears. No; I won't give you a police escort. This killing of Ben Lewis has stirred up trouble in that section that may turn into a volcano. I can't spare a man. Sorry."

Gillian rudely jiggled the hook. When the operator answered, he called Western Union. He was presently dictating a message, which ran:

Jerry Conway, Hotel Weymouth,
Chicago, Ill.
Sell cotton.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

HE dressed with deliberation. Soberly he consumed his large breakfast. His conversation with Chief of Police Bellows had confirmed all his suspicions. The Ben Lewis murder was the crux of a frame-up, and the Dearing girl was the goat. The scheme was being so cunningly engineered that even he had been included in the calculations. Rafferty had been told to frighten him. The chief of police had been told to frighten him. Who, he wanted to know, was doing the calculating?

Gillian decided to visit Governor Brundage at once.

It was a three-hour drive from Greenboro to Springton, the State capital, and Gillian was sufficiently prudent to make the drive in his coupé equipped with windshield and windows of triplex glass, which is bullet-proof. He had had the bullet-proof glass installed a year ago when, during a murder trial, he had received many anonymous threats. It gave him a feeling of great security to know that he was, while in the coupé, safe from one of those hand machine guns.

Shortly before noon he parked his coupé in the area in front of the State Executive's mansion and was presently making his presence known to a sallow, micy-eyed secretary.

Half an hour elapsed before he was ushered into the private office of Governor Brundage.

The Governor, seated under a great window at his spacious walnut desk, did not look up for several minutes; and Gillian was reasonably sure that the delay in admitting him and the Governor's present preoccupation were intended to put him in his place. He was not, it chanced, of the Governor's political party.

He was at liberty to make certain discoveries. Governor Brundage's hair had grown a shade grayer and perceptibly thinner in the year since he had last seen him. His face was as red as ever; the mark of the day laborer was still somehow stamped upon him, although he had tried, in every way, to erase that mark.

In Gillian's estimation, he was simply a living proof of the theory that it takes three generations to make a gentleman. Or is it six?"

From all of which it may be gleaned that Gillian did not like Governor Brundage, did not appreciate Governor Brundage, and rather believed that Governor Brundage was out of place in the gubernatorial mansion.

At long last, the Governor's reddish, hot blue eyes were lifted from the absorbing documents he was reading.

He looked up and saw Gillian standing there, hat in hand.

He did not rise to greet him; made no move to offer Gillian his hand. He merely said, rudely:

"What's on your mind, Gillian? You see I'm pretty busy."

To which Gillian briskly retorted:

"I imagine that three of you would sometimes be almost as busy as one of me!"

Governor Brundage started to glare; he reddened. He switched off his natural reaction into a hearty burst of laughter.

He said:

"I forget how important you are. I'm pestered by so many nuts. Of course, you're not a nut."

"I think I am," said Gillian, "or I wouldn't be wasting my time talking to you. Curiosity drove me here."

He, too, laughed heartily.

Governor Brundage frowningly lighted a fat blond cigar without offering one to Gillian and said:

"Let's stop being nasty. I said last night I wanted to see you. Since then, I've learned on excellent authority you don't intend to defend the Dearing girl. If that's the case, you've made your visit for nothing. That was what I wanted to see you about."

Gillian lighted a long slender brunette cigar.

"All right," said Gillian. "*Let's* stop being nasty—after I say that you've got a hell of a nerve trying to order me here or there or wherever. You're a tin Governor, and you know I know it. Stop being so pompous. I knew you when you wore red underwear. You're cocky. You think you've scared me off the Dearing case. Word has gone forth from imperial headquarters to scare Gillian Hazeltine off the Dearing case. I was staying out of the Dearing case for purely personal reasons."

Governor Brundage chuckled, as if deeply amused.

"I don't care why you're staying out of it. I only want you to *stay* out. Now that that's off your chest, what can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to look you over," Gillian answered, "to decide which part of you I wanted to hit first."

The Governor straightened up in his chair.

"You're getting rough, Hazeltine," he growled.

"I'm going to get rougher before I get any smoother," Gillian calmly warned him. "The fact of the matter is, Governor, I am absolutely fed up with your dirty work. Specifically, I'm talking about the Dearing girl."

"Ah!" cried the Governor. "The stanch defender of virtue!"

"Your son dropped in on me last night," Gillian went on. "He told me some things I had become well acquainted with before. How you had the poor kid hounded simply because Wally had fallen for her, when you had higher ambitions for him. How you drove her into becoming, at last, a bootlegger. He even intimated that this murder charge against her is the very neat result of a deliberate frame-up—with you pulling the strings."

"Don't be a fool all your life!" Governor Brundage roared. "You ought to know better than that."

"Why didn't you want me to take this case?" Gillian snapped.

The Governor did not answer. His glare, however, was eloquent: in truth, it was murderous.

"Because you knew I'd raise hell?"

The Governor drew a deep breath. "Gillian, let's be reasonable."

"Very well," Gillian agreed. "Where shall we begin? I think you're a skunk of the first water and you think I'm a dangerous trouble maker. We're both right. Big Ben knew too much about you. You hated the Dearing girl because she was making a fool out of you. By having one of Rafferty's gang kill Ben and framing the girl, you killed two birds with one stone—I mean, with two bullets. That's what *I* know. Now, *you* be reasonable."

"Try and prove it," the Governor snorted.

"I will prove it!"

"How can you? You've said you aren't going to handle the case?"

Gillian did some fast thinking. One of two people must be lost. But one might not be hopelessly lost.

"What a fight we could have put up together!" said a clear, brave voice in his memory.

"I don't trust you! You're sly!" said another.

Gillian concluded his thinking.

"I'm going to change my mind," he announced. "I've decided to defend the Dearing girl!"

CHAPTER VII.

OPEN WAR.

GOVERNOR BRUNDAGE clamped down his teeth on his fat blond cigar and contemplated Gillian with frank, cold hate.

"You can't do it," he finally ground out.

"Why not, Governor?"

"Because I won't let you!"

"You mean that you'll try to stop me?"

"I mean, Hazeltine," said the Governor with deadly slowness, "by touching this case, you're jamming your hand into a hot mangler. You don't realize what's going on under the surface. Hell is popping."

"And you, Governor, are sitting on the lid—trying to hold it down. How hot that lid is!"

"I'm warning you not to take this case. I'm warning you that by taking it your life won't be worth a nickel. You'll never reach the court room alive."

"You ought to know me well enough not to make threats," Gillian answered. "I love a fight. Threat on!"

"I'll make a deal with you," the Governor surrendered. "Take her case. Go ahead! Put in a straight defense on the grounds of self-defense. Any defense you want. I'll have the state's attorney go easy. I'll have the jury bring in a verdict of guilty, second degree homicide. I'll have the judge let her off with ten years. She can halve that with good behavior."

"You'll hand-pick the jury?"

"Sure! We'll hand-pick the jury."

"Is that the best deal you can offer?"

"Isn't it fair enough, when I can railroad her through to the chair whether you defend her or not?"

"You're sure of yourself, aren't you?" Gillian growled.

"You bet I am! Are you going to play—or aren't you?"

"Whatever way I decide I'll have to try the case before a fixed judge, won't I?"

"You ought to know you will, Gillian!"

"Well, I'll have to bear it," said Gillian. "I'm just full of enough wild cat to tell you that I'm going to kick you off that lid you're sitting on—and let hell pop!"

"You won't play ball?"

"Nope. I'm going to fight. I'm going into that court room and when I get through with my bag of tricks, that girl is going to walk out of there a free woman!"

"You can't do it!"

"Want to make a little side bet, Governor?"

"I'll bet you a five thousand dollar marble monument," answered the Governor, "that I attend your funeral before you attend mine!"

"I'll take that," said Gillian promptly. "And I'll make another. I'll bet you a solid bronze casket with sterling silver handles and a genuine plate glass window that you're not sitting in that chair or anywhere near it in six months! Speaking of playing ball, I'll make that bet include you playing with a ball and chain inside of a year!"

The Governor bent forward and pressed a pearl button.

The door opened and the sallow, cold-eyed secretary appeared.

"Show this fellow out!" snarled the Governor, and his anger so blurred his pronunciation of "show" that it sounded suspiciously like "throw."

Gillian retired from the office with the gratifying feeling a man has when he has said the nastiest things his

tongue can summon to a man he heartily and justly detests.

GILLIAN drove rapidly through the streets of Springton to the State Capitol building. He was presently having lunch in a near-by restaurant with no less a power than the Speaker of the upper House of the State Legislature, a lanky, cadaverous man with bulging black eyes: Senator Angus McMorrow.

Amiably Gillian discussed the topics of the day with the Senator until they had had their coffee and chocolate éclairs. Over cigars, in muted tones, the Silver Fox began:

"Mac, I want a bill rushed through for the Governor's signature by tomorrow noon. The Governor will veto the bill whether or not he knows that I'm the author of it. As a matter of fact, I'm not the author. The author is an authoress. Both Houses, meeting in joint session, are to pass my bill over the gubernatorial veto. Do I make myself clear?"

"As clear as mud," said Senator McMorrow.

"As I see the situation," Gillian explained himself, "you have ably gathered unto yourself control over not only the majority of votes in both Houses, but more than three-quarters of the votes. In short, you can put through any measure that tickles your fancy.

"You are, if you wish to assert your power, a stronger man in this State's affairs than that second-story man occupying the executive mansion. You are, if I may mix poesy with religion, a modern Messiah about to lead the helpless people of this great State out of the jungles of graft and political corruption."

"Stop this gush, Gillian, and get down to cases."

"The reason for this deplorable state of affairs in this great State," Gillian amiably ambled on, "is that we have a crook in the executive mansion—a crook who has rotted the entire political structure of the State. In you, we have an honest man making laws and doing everything in his power to undo the wrong the other one does. But you aren't doing enough. You aren't kicking the crook out of the executive mansion!"

"Get to your point, Gillian; this is my busy day."

"You have waited," Gillian proceeded, "ever since the Governor grievously disappointed you by being reelected, for an opportune moment to knock his pins out from under him. Do you still hanker to knock the pins from under him, Mac?"

"You know damned well I do," said Senator McMorrow fervently.

"Actually you can do it," Gillian said. "But, regrettably, I am apt to get all the credit."

"I don't care a hoorah for credit," said the Senator grimly. "I want that crook out of there! What's your proposal?"

"You've heard of Big Ben Lewis's murder?"

The Senator nodded. "He was a tough egg, but a square shooter. Did the Dearing girl kill him?"

"She did not."

"You defending her?"

"I am."

Senator McMorrow grinned. "She needn't worry."

Gillian smiled.

"Thank you, Mac. The point is, who did kill Ben? This is straight stuff: It's a large, dirty political job, with Brundage pulling the strings."

"Frame up?"

"Ice-cold, Mac."

The Senator nervously lighted a cigarette. Gillian proceeded to give him as much information as he was reasonably certain of. He was eventually interrupted by Senator McMorrow's impatient:

"I know that most of that is true, but where do I cut in?"

Gillian fished from his pocket Adel-

bert Yistle's interview which he had clipped from the Morning Journal.

"Read that," he requested.

The Senator quickly read the interview. Several times he smiled, wanly. He handed it back to Gillian.

"It's true, Gillian. You are a showman. Barnum had nothing on you. The people like to be fooled, and you're an artist at fooling them. You are amusing and dangerous. But so is Darrow. So are a lot of other fancy-priced criminal lawyers. I enjoy following your trials in the papers more than going to theatres. Why don't you reform?"

"I have," said Gillian, gravely.

SENATOR McMORROW stared at him. "Gillian, let's make this a jokeless Thursday!"

"I am in earnest," Gillian insisted. "I have been shown the errors of my ways."

"By a woman?"

"Of course!"

"You're through buying judges, bribing juries and introducing crooked evidence?"

"All through."

"How about surprise witnesses?"

"I must draw the line there. I depend on surprise witnesses for drama. But let's get on to this bill I want you to put through. Don't laugh until I have finished. This is jokeless Thursday. What Yistle says is true enough. The State, the taxpayers groaning under their burden, foot the bill while the performers wax rich and famous. I want a bill introduced whereby the State will receive huge returns from popular murder trials."

"How can it be done?"

"Don't smile, Mac. It's still jokeless Thursday. I want the State to lease the Lincoln Stadium at Greenboro for the Dearing trial. By clever press agenting, we can pack it for every performance — sixty thousand people. Ringside seats will sell for ten dollars. Prices will grade off to one dollar for the worst bleacher seats.

"We'll install microphones over the judge, the witness stand and the lawyers, and loudspeakers throughout the stadium so that every whisper can be heard. We'll lease the radio rights to the highest bidder. We'll charge a stiff fee for newspaper representation. At lowest estimates, the State should take in at the gate a hundred and seventy thousand dollars a day, over all expenses."

Gillian stopped. Senator McMorrow was softly chuckling. He looked like a bird of prey when he laughed. Actually, he was the ablest and most honest politician in the State.

"You think it's funny, do you?" the Silver Fox growled.

"It's positively overwhelming," laughed the Senator.

"Finish your laugh and then react," suggested Gillian.

Senator McMorrow stopped laughing.

"It's a glorious idea, Gillian. It comes directly under the heading of idealistic legislation. The taxpayers will be delighted. It's non-political, in a way."

"My suggestion is that you tell reporters that it grew out of Adelbert Yistle's brain. He needs credit, poor devil. It would make him so popular with the people he could have anything in the State—including the Governorship. Why not? He's honest and dumb. You could put a ring in his nose and lead him wherever you wished. He'd make a perfect Governor."

"He would," agreed the Senator. I'll act on that suggestion, too. Any others, Gillian?"

"As far as I'm concerned," Gillian replied, "the stadium will give us, through me, precisely the opportunity we wish for laundering Brundage's political linen in public. We'll have a changing mob daily of sixty thousand voters; we'll have radio listeners all over the State, all over the country—"

"Don't forget, Gillian, he'll have the judge fixed."

"I've taken that into consideration," said Gillian.

The Senator arose.

"I'll start the machinery moving," he said. And looked at Gillian with hawkish eyes.

"How would you like to be the next Governor yourself?"

"When next election comes around," Gillian amiably answered, "I firmly intend to be eating breadfruit under a palm tree in the South Sea Islands with the lady of my choice! No, thanks, Mac. I wouldn't look well with a ring in my nose!"

"You know damned well," the Senator barked, "you'd have your own free will in all matters. We'd work together in the most perfect harmony."

"It doesn't appeal to me," said Gillian. "I'd rather be the slave of a beautiful red-haired woman. I mean," he hastily amended, "of a glorious brown-haired woman."

"You and the ladies!" sniffed the Senator.

"Life would be a desert without them," Gillian sighed.

GILLIAN generated several hundred horsepower of thinking on his return drive to Greenboro. He devoted high-powered thought to the Dearing case. He devoted high-powered thought to Governor Brundage.

At times, it was true, his mind flittered away from these ponderous subjects and lingered gayly amid romantic fancies. There was the kiss that Dorothy Murphy had given him last night. Dorothy was alluring. She had beautiful hands and she used some scent in her hair that exerted a compelling influence upon him. Marguerite, too, was charming. She had, perhaps, the most beautiful ankles in Greenboro; her slim blond perfection was more than provocative. When she pouted her red, beautiful mouth, a man's heart accelerated madly. Yes; Marguerite was adorable.

Hair of brown and eyes of brown or hair of gold and eyes of blue?

Impishly, a third head intruded. It was red. The eyes beneath it were that rarest shade of dark blue—violet.

Gillian found himself frowning. He wasn't fickle. He could swear that he wasn't fickle. Or did he merely love them all with a nice, wholesome, brotherly love? Yet he persistently saw himself lunching upon breadfruit under a South Sea palm, first with a laughing brown-haired girl, next with a laughing golden-haired girl, and again with a laughing red-haired girl.

Still, in fondest fancy, he trapped himself in the mental act of kissing each of the three. Was this brotherly love?

"I am a dirty dog," Gillian addressed himself. "I have the makings of a first class polygamist. But what is a man to do? What a sap I am! As if I could ever fall for that Dearing brat!"

That reasoning comforted him. He stepped on the gas; plunged his mind into a consideration of smelly State politics and was deep in concentration, clipping along at forty-five miles an hour, when a shabby black Packard sedan of ancient vintage dashed out of a side road and fell in behind his coupé.

Gillian eyed it carelessly in the mirror above his windshield, and paid it no heed.

He was reviewing Governor Brundage's long record of misdoings when the sedan shot up alongside him with the evident intention of passing.

Not until it was abreast did Gillian come fully awake to the evil identity of that car. A sedan of that age and model had followed Click Gorner to Dexter last night! A sedan of that age and model had pulled away from Ben Lewis's back entrance a few seconds after his murder, according to Nicky Anderson's testimony!

Gillian, forced to the right side of the road, shot a side glance to the left

and saw that the curtains of the sedan were lowered. Then the curtain of the rear door was raised a dozen inches.

An ugly black muzzle was poked out. Behind it, for a brief period of breathless horror, Gillian saw the red face, the low forehead, the greasy, silver-blond hair of Mike Rafferty.

The gang leader was grinning. It was a grin of death.

The muzzle of the machine gun was pointed fairly at Gillian's body.

There was suddenly a splattering of sound. In the triplex window on that side of the coupé appeared an intricate white cobweb of many centers.

The black sedan shot ahead down the road. Gillian, holding his breath, slowed to a stop. He held his breath until his lungs threatened to burst. Certainly, certainly, that pane of glass had not stopped that entire burst of bullets. Certainly, an examination must prove that at least one of the missiles had found its way into some vital spot of him.

He waited for the messenger of pain to come from that certain wound. He waited. No pain came.

Gillian expelled his breath. With extreme delicacy he lifted his coat on the left side and examined it. There were no holes. He lifted his hand and delicately felt of his cheeks, of his head. There were no holes.

Now he examined the window which had so miraculously stopped that burst of bullets. Three of the bullets, flattened, were sticking in the holes they had bored.

He wished he had a lovely, sympathetic, understanding wife at home to show that window to. He could hear her pretty squeals of dismay; could feel the delightful pressure of her arms about his neck, where she would impulsively throw them in a gesture of thanksgiving that he was safe.

A brown-haired wife was quickly followed by a golden-haired wife who was as swiftly displaced by a red-haired wife—all throwing their arms about Gillian's neck, all hysterical with joy that he had been saved from the bullets of the Rafferty gang! Oh, these mental marriages! He was fickle in the face of death!

"How simple it would be," Gillian sighed, as he drove on, "if I had only been born a Turk!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GUN MOB.

GILLIAN'S heart missed two beats when he entered the kitchen of his house. He generally entered his house via the kitchen, because he was generally hungry. Against one kitchen wall stood an electric refrigerator of the size usually associated with flourishing butcher shops. This was kept stocked with a variety of tidbits pleasing to Gillian's palate. He used up huge amounts of energy; therefore, he consumed huge amounts of food. He liked everything. He was not a gourmet; he was a gourmand.

But he did not approach the refrigerator when he entered the kitchen after his long drive from Springton, fresh from his experience with Rafferty's gang.

He thought he had been trapped. the kitchen was full of young toughs, sprawling about on chairs and table, smoking cigarettes, drinking Canadian ale which they had filched from that selfsame refrigerator.

The kitchen, with all doors and windows closed, shades drawn, and hundred-watt tungstens glaring, smelled to him like a fox cage.

His terror dropped away from him in a sigh of relief when he saw the lean ugly face of Nicky Anderson.

Said that worthy:

"Here they are, Mr. Hazeltine."

There were eight of them, not counting Nicky; as representative a collection of big city bad men as could have been selected from a month of police dragnetting.

As Gillian's fears abated, he glanced quickly from face to face. And in each face he found at least two of those three characteristics common to the countenances of all out-and-out crooks: close-set eyes, long noses, receding chins.

Nicky said:

"We've got our rods parked out in the bushes. What's the lay, Mr, Hazeltine? When do we slaughter Rafferty's mob? We're rearing to go. These boys are all high-class shots. I hand-picked the Loop to find 'em."

Gillian looked the gunmen over carefully. He seated himself on the edge of the long, porcelain-topped kitchen table and faced them. He said:

"I don't think a tougher gang than this has ever been brought together in the history of American crime. I'll bet I know every last one of you. You," he said, jabbing a finger at a long-faced young man with oyster-colored eyes, "are Frisco Joe. You're Hop Smith. You're Slug Lenihan. You're Dopey Levine. You're Loop Larry. You're Benny the Knife. You're Kip Murphy. And you're Snake Harris.

"A fine bunch of yeggs you are! A bunch of stir-bugs! A bunch of hop-heads!"

The choice little group laughed boisterously.

"I'm going to give you a piece of big news," Gillian went on. "If any one of you came down here with the idea of gypping me, blackmailing me, slipping me the double cross in any shape, form or matter, you'd better knock the idea out of your heads quick. I know your records. You know mine. I'm a gentleman, but there's a tough streak in me. I'd walk through hell in my bare feet after any man who played dirty with me. Get that, you yeggs?"

There was a respectful murmuring of assent.

"Stand up, you bums. You've got your nerve poking into my icebox and messing up my kitchen. I suppose that box looked like a crib and you just had to crack it!

"Now, listen to me. You're down here to follow orders. This isn't a killing bee. I'm going to pay you well. I'm going to need you for a considerable time. I'm going to pay you a hundred dollars a day apiece for pulling off a long, hard job. If you fumble it, you don't get a dime. It's a P. O. D. job—pay on delivery. Get that?"

Snake Harris growled: "How de hell do we eat?"

"Not out of that icebox," snarled Gillian. "You'll get expenses. I'll allow you ten dollars a day apiece for expenses. Now don't go throwing it away on booze and snow. Eat something once in a while."

"What's the racket?" Slug Lenihan impatiently put in.

"It's this," said Gillian, staring into one pair of shifty eyes after another, until he had reached Dopey Levine and the end of the line. "You're to round up Rafferty's gang. There are seven of 'em. You're to drive out with them—alive, not dead!—to my summer camp on Lake Largo, and keep them there, prisoners, as long as I say. When you've got them out there I'll tell you what to do with them."

"What if they fire on us?" whined Loop Larry.

"You'll have to figure on some way of pulling it off so they won't fire. For important reasons not one of them must be killed. I've got a dozen pairs of bracelets upstairs. I'll get them for you. You've got to figure on a way of capturing the gang, getting them out to Lake Largo without being detected, and keeping them there without being discovered. It's a big job. If you pull it off without a hitch I'll give each of you, at the conclusion of the contract, five hundred dollars bonus.

"You'd better let Nicky take charge. He knows the lay here. He knows the lay at Lake Largo. I don't want to know a thing that's going on until

you've got them safely at my camp. Then, Nicky, you can phone me. Come up to my office and I'll give you the bracelets and some expense money—also a code to use in phoning me. I wouldn't trust this gang with that code."

HE and Nicky ascended to the Silver Fox's office. Gillian said:

"If you get Rafferty and his gang locked up at Lake Largo, call me up and say anything that comes into your head about *plumbing*. I'll understand anything you say about plumbing as meaning you pulled off the job successfully. Seven faucets or seven leaks or seven of any plumbing fixtures you mention will mean you've got seven men. You used to be an electrician. Put in a switch on the phone wire, hidden somewhere, so no one but you can use the phone. To play absolutely safe, post one of your men at the phone—keep a twenty-four hour guard over it—to prevent any of Rafferty's gang from getting at it. We must keep that phone open, but if one of Rafferty's men should get at it—the whole scheme is cooked."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Hazeltine," Nicky promised. "Say! I wanted to tell yuh yuh made a bad boner down in de kitchen. Dat ain't Dopey Levine. Dat's Dopey's brother, Freighter!"

"All right," Gillian chuckled, "Tell Freighter I mentioned my mistake to you. Freighter? He was mixed up in that Seventeenth National Bank stick-up job, wasn't he?"

"He was de outside man, Mr. Hazeltine. Who wised yuh?"

Gillian grinned. "If anything big is pulled off in yegg circles that I don't sooner or later know all about, just mention it to me, will you, Nicky? Do you think you can handle that bunch of cutthroats?"

"Wit' you behind me, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Drill it into their heads that hell will be an icebox compared to what will happen to any of them that double-crosses me."

"I won't have to. Dey're scared stiff of yuh."

"Nicky—" The Silver Fox looked thoughtfully at the crook. "I've always thought you were a pretty good egg. The record I've been keeping of you for the past ten years says that you've tried to go straight three times. Why'd you slip?"

The gunman stared at Gillian's shoes.

"The gang brought so much pressure to bear on you you had to go crooked each time?"

Nicky nodded.

"Look here, Nicky, why don't you cut out the dope?"

The crook lifted his head and looked Gillian in the eye.

"I ain't had a sniff of de stuff in better'n a year!"

"I'm no Sunday school teacher," Gillian went on. "I've helped a lot of you guys go straight, because I seem to know the answer better than you do. Sooner or later you end up with a life stretch—and pretty soon you're a cuckoo old man pottering around the prison yard. That's a hell of a way to end your life. My opinion of you is that you are not an incurable criminal—talking straight from the heart, Nicky. You're a clever kid. You ought to know the next time they nail you, you go up for life."

"I been framed—" Nicky began.

"Can that stuff!" Gillian snapped. "I'm no reformer. Part of my job has always been to help fellows like you who deserve it. Click Gorner was an incurable criminal. He was the last man standing in the way of your going straight. The old gang is gone. You're going to have a nice piece of change out of this job I've turned over to you. It ought to net you ten thousand dollars, because I'm going to pay you double what I'm paying those yeggs downstairs. What are you going to do with it?"

Nicky lifted his eyes again. He said nothing.

"That's honest money," Gillian went on. "You're helping in one of the biggest political clean-up jobs that's ever been pulled off in this country. If you get away with it you'll have broken at least three criminal statutes—carrying a gun, banditry and kidnaping. But it won't be for any crooked purpose. I'm not gypping anybody. You are acting, actually, as my personal police.

"That Rafferty mob tried to get me this afternoon, Nicky. They pulled up alongside my car on the turnpike and gave me a burst from that Browning gun—but I happened to have bullet-proof glass in the automobile I was driving.

"If you don't kidnap them they'll get me sure. Aside from that, in kidnaping them you'll be working *with* the law and not against it. I mean that ten thousand is going to be honest money. Well, what are you going to do with it?

"That's a nice piece of jack, Nicky—ten grand is. And here's my suggestion: You used to be a crackajack electrician. Why not change back to your real name, Jack Miller, and buy an interest in an electrical store? I know a man who will sell an electrical store worth twenty-five thousand for half that. I'll lend you enough to get you started. Think it over.

"Now run along. Get those yeggs out of my house. They smell. Have you any idea how you're going to round up Rafferty's mob?"

"I got a couple. I know where they're hangin' out about dis time. I'll stage a surprise party. Whereabouts is dis electrical shop?"

"In Norville Center."

"It soitny listens good, Mr. Hazeltine. I don't need to think it over. Tell dat fella you found a customer fer it!"

"Good luck, Nicky! And, by the way, when it's necessary to send anything out to you at Lake Largo—provisions of any kind, or messages by hand, my man, Toro, will bring them. You can trust him."

THE events of the next few hours, Gillian realized, would depend entirely upon whether Mike Rafferty or any of his gang drove off from the scene of the attempted roadside killing with the knowledge that their intended victim had escaped unscratched. The nature of immediately forthcoming events would also depend upon whether or not Gillian had been seen driving back to his house.

If reports were turned in by the gunmen that Gillian Hazeltine had been "knocked off" no further attention would be paid to him until it was learned that these reports were unfounded.

The belief, in the proper quarters, that Gillian was dead would have, for him, two important benefits. The gunmen, thinking he was out of the way, would relax, and would probably stage a celebration in some speakeasy with which Nicky was acquainted and could gain access. It would be comparatively easy to stick them up and kidnap them under these circumstances.

Moreover, if it were believed in certain official circles that Gillian Hazeltine was dead, it would make him safe from further attempts at assassination for some hours to come. He only hoped that, in these hours, Nicky would be successful in executing his dangerous mission.

When Nicky and his gangsters were gone, Gillian rang for Toro. And when the Japanese appeared, the lawyer said:

"Toro, are you satisfied with your job?"

In his perfect English, Toro answered: "I am perfectly satisfied, Mr. Hazeltine."

"You aren't sorry I got you out of the dope smuggling business?"

"On the contrary, you have won my lifelong gratitude."

"That's good," said Gillian. "Did you, by any chance, observe my recent callers?"

"I did, sir."

"What did you think of them?"

"They looked like men from the Chicago loop. Several, in fact, I recognized."

"What, I said, did you think about them?"

The Japanese smiled fleetly.

"I said to myself: Your curiosity can wait. All things are eventually explained."

Gillian chuckled.

"Toro, that gang is my personal constabulary. To-night, with luck, they are going to kidnap Mike Rafferty's gang and take them out to the Lake Largo camp."

"And, I trust, drown them like rats," said Toro. "I saw the window of your coupé, Mr. Hazeltine. I drove the car into the garage."

"And locked the garage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Next year," said Gillian, "I am going to send you home to Yokohama for a six months' vacation on full pay."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, let's check up. This is the gardener's day off, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where are the cook and the chambermaid?"

"Both are out for the afternoon, sir. They will return in about an hour, I believe."

"When they return, they are not to know I am in. The point is: No one must know I am alive until word comes from Nicky Anderson that the Rafferty gang is safe under lock and key at the camp."

"Yes, sir."

"In case any one phones, I was shot and killed on the State road. Some farmer called up this house. That's all you know. Wait! In case any *woman* phones, you simply do not know where I am. I am not home. Get her name. Now go around locking up the house."

"It is completely locked, Mr. Hazeltine."

"If the phone rings, answer it in my bedroom. I want to listen in on this extension."

"Very well, sir."

It was perhaps an hour later that the telephone rang. It rang vigorously, insistently.

Gillian heard the soft footfalls of Toro in the bedroom. He lifted the receiver and put it to his ear the instant he heard Toro say hello.

"I want to talk to Mr. Hazeltine," said a man's gruff voice, which Gillian identified promptly as that of Chief of Police Bellows.

"Mr. Hazeltine is not in," said Toro. "I have just had a telephone call from a farmer on the State turnpike that Mr. Hazeltine was shot and killed."

There was a silence at the other end. Then Hazeltine heard a loud whisper:

"His Chink says he was killed on the State road." Again the chief's voice on the wire:

"How did it happen?"

"I do not know," Toro answered. "The farmer merely wanted to know if this was Mr. Hazeltine's residence. He said he had found Mr. Hazeltine dead in his car beside the road—full of bullets. He asked me to describe Mr. Hazeltine, and I did. He then said he would telephone the nearest State police barracks."

"Thanks," said Mr. Bellows, and hung up.

Toro came into the office.

"Satisfactory, sir?" he inquired.

"Perfect," said Gillian. "In case there are other calls, stick to that story."

"Very well, sir."

THERE were, however, no other calls until evening. Darkness came. At seven Toro entered the office with a tray of supper and the information that "those vandals" had

drunk up the last bottle of Canadian ale.

At eight-thirty a car passed slowly in front of the Hazeltine residence, but did not stop. Two men, Toro reported, had peered steadfastly at the upper windows.

"They may be burglars, sir, planning to break in and rob, knowing that you are dead. I have set the burglar alarm."

"Are you armed?"

Toro drew from his hip pocket a .45 caliber army automatic pistol.

At nine-thirty the telephone rang. Toro answered, as before, and Gillian listened in downstairs on the office extension.

The man said: "Is Mr. Hazeltine there?"

Toro answered: "No, sir, he—"

The man hung up.

A few minutes later, the phone rang again. This time it was Dorothy Murphy. Toro told her that Mr. Hazeltine had not yet returned from a trip to Springton.

"Do you suppose anything has happened to him?"

"Nothing ever happens to Mr. Hazeltine, madam."

The girl hung up her receiver.

Gillian waited. He was working on the case already, listing his witnesses, preparing his many-angled attack; but it was hard for him to concentrate. He felt nervous. He was letting his imagination get the upper hand. He was seeing Nicky Anderson and the Rafferty gang in a fight to the death; guns blazing, men falling, blood flowing; a swift and ruthless descent by the police; a third degree of the surviving gunmen—his name in the papers as the perpetrator of a horrible gang war!

Gillian began to perspire. It was only ten-fifteen. He might be kept in suspense hours—hours!

He tried again to concentrate, but once again his mind slipped off into morbidly horrible channels. The success of his entire plans depended upon the success of Anderson's gunmen. If they failed, he was finished.

"Nicky's clever," he argued. "And he has guts. And he fell hard for that electrical store. He'll work for *that*, the kid will!"

Gillian began to hear strange, suspicious noises about the house. A stiff fall wind was blowing; branches, drained of sap, were creaking and crackling.

The Silver Fox smoked cigar after cigar. He paced. He tried to concentrate on the Dearing case; but his mind slipped away.

At a little after eleven, the phone rang again. Again Toro answered it. A man's excited voice began:

"This is Milliken of the *Daily Journal*. We've just heard a report that Mr. Hazeltine was killed on the State turnpike this afternoon. Anything in it?"

Gillian had placed his receiver on the desk at the first words and rushed into the bedroom. He whispered in Toro's available ear:

"You don't know anything about it."

"I know nothing about it," said Toro.

As Toro replaced the receiver, Gillian panted: "I can't stand this strain much longer."

"Yes, sir," said Toro, and departed.

He returned with a tall, slim, alluring Scotch highball.

"Try this, sir," he suggested.

Gillian was sipping the highball when the telephone bell jangled again. He lifted the receiver from the hook and heard:

"This is Dan Merritt, the plumber, at Dexter. Mr. Hazeltine wanted me to go over his plumbin' and give him some idea—"

Gillian marveled, even as his heart leaped and sang, at Nicky's ability to enact the rôle of a drawling, small-town plumber.

Hazeltine dashed wildly to the bed-

room and gestured to Toro. The Japanese put his hand over the mouthpiece as Hazeltine whispered: "Ask him what he found out about my plumbing."

Toro listened, then whispered back: "He found eight leaky faucets, sir."

"Ask him about that big one I told him about."

"Yes, sir, he got that one, too."

Hazeltine grabbed the telephone. "Hello, Dan—this is Mr. Hazeltine. Good enough. Go ahead with the work. Did you put on those new washers I got for you?"

Gillian hoped Nicky would understand that he was alluding to the handcuffs he had given to him. After a silence, Nicky grasped the allusion.

"Yes, Mr. Hazeltine. They're all on. And workin' fine, sir! There hasn't been a leak out of one of them pipes—not a leak. How about that nice thick steak you promised to send my missus from your butcher's?"

It was Gillian's turn to think rapidly. Steak? Butcher's? Food? Food! That was it! Nickey needed provisions for his eight guests and their nine hosts.

"I'll send my butler, Toro, out with that steak in my car this very minute," said Gillian heartily.

Toro came in on soft feet with a catlike grin.

"Buddha be praised!" said he.

"You," Gillian informed him, "have a difficult job on your hands. You are, somehow, to keep that gang of seventeen men in provisions without any one suspecting what is up. Can you get away with it?"

"I have a flivver that is identical in appearance with twenty million other flivvers," was Toro's answer. "And there are an unlimited supply of grocery stores whose proprietors do not ask questions when purchases are paid for with cash!"

"Go to it," said Gillian. "Take everything in the house you need now. And take this note to Sheriff Bolton, at Dexter."

Gillian seated himself at his typewriter and laboriously picked out with his two fingers this note:

DEAR PETE:

I want you to do me a great big favor. A number of my friends, in fact a large number of my friends, are putting on a stag party at my house on the lake. It may be a pretty wild party, but they can raise the roof as far as I'm concerned. This large party of gentlemen wanted a nice, remote place to go and stage their jamboree. Please see that they are not interrupted, spied upon or annoyed in any way.

The favor I want to ask is that you hire two deputies at five dollars a day—which I will pay—to keep an eye on the house. They musn't go near the house, but they must keep anybody else from going near it.

My butler, Toro, the bearer of this note, whom you know well, will drive up once a day or so with provisions for my guests. He is to be permitted to enter the house. So am I. *But no one else.*

These gentlemen who are using my house are all men of great importance. They must not be bothered.

I am sending to you, by the hand of Toro, a box of those cigars you said you enjoyed so much.

Fraternally yours,

Gillian signed the note, sealed it in an envelope and gave it to Toro with instructions to deliver to the sheriff a large box of Corona Coronas.

"Deliver the provisions to Nicky—and, if I were you, I'd carry along an electric flashlight and shine it into your face as you walk toward the house, so they won't accidentally pot you. Then come back immediately. I want to know how Nicky landed that gang. The kid is clever!"

THE telephone began to ring before Toro was out of the room. He stopped and turned, but Gillian waved him on. There was no need for keeping his aliveness a secret any longer.

He hoped his caller would be Chief of Police Bellows. It was. The chief's voice was savage.

"That you, Gillian?"

"Yep! That you, chief?"

"I want to know," said Mr. Bellows in the thick voice of fury, "what in hell your game is?"

"My game?"

"I said, game. What's the big idea of letting out the report that you're dead?"

"The reports of my death, to use the celebrated words of Mark Twain," Gillian answered, "have been grossly exaggerated."

There was a snort of rage at the other end of the line.

"You'll be sorry if you try to make a monkey out of me! Come clean and come clean quick!"

"To use your favorite expression," Gillian gibed at him, "'Let's put all our cards on the table.' Meaning: Let's keep on lying as long as we can get away with it."

"I want to know where Mike Rafferty is!"

"Rafferty? Rafferty?" said Gillian with pretented puzzlement. "You mean your old henchman and personal killer, Mike Rafferty?"

"You know damned well I mean Mike Rafferty!" roared the chief of police.

"Have you tried dragging the river for his body?" asked Gillian.

"Where is Rafferty?" bellowed Mr. Bellows.

"I said, you might try dragging the river," answered Gillian. "Is anybody else missing?"

"You know well enough who's missing! Mike Rafferty and seven of his—um—close friends. They've been kidnaped. Where are they?"

"Listen," said Gillian, no longer playful. "Acting under the orders of Governor Brundage, you ordered Rafferty's mob to get me this afternoon when I drove back from Springton. They didn't get me, Bellows. But I'm like the elephant. I never forgive a man who tries to shoot me in the back. And I never forget an enemy. I got Rafferty. I'm going to get you. Before I'm through, I'm going to get Brundage—because you're a pack of rats!

"Rafferty?" Gillian snarled. "Rafferty is dead! His seven gunmen are dead! I had them killed and thrown in the river. What else do you want to know?"

The conversation ended in a splutter, as of uncontrollable rage, and a sharp click. Mr. Bellows had rudely terminated the connection.

Gillian jiggled his hook and put in a call for the Murphy sisters' apartment.

Dorothy answered. She seemed startled to hear his voice. She gave a little gasp, said "Gil—Gillian?"

The Silver Fox said: "Did I startle you, dear? You phoned here this afternoon, so Toro says."

"I wanted to see you this evening," Dorothy told him.

"I'm afraid you can't. I'm afraid I'll be too busy. I'm also afraid you wouldn't want to see me, anyway, when you learn that I've decided to handle the Dearing murder case."

"I knew you would!" she wailed.

"You had marvelous intuitions. I didn't know it myself until I talked to the Governor. You evidently knew better."

She snapped: "What do you mean, Gillian Hazeltine?"

"I'd give a good deal to know," said the Silver Fox, "why you were so startled when you heard my voice just now?"

"Startled?" she repeated.

"And why you asked Toro this afternoon if anything had *happened* to me. Hadn't heard I'd been waylaid and killed by gunmen, had you?"

"Why—why—why—"

"And who sold you the idea," Gillian relentlessly went on, "of offering to marry me on condition that I gave up my criminal practice, beginning *now*."

"How dare you!" cried Miss Murphy.

"Last night," went on Gillian, "I loved you. You are marvelous. You

are a brilliant actress—and a dangerous character. Get out of town. I am starting a clean-up campaign. You gave me the idea. You pointed out the errors of my ways. I am a reformed man. It's going to be a whirlwind campaign, Dorothy. I hate to fight women — especially beautiful women I've been in love with."

"Gillian, please—" Her voice was suddenly frantic.

"Clear out before you're hurt," he said. "I've done a good deal for you and your sister. I've thought you were two clever girls. I've concluded that you're *too* clever girls. I'll give you both a week to go somewhere where your cleverness will be better appreciated. Good-by!"

"Gillian—" she shrieked.

But Gillian had hung up the receiver. He felt tired. He had loved Dorothy and—she had made a fool of him. He was, he reflected, too weak where beautiful women were concerned. He wanted to treat them gallantly. When he admired them, he wanted to believe they were true and upright and fine. It hurt to discover the things he had discovered about Dorothy Murphy.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

They Fought Through

THE five-masted schooner K. V. Kruse recently ended a nightmare of a voyage from Adelaide, Australia, to the mouth of the Columbia River. The voyage lasted one hundred and fifteen days, and for two weeks the crew was on short rations.

When the rations gave out, the crew ate the rice that was intended to feed the captain's parrot, much to the indignation of the latter. The wonder is that they did not devour the bird. To quench their thirst they drank rain water caught during the storms. In that awful voyage tragedy stalked the decks, for one man had the obsession that the ship was laden with a cargo of corpses and that his mates were plotting to kill him. In desperation the poor fellow climbed aloft and leaped to the deck below, thus ending it all.

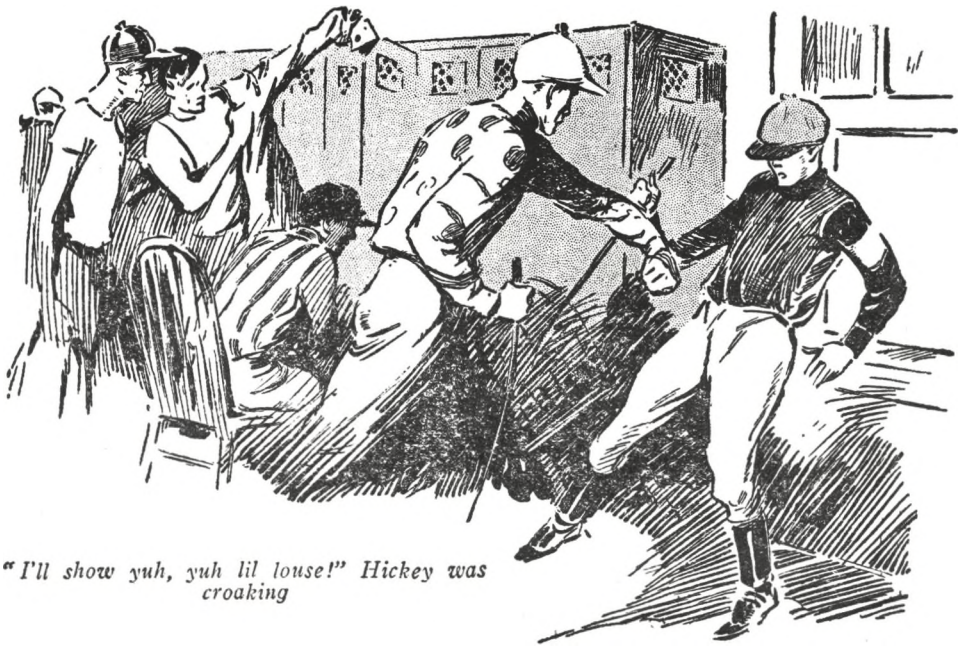
Near Coos Bay, Washington, they sighted a passing tanker and signaled for help. The message the captain sent to the other ship was that they were out of provisions. "That's appetizing," came the insolent reply. Captain Mayne then signaled that he could not get into Coos Bay. "Too bad," was the sneering answer as the tanker left them. There was no fuel on the schooner by now and all the spare spars and movable woodwork had been chopped away to furnish heat for the famished and half frozen crew.

In such condition did the pilot schooner Columbia find them on the morning of April 3. The pilot was able to come alongside and give them all the provisions she carried. Captain C. E. Ash, bar pilot, was also put aboard in order that the Kruse might safely start into the river.

Later in the day the tug Arrow No. 3 put to sea with more provisions and coal. The tug, however, was unable to reach the schooner for several days, and again the Kruse had used up her food supply. Coal from the Arrow No. 3 made it possible for the schooner to raise her anchor and put into Astoria.

Captain William Mayne, master of the Kruse, described the voyage as a trip through hell for the fourteen men aboard. Certainly such a brave captain and such a loyal crew, who fought through to win without any signs of mutiny, deserve everlasting fame.

But for the tanker, which was so lacking in the courtesy of the sea, no words can express the contempt which she has earned. *Guy Rader.*



"I'll show yuh, yuh lil louse!" Hickey was croaking

Woodsmoke

Courage! Without it a jockey is a failure—and Larry Long knew, to his bitter humiliation, that he did not have it

By GEORGE W. PIDDINGTON

"MAD" MATT ANDERSON, known all over the circuit as the Philosopher of Poverty Row, hung over the rail in front of the grandstand at the Maple Heights track, mild blue eyes ablaze with excitement; grizzled, weather-beaten face, with its droopy military mustache, agape in plain amazement. A horse from his stable, Blue Paradise, his sole stake representative and claim to greatness, had just darted by the judges' stand, his nose in front of seven other horses.

"By the great-toed horn eagle!" he gulped, breathlessly. "The Shrimp won a race. He finally got his big ambition."

Sandy McIlroy, assistant starter at the track, taking an enforced layoff because a horse had trodden determinedly on his foot, grunted. He shifted his heavy weight more firmly on the whitewashed railing separating the inclosure from the dark loam of the racing oval; squinted a kindly pair of eyes—that belied the gruff tone of his voice—at a gnomelike rider, who was guiding his mount in the exclusive semicircle in front of the judges stand for the first time in his life.

"What d'ye care about Shrimp winnin'?" he growled. "It's ye that ought to be crowin' about winnin'. Ye that's so hard up ye can't pay your feed bill. Starvin' to death an' ye still feel tickled because the kid won his first race."

Flushed of face, eyes sparkling, a wide grin stretching his mouth to its fullest, Larry Long was holding his bat up to the judges, seeking permission to dismount. Larry Long he was

named, but perched up on the back of the golden colt he looked like a brownie. It wasn't hard to guess where he had gained the nickname of "Shrimp."

Anderson permitted himself a quiet smile of pleasure at his jockey. "I don't care so much for myself," he chuckled to his crony of many years, "but I'm tickled for the kid. It sort of vindicates my faith in dreams. Larry's had plenty of dreams. He has been livin' for a year on the bit of philosophy I gave him—if you want somethin' long enough, an' bad enough, you'll finally get it."

Sandy didn't answer. Anderson glanced at him, to see that he was looking, with intent suspiciousness, at Tom Hickey, rider of the place horse, Jaysee.

Hickey, the money rider at the track, brushed by the weighing scale, ran up the steps to the judges' stand. Wise in the ways of racing, Mad Matt knew a complaint was to be made. He pursed his lips wrily.

The trainer pretended he had not noticed Hickey's ascent to the cupola housing the powers of the track.

"Dreams"—his tone was so casual one would have never guessed the mental agony he was suffering—"dreams is only pitchers flashed on a mental screen; somethin' for a mental eye to sit back in the brain, like at a pitcher show, an' gaze upon."

Sandy was uneasy; didn't try to conceal it. He shifted his weight again, turned sidewise so as to see what was about to happen. Hickey was standing, cap in hand, talking to the three judges, who in turn were gazing sternly down at Long as he unfastened the saddle girth. Blue Paradise's number, 5, was still posted on the board across the track, but the red *official* sign had not been placed.

"Larry there has dreams," Anderson mused. "If a guy was to cut a chunk out of Larry's head an' look on the screen inside, he'd see a fine pitcher. Wouldn't he, Sandy?"

Sandy nodded. Many times had they heard Larry tell of his dream. If any one had been able to perform an operation in trepanning, to see the rider's mental screen, the image would have reflected this:

Larry himself, in person, garbed in a gorgeous red and gold silk blouse, gleaming white breeches, shining black boots, astride a sleek chestnut stallion, thundering down the home stretch, under the wire ahead of a great field of racing thoroughbreds. The picture would reveal Larry flashing a row of glistening teeth, in a laugh of triumph, back at the laboring horses and dismayed riders.

The judges had called Larry now. The diminutive rider, a trifle pale, frightened, passed on his way to the tribunal. Anderson saw his rider go by. With an effort he gulped in an attempt to swallow the sudden heavy lump in his throat. The trainer and the assistant starter looked at each other—the pleasant, mild blue eyes meeting the steel-gray on a common level of concern—both knowing that Long was to be questioned on the ride he had given Blue Paradise.

"Well, your hosses run consistent, Matt," Sandy observed, comfortingly, "they won't question him on that."

"Yeh, my hosses run honest. I've never cheated. I saw the colt swerve a little bit as he passed Jaysee in the stretch run. The two hosses might've come together. Mebbe Hickey told the judges Shrimp bumped him a purpose. The pore kid's never been before 'em. He'll be scared enough to admit anything."

THEIR worst fears were confirmed. following a minute of questioning, a moment that to the two below seemed to stretch out in the interminable time of an age, the numbers on the board across the track were changed. Number 5 was withdrawn, to be replaced by 1, 3, 6. Blue Paradise had been disqualified! Jaysee had

been given the race, and the two following horses moved up a place.

Hickey, tall and oversize for a jockey, his gauntness of frame balancing his height for lightness of weight, stepped cockily down the stairs, a dog-toothed grin seeming out of place on the wizened, wrinkled face of him.

Behind, slowly feeling his way down, with hands leaning on the rail, walking like one in a daze, came Long. His face, one reflecting weakness, was chalky pale, as if he had been rocked with a hard blow. The outer edges of his lips were quivering, as he tried to keep them in a taut, grim line; tried to keep them from drooping, sagging.

Small of stature he was, but of good build; with tight knit shoulders, a slim waistline that would have adorned a girl; slender legs that gave an impression of strength. He at least had the makings of a jockey.

Hickey stepped on the scales to be weighed out. He talked in a loud tone, supposedly for the benefit of the clerk of the scales, but purposely for the ears of the crowd gathered near by. "Yeh, he bumped me comin' down the stretch an' they disqualified 'im. He kain't steal any race from Tom Hickey."

He moved from the scale, brushing roughly past Larry, who drew against the railing to let him by. Anderson, who had been watching all this, frowned at Long's display of timidity. He knew this was the reason that the rider's dreams of winning a race never came true. The smallness of Larry's body seemed to have given him a handicap of physical fear; he had never taken a chance. Mad liked the lad, wanted to see him make good.

"Pore little ol' kid," he said, "pore little ol' Shrimp. After dreamin' about winnin' a race he finally boots one home, only to get it taken away from him."

Sandy looked at his friend, and saw the look of compassion. He knew that Anderson was genuinely stirred, not at his own misfortune, but at that of his rider. Gruffly he inquired: "What'n hell's the matter with ye? It isn't him that's doin' the heavy losin'. He's just a jockey, with a head chuck full o' dreams. What about ye?"

Anderson, with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders, showed how he had earned the misnomer, "Mad," from other horsemen. His tone was content. "I hadn't planned to win that 'un, Sandy, that's why I put Larry up in the coop. I only wanted a workout for the Lakeview handicap to-morrow, an' I got a good one."

"What about the purse, dummy?"

"Oh, that." Anderson was a study in bland unconcern. "Blue is a goin' to win the handicap race hands down. I don't care about the money, Sandy, only it 'll pay my feed bills an' leave me enough to ship to Coney Island for the summer meet. No, suh, I don't care about purses. I have my hosses, good health—happiness."

"Happiness ain't goin' to save your stable. If your hosses were any good they'd been attached long ago." The remark was directed at the armor of indifference, and was not truthful. Both knew that.

Anderson grew thoughtfully quiet. Together they struggled through the racing mad crowd, Sandy limping painfully, but able to keep up with the tolerant, easy going stride of the trainer. They headed for the row of stables at the curve of the back stretch, Poverty Row; in one barn of which, occupying four stalls, was the Anderson stock.

"So ye think your beetle will win the handicap?" Sandy questioned. "What about Blue Paradise being a slow breaker, against such speedy colts as are entered in the race?"

Anderson was confident. "I feel in my bones that Blue'll win. I'm goin' to have a good rider in the coop, one that 'll keep the hoss on edge for the break. If you weren't so darn tight I'd advise you to lay a bet."

Sandy shook his head, leaving his

friend to form his own conclusion. Knowing McIlroy's policy was absolute honesty in starting a race, and that he wouldn't want the temptation of betting, the trainer thought the shake of the head was only the usual refusal to wager.

"Not goin' to let Shrimp ride?"

"No, he's too timid for a big race like that. I want some jockey 'at's not afraid to take a chance."

The object of their conversation was in the jockey room, at that exact minute crowded up against the window. If he had been turned around he could have looked out over the roof of the betting shed, gazed down at the racing plant below, the white of the track, the green of the infield, the vista of hazy blue stretching out beyond. But he wasn't in a position to turn around.

In his face was shaking a grimy fist —the tingling of his cheek recorded the sting of a blow he had just received there. In back of the waving fist was the coarse, evil face of Tom Hickey. Vituperative oaths were issuing in a stream from the thin, characterless lips.

"I'll show yuh, yuh lil louse," Hickey was croaking, "that yuh kain't win in the same race with me. When I tell yuh to stay outta the way, get outta the way. I'm not goin' ter have a damn bug spoil my record on this track. I bumped yuh on purpose, but the judges will never know the difference. There ain't nobody in this room will squeal." He glared around the room belligerently.

There was no response. The riders went about their business, changing clothes, either for their track or street attire. Some cast looks of contempt at Hickey for his bullying attitude, but none took any measure to aid Larry. Why should they, their manner indicated, when the Shrimp was nothing but a 'fraid cat, anyway? A body that was afraid of his own shadow wasn't worth helping.

None noticed that the Shrimp's deep brown eyes contained vistage of fire, that his slender hands were clenched tightly. All they saw was his small body, shrinking against the window, as far away from Hickey as possible.

Then came the surprise. Larry, with an effort, pushed himself away from the wall, stood looking up at Hickey defiantly. His tense voice carried the length of the room. "For that smack on the face I'm going to show you up. Some of these days I'm going to ride a race you're in and I'm going to win. I'm going to beat you so bad you'll look like a bug."

Hickey looked down, dumfounded. Then he broke into a guffaw, turning to the rest of the riders to let them in on the joke. "D'jer hear that, gang? Shrimp, so damn skeered he's been ridin' a year without a win, is goin' ter beat me. Me, Tom Hickey, the best rider in the West. In a hoss race, too!"

Every one in the room, riders and valets, joined in the laugh. That is, all except Larry. To the jockeys, knowing his record as they did, the idea of Long winning a race, defeating the money rider of the track, was ludicrous in the extreme. Why, he did well even to get a chance to ride, much less pull a beetle home in front. Trainers never gave him a mount on a horse with which they were trying to win.

Hickey doubled up with coarse laughter, his risibilities tickled at the thoughts of Long challenging him to a race. "The dreamer," he gasped between the roars of laughter, "has had another dream. He's hittin' the snow again."

Larry, aggravated at the scornful mirth, seeing a chance to get even with Hickey, doubled his fist, got ready to strike the tall rider, who in his present condition would have been easy prey. Half way to its mark, the side of Hickey's jaw, the fist halted, wavered in painful indecision. Its owner's timidness had assumed control again; Larry had suddenly thought of the con-

sequences. That was always the way, even in riding—he would foresee the consequences of an action before making it.

Hickey saw the fist coming toward him. He ducked. He swore grimly, vengefully, as it halted, and the vacillating look swept across Larry's face. Emboldened by the show of cowardice he lashed out with his clenched right hand, catching the apprentice napping, and knocking him back against the wooden wall, where he dropped to the floor.

IT was a pitiable young man that slowly made his way to the deserted grand stand after the races. Larry had hidden in the jockey room as long as he could. He knew Anderson, and probably McIlroy, would be waiting at the stable to take him to the little boarding house where Poverty Row denizens ate their meals. In his disconsolate frame of mind he did not care to face them. He wanted to be alone.

It wasn't that Anderson would storm at him for losing the race; he knew that near the old philosopher was the only place in the world he would get solace, sympathy. He was fighting a bitter battle within himself against his inherent weakness. It was his own timidness that had cost him the first race he had ever won. If he had only been brave enough to tell the judges he hadn't swerved, bumped into Jaysee; that it was Hickey who had slapped up against him. If he had only been brave enough to smack Hickey, fight him when he had the chance, instead of backing out, being knocked down, kicked.

The kicking alone hadn't hurt—Hickey had his soft riding boots on—but to be degraded, humiliated before the riding colony! Afraid to fight back, when even apprentice jockeys much younger than himself would not have stood for such treatment. Then tc have challenged Hickey to a riding duel, declared his intentions to beat him—when he couldn't win a race, he knew he couldn't. Larry found a seat in the grand stand and slumped down, a broken man.

Out in front of him, over across the racing plant, the sun was sinking to the level of the flat, far horizon. The green of the infield had turned, chameleon like, to a burnished brass. The dust brown of the racing oval, now being harrowed and raked by crews of horses and men, was taking on a purple grayness, as if a mantle had been thrown over its bed to protect the feet of the precious thoroughbreds on the morrow. The grand stand, majestic despite its loneliness, wide emptiness, the furlong poles, the columns of the judges' stand itself, were backed by creeping black shadows and hieroglyphics marking the passing of time.

Larry Long saw none of this, although ordinarily such beauty would have aroused some indefinable longing within him. Immersed in his own bitter brooding, his eyes, gazing far outward but in reality turned inward, reflected none of the scene.

A failure, a coward, a scared-cat. Other names, less fit to mention, he called himself. Here he was, at twenty, still an apprentice jockey, an exerciser of horses. Born small in stature, with a love of horses, it had seemed almost natural to drift to the tracks, to land a job as an exercise boy. At this he was adept, bringing in fast workouts with mounts, some faster than they made in actual contest.

But in races he was a terrible flop, always bringing up the rear. When chances to win presented themselves, an opening to go through which would lead to victory, his revolting timidness would hold him back. Now he had been riding as an apprentice for a whole year; the only races he won were in his dreams.

Riding under any other jockey club rules he would never have won his spurs, that he knew. In most States

an apprentice had to ride forty winners before becoming a full-fledged rider. At this track the ruling was for a year's apprenticeship, regardless of the number of wins.

Here he was, Lawrence Long, with his apprenticeship to expire to-morrow. To-morrow night he would be a jockey, one of an historic, traditional calling. A great asset he would be to it—he grimaced sardonically—without a single winning bracket to his name.

Darkness came down upon him before he realized it. Off to the right, twinkling sparks, like so many fireflies on a summer night, told him that lights were being turned on in the rows of stables.

Wearily he came to his decision. He would have to give up the track, give up trying to win fame as a jockey. It just seemed he wasn't cut out for it.

No more would he be able to face Hickey, the rest of the riding colony, after his degradation. He would go over to the stable, get his few togs from Anderson's 'tack-room, beat it away some place.

Only one regret struck him, a poignant, painful regret. He would have to leave Mad Anderson, the one man in all his none too easy life who had befriended him. He would have to leave Sandy McIlroy, who, despite his gruffness, had a heart as big as a barn.

Then the vision of himself, bending low over the neck of his mount, leading the field of racers past the judges' stand, came to him. He was looking back, grinning widely, tantalizingly, at the jockeys behind. Oddly enough, the rider nearest him was Tom Hickey. To give up that dream was more than a regret; it was anguish.

He arose from his cramped position, stamped heavily to start the flow of sluggish blood in his booted feet and legs. The stamping awakened hollow echoes through the long grand stand, startled him. The darkness, the loneliness of it all, made him uneasy. He started to leave.

"FIRE! Barn burning!"

From off at his right, in the direction of the stables, came the hoarse cry. Shouts, faint at the distance, were carried to him by the sullen wind. He sniffed the heavy, acrid odor of woodsmoke. Now he saw it! A burst of jagged, crimson flame, lighting up the skyline, throwing into relief for a moment the roofs of the stables.

He gasped. Anderson had told him to keep an eye on the colored boy in the Hutchinson stable, occupying the adjoining stalls in the same barn. The swipe was careless about his cigarettes. Here he had stayed away, while Anderson had, no doubt, gone to supper, expecting him to stand guard.

He leaped over the fence rail, started running down the black track. A greater fear than of the blackness was tearing at his vitals now—the fear that Anderson's stable was too near that blaze. Small and light, he sped down the roadway as fleet as a deer.

Plainly the sounds came to him—yelling, cursing of excited men and boys, the shrill, whinnying fear cry of horses. Came to him the smell of smoke, the crackling of flames. Fire at a race track: a terrifying thing!

Blanketed horses were being led to safety. Huge creatures loomed out of the molten glow before him, led by stable boys, gnome-like.

"What barn is it? Whose barn's on fire?" he asked one of the gnomes, gliding by like some evil character from another world.

"Barn 87. Mad Anderson's," a voice returned, fading as it was hastened away with its owner. He heard the quick, frightened tread of horses.

"Is 'at you, Shrimp?" came another voice, accompanied by a chuckle. "You-all better get busy an' save yore hosses. Sure looks like you lost yore job now."

Anderson's barn! His horses in the fire! He sped on, a question searing him. What could he do?

Toward the barn he ran, the furnace glow increasing. Crackling flames, fire fingers, reached up in the darkness. He could see the blaze coming from the roof now, dense clouds of smoke pouring out the open doors. Men, boys, figures, were running back and forth; a group of men had stable hoses turned on, squirting small streams on the blaze. Not sufficient to quell an inferno like that: the old, weather-worn timbers were easy prey to the flames.

He darted through the crowd of men and boys standing, staring at the fire. They were at least fifty feet away from the burning structure, and he shrank back to them as he felt the heat fan his face uncomfortably. The stable, occupied by three different owners, had caught fire at the far end when a stable boy tossed a cigarette butt in some straw, he heard one man say. Oh, if he had only come back in time!

From the barn came a heart-piercing whinny, the wail of a horse, frightened and distressed. Pain tore at Larry's heart. It sounded like Blue Paradise.

"Larry!" it was the voice of Matt Anderson, behind him. Turning quickly he saw the grimy, smoke-stained, sweat dripping face of the trainer; saw the look of anxiety, the pain in his eyes. Anderson drew him up close, held him in his arms. "Thank God, Larry, you're safe! They said you were in the barn. We couldn't find you!"

A warmth of feeling swept Larry. Some one was concerned about him, at least. "Blue Paradise? Is he in there?'

Anderson nodded, his lips dropping in a grimace of hopelessness. "He's in there, Larry. We couldn't move him. Now it's too late. Got all the rest of 'em out. All but my stake hoss, by—" his voice broke.

Larry turned again, facing the barn. Most of the roof was in flames, and fire was creeping up the walls at one end. The stall housing Blue Paradise was still untouched, although dense clouds of smoke were pouring forth. In a few minutes the fire would be creeping down the sides of his stall.

Too late! Larry stood staring at the black hole, back of which a handsome colt was stamping, whinnying terribly. Was it too late?

He knew that without the colt Anderson would lose everything; it would be his finish as an owner. Away from the tracks the old-timer would die, heartbroken. There might still be a chance to save the colt for him. Here would be an opportunity to repay the man for all his many kindnesses. His own life didn't amount to so much —Larry winced at the realization.

The cold, gripping hand of fear had laid hold of him; his abdominal muscles quivered, trembled sickeningly. Afraid he was. Never, in all his life, never had he been so afraid. The consequences—he fought back a sudden desire to turn and flee. No one would blame him for running away. He was a coward. He was scared. Everybody knew it anyway, and—

Gritting his teeth to repress the scream of agonized fear, he lurched forward.

A blanket was lying before him on the ground. He seized it, ran and doused it in a near by trough. His mind holding the one thought that he must do something or be forever beaten, he darted for the almost hidden door.

"Come back! Come back! Larry, come back!" faintly the yells came to him.

On to the door he ran. Heat, flaming, scorching, searing, struck at him like an impenetrable force. Stooping low; coughing from the smoke; reeling; feeling instinctively for the stall walls, he entered. Above him, through the smoke haze, could be seen flashes of flame. The stall was under a canopy, slowly settling downward. But little smoke had bothered the colt yet.

"Blue, Blue, it's me!" he cried. Beside him sounded a stamping. His hand rubbed a sleek nose, fear lathered. He unsnapped the two halter ropes and felt the horse rear, strike out with his hoofs. Larry stepped aside barely in time to avoid being struck down. He clung to the halter rope, pulling the frightened horse down.

A furnace roar engulfed him. The doorway through which he had entered, with fire fingers reaching across the space toward each other, had become almost a sheet of flame. Calmly—his calmness being so unexpected as to strike him with wonder—he studied the doorway, estimating his chances. Never had he imagined himself so calm, so confident. Bathed in the flickering, increasingly hot crimson glow, he realized that timidness was not unconquerable. He found, as had others who braved danger for high adventure, that a barrier of timidness must be broken through, as he had broken through the barrier of flame, to enable the inner self to be rescued from the disaster of effacement.

He swung the wet blanket up with one hand and threw it over the colt's head. Coaxingly, uttering soothing words, explaining to the thoroughbred, as one would to a human, that there was nothing to be afraid of, Larry led Blue Paradise out of the stable.

He conquered a tendency to reel, grow faintly sick as he felt the cooling softness of the fresh air fanning his face; he had never expected to escape the fire. He had saved Blue Paradise, saved him for Matt Anderson and the Lakeview Handicap. His dream, after all, might come true.

Anderson, shaking with sobs, rushed up, threw his arms about Larry. "Larry—Larry—I—"

"Aw, hell, Mad, it was nothin' at all," Larry comforted the old man. He essayed a grin, but ceased suddenly as he felt his face stretch tightly, as if on a drum. He was painfully blistered. "I'm all right"—a gasp, to get the woodsmoke out of his lungs—"an' I guess Blue'll be okay."

GRUFF, hard-shelled, dour Sandy McIlroy was the one that took charge of Larry that night, anointing seared hands with healing ointments; kneading his chest to rid his lungs of all vestige of smoke; placing him, much against the rider's protests, in his own bed.

It was Sandy who suggested the early morning workout of Blue Paradise to Anderson, and it was to him that the trainer turned, eagerly, as Larry brought the colt back from a stirring gallop on the black track. Neither one knew that it was the first workout for Larry in which the darkness held no fear for him.

Anderson was jubilant. "No ill effects from the fire, Sandy," he said. "He's as nervous as the devil, but that's all. He'll break quicker."

"Yes, if he's nervous, he'll leave the barrier on the jump," Sandy observed thoughtfully. A colored stableboy, placing his lantern on the ground, proceeded to cover the colt with a blanket.

Larry walked over. "Matt, I think Blue'll be good for the race this afternoon." In the darkness they could not see his face. His voice was tingling, vibrant with eagerness. "If you run him I'd like to ride him for you, Matt. I feel—I feel—I'm different than I used to be. I'd like to win my spurs to-day, that is I'd like to try to win them. This is the last of my apprenticeship."

Anderson's voice was grave. "I'm goin' to run him to-day, Larry. An' what's more I'm goin' to give you the job ridin' him!"

A quiet whisper of thankfulness in the dark. Sandy heard it and grinned. His associates would have been surprised at the way his face lighted up when brightened by a smile. The colored boy, swinging his lantern blithesomely, was walking down the track with Blue Paradise. The weird gleams

of the light revealed the trim, steel-sinewed ankles of the thoroughbred, pacing lightly, gracefully; revealed the gnomish body of Larry, stepping alongside, in a jubilant sort of a war dance.

Anderson turned to his friend, anxious to explain. "After what he did for me, Sandy, savin' my colt and riskin' his own life, it wouldn't be fair for me to fail him. D'yer think?"

Sandy said nothing. His expression remained concealed in the gloom.

"Of co'se I may lose the race, Sandy, lose my hosses, but—but—" the trainer's voice trailed off into silence.

"A hell of a philosopher ye are," the assistant starter growled. "A fine believer in dreams ye are. Here ye've been tellin' the lad if he wants somethin' bad enough he'll get it, an' when his chance comes ye don't want to give it to him. Don't ye see he's inspired?"

"Do you think he'll win?" Anderson grabbed at his arm.

"It's against the ethics of my profession to make any prophecies," Sandy's voice boomed cavernously as he limped off down the track.

Passing the burned ruins of the barn the all-pervading odor of woodsmoke caused Blue Paradise to bolt. Larry and the stable boy hung onto his bridle, restraining him from running away. The colt swung sidewise, nostrils distended, limbs trembling. Larry coaxed him by, toward his new quarters.

Sandy observed all this, thoughtfully. As Anderson hastened to the horse's side, the starter limped toward what had once been a barn.

Then in the Lakeview Handicap Sandy did a very peculiar thing. Despite his still injured foot, which persisted in limping, he assured Bill Carrigan, the starter, that he would be able to work the race. Carrigan was glad to have him, even though he knew that only the day before the big man had protested he wouldn't be able to work in a week.

Sandy took upon himself the task of holding Blue Paradise, No. 3, who was extremely nervous. So excited was he that he bucked and kicked at the barrier, throwing the rest of the field of fourteen horses out of line, in great confusion. Finally Carrigan, in disgust, ordered Sandy to take the colt to the outside position, so as not to delay the start any longer.

This placed Larry and his mount next to Chief Usher, with Hickey up. Chief Usher was the favorite in the betting to win the race, especially with Hickey as his jockey. If Sandy had been a betting man he would have been able to get plenty of odds on the horse he was holding. A horse, he decided, that had to win the race to save its master from a broken heart; to enable a dreamer to fulfill a dream.

An odd part of this holding was that Sandy did it with one hand. Of course, he was a powerful man, but ordinarily, with such a fractious horse, two hands would have been required.

Even Larry, rocking back and forth in the saddle, with eyes on Carrigan, alert for his slightest move on the trigger to release the webbing; even he, as close as he was, didn't notice Sandy and his actions.

Larry, resplendent in a red and gold blouse, gleaming white breeches—all borrowed to take the place of those lost in the fire—was too busy waiting for the barrier, to get the jump. As the webbing flashed upward he didn't see Sandy rub a gloved hand, his one free hand, quickly across the nostrils of Blue Paradise.

The glistening, chestnut gold horse lunged ahead, as if released from a coiled spring. Larry had bent forward at the same time, an exultant cry bursting from his throat. He threw Blue Paradise into his stride; urged him forward to beat thirteen other shouting riders, thirteen other bounding mounts, to the rail.

Never had Blue Paradise, a notoriously slow breaker, beaten the barrier before. Never had Larry started with such a triumphant cry!

A chaotic mass of colors, a scramble of toy horses apparently thrown into a wriggling heap: that was Sandy's view of the fast disappearing field down the back stretch. He limped painfully to the rail—the strain had been severe on his foot—to get a glimpse of the bobbing line as it rounded the turn.

From his position on the ground the fourteen horses, closely grouped, with only the upper half and the riders showing, looked mechanical, as if they were being slowly drawn around on a merry-go-round. Unreal it seemed, not like a thrilling horse race.

Colors were a mere blur now. The great width of the infield hindered him. He couldn't distinguish any particular horse. Carrigan, standing on his starter's platform, was watching the race through binoculars.

"What are they doin', Bill?" For the first time in his life Sandy asked details of a race.

"Rounding the turn. Hickey up front on Chief Usher. Stealing the race. Has about a length on Lazy Boy. Another horse at the side of Lazy Boy. All I can see is his nose. Can't see the boy's colors."

"Where's Blue Paradise?" Sandy could hardly articulate. He felt himself trembling with suppressed excitement. "Is the third horse No. 3?"

An ominous quiet as Carrigan scanned the field. "Can't pick him up, Sandy. What's the colors? They're going down the stretch now. Chief Usher still on top. Picking up daylight. Lazy Boy dropping back. There—there goes the horse on the other side of him. Chestnut, red and gold rider. He's stepping out, drawing up on Hickey."

Sandy could see it now, a red and gold blur drawing out in the open. It was Blue Paradise!

"Red and gold, No. 3, going like hell!" Carrigan intoned. "Getting a good ride. The boy was holding back on the pace." His voice was thick with restrained excitement. Even hardened race starters get the fever.

His voice raised louder. "No. 3 passing Chief Usher. That's Blue Paradise, ain't it? Best race I ever saw him run. Wish'd I'd timed it. I bet he smashes the track record. There he goes!

"In the last furlong now. Just passed the pole. Paradise drawing away from Hickey—one length, two lengths. Hickey beating his horse with all he's got. No. 6 third. Lazy Boy is 'way back. Long, up ahead, riding hell for leather. Now he's three lengths ahead of Usher!

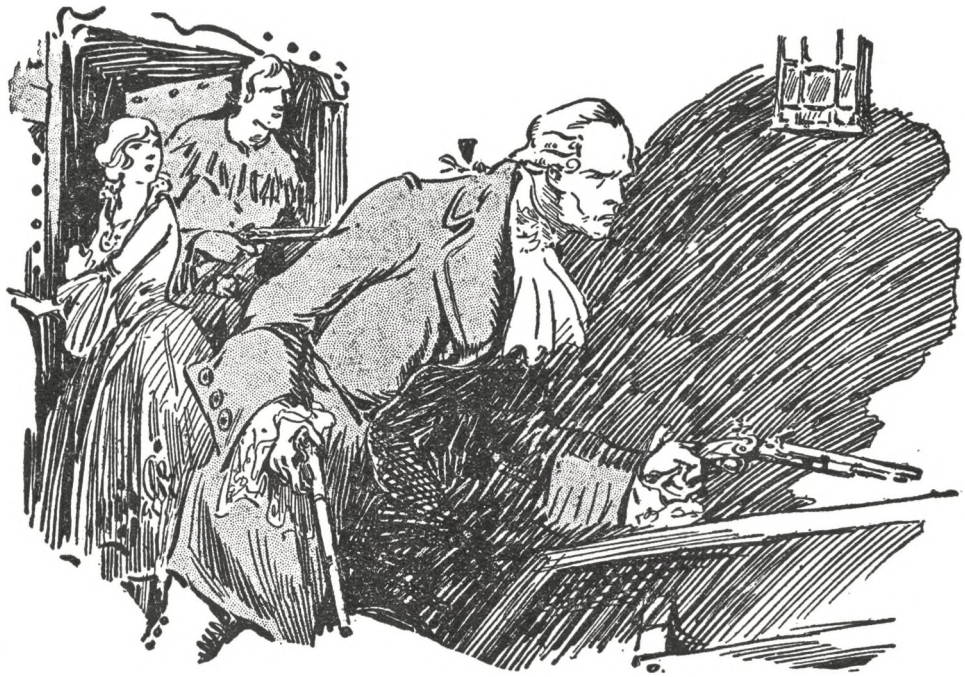
"Well, I'll be damned!" As Carrigan paused Sandy looked up anxiously, half afraid to breathe. Anything could happen in a race. A huge grin spread widely on Carrigan's face.

Across the field from the grand stand came a mighty roar; an avalanche of sound, even at the distance. The racers were approaching the wire.

The starter chuckled. "The kid up on 3 has been looking back at Hickey, grinning like an imp, all through the furlong. He's easing up on Blue Paradise. And wins!" Carrigan's voice raised to a yell—"Wins by four lengths!"

Sandy relaxed against the fence, chuckling happily. He rested a tired, lamed foot on the bottom rail; as he did so a glove dropped from his hand to the ground: a glove smudged with the ruins of the stable fire, smelling most pungently of woodsmoke.

THE END



There was something about his poise, keen, tense, that reminded me of a coiled snake

The Golden Traitor

A fortune in transit—while thieves and traitors hovered close and strove to enrich themselves at the government's expense, in those stirring days when Uncle Sam moved from Philadelphia to Washington

By R. de S. HORN

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IT was in the year 1800. The wild American frontier extended east practically to the Appalachian Mountains. Andrew King is a young backwoodsman from Kentucky, who had already traveled much between the mountains and the mouth of the Mississippi at New Orleans, but whose first trip to the Eastern city of Philadelphia occurred when his uncle sent him East to seek out his friend, Mr. Calthorpe, who holds a position in the Federal government, and who is to supervise the finishing of Andrew's education.

Andrew happens to be in a lonely Philadelphia inn on the night of his arrival, when some ruffians who are plotting to steal some of the property which the United States government is then engaged in moving from Philadelphia to Washington attack a lone man with his daughter, disguised in a voluminous riding cloak as a man.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 8

The man is known to the pirates, who manage to steal some government money presses, and paper for United States money, as old "Pokey Nose."

Old Pokey Nose manages to fight well enough to free his daughter to sound the alarm, before any one realizes her identity as a girl. Andrew takes part in the brawl, trying to help the old man, but has all he can do to get away himself.

He manages to join the girl on the road, but they both fall into ambush, and are shanghaied on to the boat Saucy Mary, owned by Black Barbary, a pirate of good family, who formerly operated in the West Indies, and commanded by a gigantic ruffian named Bully Benton, who is on board because of his intimate knowledge of the Delaware River and the port of Philadelphia.

Another authority on board is a man whom the pirates know as "Major Matteson," and whom old Pokey Nose addressed as Matthews.

Bully Benson wants to slaughter Andrew while the young Kentuckian lies bound, defenseless. But Barbary saves Andrew then, and later gives him the chance to escape through the porthole of the storeroom.

Andrew is just about to drop overboard and swim away when he remembers the girl aboard and determines to help her get away from her stopping place in Barbary's cabin. However, Andrew is repeatedly thwarted in his desire to leave the storeroom.

Meanwhile, Benton, Barbary, and Matteson congregate at daylight in the main ship's cabin. When Matteson, who has been very morose since his recognition by old Pokey Nose made him realize he had irrevocably thrown away his honor in the treasonous project to which he had instigated these pirates, offers to give Barbary his whole share to save the girl when he finds there is a lady aboard.

Not to be outdone as a sport and a gentleman, Barbary says that he wants to marry her. However, when Benton blurts out that the girl is the daughter of old Pokey Nose, Matteson turns pale and "sees red," and insists on a duel for the girl.

Andrew watches from a knot hole in the storeroom partition as Matteson and Barbary fight a lively duel with cutlasses, while Benton stands by with a drawn pistol.

Just as Matteson manages to best Barbary, and force him to agree to the bargain of taking Matteson's share of the booty in exchange for the girl, Benton knocks down Matteson with the butt of his pistol, and then fires it full into the breast of Barbary.

CHAPTER IX.

A SHOWDOWN.

THREE things I was aware of in the second following that fearful deed: a soul-numbing horror at the treachery of it—a scream from somewhere near that set my nerves jumping—and a shout and the rush of feet on the schooner's poop above.

It was not a man's, but a woman's, scream. Hysterically it rang behind that closed door of Barbary's cabin, that not even he had opened since those first few moments after we had been brought aboard.

Then the rush of feet above became a trample of feet at the cabin door. The door flew open with a crash and there, just inside the tiny passage, stood an amazed seaman staring with bulging eyes into the cabin where the smoke wreathes still drifted and waved.

"A shot—I heard a pistol shot—" he began, and then stopped short as the snarling Benton whirled on him.

"Get out!" roared that scoundrel, making as if to hurl the useless pistol he still held in his hand. Promptly the sailor fled, banging the door behind him as though the devil were after him.

Closely, callously, Benton surveyed the slender Matteson whom he had

struck into unconsciousness or death with his heavy pistol butt; sneeringly he regarded the sprawling form of his comrade in crime, Barbary, whom he had so foully pistoled. Then he turned slowly to that closed side cabin door.

Careless of noise, I scrambled out of the canvas and to the small square door out of the storeroom, swinging it on its hinges.

Engrossed though he was in his purpose, the sea captain must have heard something, for he stopped short of the side cabin door and turned about. A puzzled frown came on his face and he stepped back to bend over each of his victims in turn, knowing naught of my own presence at the storeroom door which my quivering fingers held ajar.

Had I been better prepared for such an opportunity I might in that instant have sprung out almost atop of him as he bent down, but the narrowness of the frame prevented any such instantaneous move.

Unarmed I was, but there were arms in the cabin, could I but reach them. There was the rack of muskets, unloaded most like, against the wall, and there were the cutlasses still lying on the floor where the stricken duelists had dropped them, and there were their discarded pistols still on the table against the wall.

If I was to arm myself to any advantage it would have to be with the pistols, for the cutlasses would have been as useless to me in my unfamiliarity as a carronade to an Indian brave. On those pistols I now fixed my purpose.

Benton seemed satisfied that nothing could arise in the cabin there to thwart his plans, and turned away with never a look toward where I crouched. Before he had gone a step I had the door open and one foot out.

By the time he had gone two paces I was on my feet in the cabin, stealing toward that table with the precious pistols as silently as ever I had stalked turkey or deer in the forests.

Careful as I was, though, a plank cracked under me just as he laid hand to the side cabin door; he whirled with amazing swiftness for one so big. And so we faced each other, at almost equal distances from the table whereon lay the pistols.

For an instant he could not speak; his lips gaped in wordless surprise. I was all eyes to see whether his pistol was handy to his fingers.

It was, but it was uncocked. With that knowledge I flung myself toward the table in one great bound. And out of the corner of my eye I saw his hand flash to his pistol butt.

"Body o' Satan!" he roared. "It's the forest fellow!"

Even as my hands closed on the weapons on the table I saw the glint of his pistol's barrel as he threw it forward to cover me.

Just in the nick of time I flung myself aside.

The cabin rang with the explosion, the spurt of flame all but singed my hair, but the bullet had sped harmless by the thickness of an eyelash. The next moment I was leaping back to safety and to a place clear of the swirling pistol smoke where he could not spring upon me unseen under its misty cover.

But seeing that he had missed, Benton had not tarried, now that I was armed and he was not. Cursing and roaring he plunged toward the cabin door leading out onto the deck, setting the powder fumes whirling with the wind of his going.

Frantically I tugged at my pistol hammers to get them cocked, but in my eagerness I only cut my fingers on the flints. I got one ready just as he jerked the outer door open, and I hastily threw up and fired.

A roaring oath told me I had not missed altogether, but the vigor and speed with which he jerked the door to behind him and was gone told me also that I had given him but a trifling wound.

So I stood alone in the cabin, one loaded and one discharged pistol in my hands, staring about, all but dazed by the rapid turn of events. I wondered what I had best do next, when suddenly from behind me I heard a low voice, weak and stumbling: "Bar the—cabin —door, Daniel Boone!"

I turned. Barbary, whom I had reckoned instantly slain, was looking at me with fevered eyes, his face deathly white with the strain of turning it to face me.

With comprehension of his meaning, I turned and ran with all speed to the door when Benton had vanished. I found there, even as Barbary had said, a great oaken bar, with great iron cleats let into the timbers of the door's frame to hold it.

The oaken door itself was inches thick, as if the builder had in mind that it might be called on to resist attack. Having secured the great bar across, I waited beside it for a moment. Outside I could hear cries and oaths and the tramp of many feet. Then the door trembled with the shock of men's bodies against it.

"The first man through will be an unlucky one," I called by way of stopping them, "for I stand ready inside with pistols loaded!"

The shaking ceased at that, though they would have had to splinter the thick oak to force their way in. Then from outside rose Benton's hoarse voice:

"Ho, you forest fellow! Let us in, and I will see to it that you shall go free—that you shall go unharmed and free at the first town we come abreast of!"

"Thanking you for the offer, I'll just keep the door closed," I answered shortly. "I have seen something already of the trust that can be placed in you."

"Then," shouted Benton, "I'll break the back of you with my bare hands when I am able to lay them on you!"

Nevertheless I noted that they tried no more to push the door in.

BUT this very silence of theirs now aroused my uneasiness. They would be plotting something, I knew. I went back to look carefully about the cabin, and so perceived Barbary gazing at me again as if he would speak. I went and bent down that the drain on his strength might be less when he spoke. And a tiny smile came on his face as he whispered.

"You're a fine lad—Daniel. I thought as much before. You'll pay him off in full for me—won't you, Daniel?"

Realizing that he meant Benton, I nodded quickly. For in my rage at the injuries I had suffered from the man and at his villainies and murders that even a savage might have been ashamed of, a cold fury possessed me that nothing but his death could have satisfied.

My nod seemed to cheer Barbary greatly. After resting for a moment to gather his strength, he opened his eyes again, rolling them meaningly toward the side-cabin.

"In there—Daniel," he whispered. "A fine girl—no baggage, y'see? 'Tis a judgment on me, mayhap—this wound—for abducting her. Ye'll look out—for her, Daniel?"

Again I nodded, a strange lump in my throat at seeing him so weak.

Whatever his villainies, he had befriended both myself and that girl there in the safety of his cabin. So before I did aught else I searched about in the captain's cabin until I found a jug of water, and fetched it to him and gave it to him, a sip at a time, which seemed to strengthen him considerably. Then I went to the side-cabin door whose entrance Benton had been twice disappointed of, and opened it.

As my eyes grew accustomed to the side-cabin I saw on the bunk a girl, her hands and feet bound so ingeniously to each other and to the bunk that while she had considerable freedom of move-

ment, yet it was impossible for her to free herself.

Her hair was spread disordered about her pillow, and her eyes were staring at me in dread and horror. Hurriedly I spoke to abate her fear that had so evidently struck her speechless.

"It is I—Andrew King—the Kentucky fellow that rode with you into the ambush," I said quickly. "Don't you remember me? I have come to set you loose."

As I spoke I was picking at her knots. For a moment she stared, and then she closed her eyes, as in great relief.

Either from her nervousness or my fumbling, I could not untie the knotted cords. So, remembering that Barbary undoubtedly had a knife, I explained to the girl what I went after, and hurried back into the main cabin.

Lucky it was that I did so. As I neared Barbary I became aware that his eyes were fixed on me anxiously and his lips were moving in attempt to call me.

"The cabin light, Daniel — the light!" he muttered thickly, so wrought up that he even attempted to raise his arm. "The cabin light, Daniel—*overhead!*"

I turned and watched a small trap-door-like opening in the cabin ceiling, which I had scarcely noted before.

This was different from the tiny round holes no bigger than my two fists, with their metal gratings, through which the daylight poured into the cabin. It was a square solid-framed affair of fully two feet in length and breadth, and well shuttered by a stout oaken trap which now fitted it tightly.

Just now the trap seemed as solid a part of the ceiling as the great beams themselves. Then even as I watched, the creaking noise sounded again, ever so slightly, and the trap seemed to lift upward the tiniest fraction of an inch. I tiptoed to a spot where I could catch the first glimpse through when the trap opened, and repriming my pistol I cocked it and pointed it at the slowly lifting edge of the trap.

With a last tiny creak a thred of daylight showed. Then the light was blotted out and I saw two glittering eyes staring down. Before ever the owner of the eyes could move I fired. With the report came a great cry from without, a heavy fall, and then the oaken trap crashed heavily back into its place again.

Almost simultaneously I heard from the side-cabin a low cry. "Andrew! Andrew! You are not hurt, Andrew?"

"Not I, but the other fellow," I answered.

I returned to Barbary to borrow his knife, at the same time wondering troubledly what I should do if those above tried the trap again, since I had no charges left now in my pistols nor knowledge where to get more.

Barbary, however, seemed to read my thought as I bent over him. "Powder and ball—in the chests—in my cabin, Daniel," said he huskily. "More in the storeroom—for the muskets." Then he licked his lips feverishly. "Water—water, please, Daniel"

Again I gave him a half dozen sips, and then slipping into the side-cabin cut the ropes that bound the girl. She leaped to her feet as the cords fell clear. "Where are we, Andrew?" she cried.

"All that I know," said I, "is that we are on a schooner with a most villainous crew, and a murderous fiend for a captain. But as to what they are going to do with us, I should say 'nothing,' until they find better ways of breaking into the cabin than through the trap. For as fast as they put head or foot inside I can put a bullet through them." And without waiting for further talk I broke open the chests and found therein both powder and bullets, even as Barbary had said.

"Dolt! Don't you think I know we are on a ship?" snapped the girl with surprising spirit; then she stopped short and blushed and bit her lip. "Nay, I

don't mean that; you have been very good," she said apologetically. "But what I mean is, where are we? How close to land? Could we swim ashore, do you think?"

Marveling at the fire and spirit of her, not two minutes freed of her bonds, I shook my head. "I know no more than you do, Miss—Miss—"

"Henrietta," said she, "though my father, lacking a son, has always called me Henry."

"I know no more than you do, Miss Henrietta," said I. "I think we must still be in the river, however, since Benton offered to land me at the next village we came abreast of."

"Benton?" said she, wrinkling her pretty brows. "Who is Benton? The only man I have seen aboard is the great fellow who caught me from my horse and brought me here and bound me, and told me I would be safe as long as I did not cry out."

"That was Barbary—a kindly fellow, even if he has been a pirate mayhaps," I answered. "Benton is the villain of a captain who treacherously shot that same Barbary not twenty minutes ago. If Benton should get inside the cabin, may God help both of us!"

"It was Benton you shot at just now, trying to break in?" she demanded.

"Him or one of his rascally crew," said I, priming my reloaded pistols even as I spoke.

"Then won't he try again soon?" she cried fearfully. "Hasten back to the cabin and keep watch—I'll fetch the powder and shot in to you."

So leaving her to collect the ammunition, which I had been trying to cram into my pockets, I returned to the main cabin. Barbary lay so quiet for a moment I thought he had expired.

I had to marvel at the tremendous strength of the man that could fight off death so long. He even opened his eyes as I bent down, and rolled them meaningly toward the sprawling figure of Matteson, which all this time had been corpse-like in its stillness.

"Not dead, Daniel," he whispered, "I heard him—groan."

Indeed at that moment the sprawling figure near by twitched. Splashing water on the pallid face I had the satisfaction of seeing the fluttering eyes come wide open.

"That's all right—you're all right now," said I encouragingly, having examined the bruise on his head. "Just a heavy clout that came right over the ear."

But his eyes continued to hold mine in a strange steady stare. Then this strange man who had moved so mysteriously through the exciting events of the past twenty-four hours sighed deeply.

"I had thought—I had hoped—that I was dead."

CHAPTER X.

A TRAITOR TALKS.

IN my ministrations I had completely forgotten the girl. All at once I heard her step behind me, and then her voice. And it was shrill with both surprise and anxiety. "Stephen Matthews!" she cried. "How—what—" And then suddenly she was at his side, the powder and ball she had brought in her skirt scattering all over the floor. "Oh, you are hurt!"

Matthews! I became aware to my surprise that instead of welcoming the girl's ministering hands he was actually trying to turn away from her. He put out his hands, white and shaking, as though to hold her off. And his white lips muttered hoarsely: "Keep away! Keep away! Would you touch a—traitor?"

"A traitor?" she cried, in utter amazement. "You?"

"Aye," he nodded, while a bitter look came over his face, twisting his mouth into hard cruel curves. "Even I—Major Stephen Matthews. How

think you, otherwise, these scoundrelly sailors would have known of the chests and what was in them?"

Long she stared at him, wordless, as if her brain could not give credence to what her ears heard. Then I saw the slow horror dawning in her eyes. Her hands fell away from him. "You were the one that told?" she whispered. "You were in the plot to steal the plates and papers?"

"Yes," said Matthews. "Not only did I reveal the secret, but 'twas I that planned the attack on the escort and the escape in this ship." His lips were curled with the bitter self-contempt of one who would sound his shame to the very depths.

She cried out wildly: "But why did you do it, Stephen?"

Matthews turned his head away, and his voice became scarcely audible. "Why else would I do it except—for a woman?" he asked bitterly. "For a woman I loved—and foolishly hoped I might win—had I but the money to woo her!"

"You can't mean—" She could not say the word that came to her, yet I knew with certainty what it was that she would have said.

And Matthews nodded slowly. "'Twas no compliment to think you might love one who now is become a traitor, was it?" he asked. "Yet when came the time to strike, I found that I was not even a good traitor. I was a weakling who could not shoot his fellow soldiers; a weakling who stood goggling like a stable lout while this mere youth here fought the fight of a man."

I do not think the girl even heard this last, for she had hidden her face in her hands. "To think that you could have thought so ill of me that you—you believed my love could be swayed by money!" she cried tearfully. "Why, I would have loved you had you no more than this forest-fellow's buckskins to wed in—if I had loved you!"

"But you didn't," he said slowly. "And if I had but reasoned I would have known."

THEN for the first time my manners returned to me, and I got up hastily, blushing to think how I had been giving all ears to things so little meant for me. Giving the greatly weakened Barbary another drink of water I betook myself to the storeroom and scattered things this way and that until I found the bags of bullets and cask of powder that I sought.

As I dragged the cask into the cabin for broaching, Matthews was just climbing slowly to his feet, where he stood swaying. Apparently he had told her the full story of the eventful night.

"And now you know all, I am glad," I heard him say with a tone of relief. "But as God is my witness I had no idea of encountering either your father or yourself. I had thought it would be the soldiers alone."

"But you brought my father back to consciousness and saw him safe away, when, had you left him to die, the knowledge of your part in the plot would have died with him," she exclaimed cheeringly. "Surely that can in some part condone your deeds."

But he shook his head. "It could not restore to me my honor as a man and a soldier," said he. "I was major of the guards, one of the few men especially intrusted with the safeguarding of these plates and papers. Could I but return them sefely to your father even now, at cost of my life, I would consider the exchange well made. At least I can try, though."

And he turned to me almost brightly. "Ah, Andrew, you bring the powder and ball for the muskets, eh? Good! Now let us barricade the door well, and if Master Benton comes charging we'll give him a hotter reception than he bargains for."

I explained to Matthews that the outer door was already barred, but at his insistence we now made a fair barricade

in addition, of the table and benches. And while we worked he put me in possession of the complete facts of this strange adventure in which I had become involved, nor spared himself a whit in the telling.

In moving the capital to Washington, it had been thought best to leave the national treasures for a while yet in Philadelphia where there were strong vaults for safeguarding them. Washington was as yet but a half-built village, the times were troublous, and no one could tell what might happen to a great quantity of currency in the transport from Philadelphia to Washington.

But some things it was thought absolutely necessary to take to the new capital: the state papers, the great seal, the standards of weights and measures, and these, the master plates, for printing money, and some samples of the specially made paper used in the printing.

To make the matter more secret, these things had been assigned to various trustworthy persons in the Government who should convey them hidden away among their own private effects. Thus it was that the master plates and printing paper had traveled among the wool-cards and pewter and other such household goods of Henrietta's father, the stocky, red-faced man of the tavern.

Not even the soldiers who in civilian clothes escorted the wagons knew in advance of their assignment or that there was anything valuable in the carts they apparently fell accidentally in with on the road. Their lieutenant knew, and Matthews, who was major of the regiment on duty at the State Buildings.

It had been the easiest thing imaginable for Matthews to effect the raid on the wagons, with little chance of himself ever being suspected. He had made the acquaintance of Barbary, whom rumor credited with a dark past in the Caribbean waters, and Barbary had brought in Benton as a sea-captain familiar with the river to act as pilot.

Benton also had arranged for the ship and crew, using Barbary's money, and had put in at Philadelphia apparently as an innocent merchantman. To further safeguard himself Matthews had used the name of Matteson in all his dealings with his partners.

The Blue Anchor tavern, whose rascally innkeeper, Grobel, was known to Barbary, had been chosen as a handy rendezvous where men could be kept concealed until the moment to strike.

Despite a bribed coachman, however, Henrietta's father, the head of the Secret Intelligence, had almost spoiled the scheme. Journeying with his daughter in disguise, so that his official presence aboard the ship for Washington might not lead to a suspicion that the cargo was particularly valuable, he had browbeat the coachman until the latter in fear had taken him to the tavern where he thought he would be effectually taken care of.

But the little man had all but fought his way clear with the news, and had seen and recognized Matthews so that the latter's safety absolutely depended upon the official's death.

Yet as I had seen he had found himself unable to slay men for defending that which he had betrayed, and too late had repented the crime he had planned.

Left to slay the man whose recognition meant his disgrace and death, he had revived him instead, and left him alive and free. Now all Matthews asked was to give his life for the safe return of the plates and papers.

All this I learned as we built the barricade. Thereafter, in the cabin where the girl soothed the dying pirate's last moments, we held council of war

IT was all too evident how serious was our plight. We held the cabin, but all the rest of the ship outside and above, with sails and steering gear, was in the hands of Benton and his cutthroats. For all we could do they could sail straight out to sea where hunger and thirst must bring surrender.

"Could we not shout for help to some village or ship?" I asked. "Surely we must pass some such before we reach the sea."

But Matthews shook his head. "They would but think it a drunken sailor's shouts or else the men working at the ropes," he replied. "Even if we gained their attention I doubt if we could be overtaken. This schooner, could walk away from the fastest ship that came pursuing."

"You think, then, Government ships from Philadelphia will come pursuing?" I asked.

"Aye," he said. "They will know by now, but unless Benton grounds his ship they will never catch us. And Benton is the best pilot of the river." At that we both fell silent, gloomy at the hopelessness of it. We could hold the cabin until we were killed or starved, but that would be all. The plates and papers we might throw overboard, but as a last resort I intended to try to barter these for the girl's safety —though I had little faith in Benton's promises.

In this gloomy silence I realized all at once that Barbary's eyes were open and fastened on me steadily. How long he had been trying to catch my attention or what he had heard I could not tell. But I bent over him even as the girl gave him a sip of water.

"Portholes, Daniel—" he whispered in tones so low I could scarcely hear, though my ear almost brushed his lips. "—Portholes—hidden—in for'rd bulkhead."

"You mean there are portholes for firing through the forward cabin wall?" I asked excitedly. "I couldn't find any just now when I looked."

"Hidden—under raised panels," he whispered. "Don't trust—the rascals." A faint smile at his own acumen twisted his lips slightly. Then his eyes brightened, peered at me anxiously. His voice became for a moment strong—amazingly strong. "You'll bring Benton to —a reckoning for me—Daniel?"

I nodded, but before I could speak Matthews had taken the words from my mouth. "Aye, I'll make him pay a full reckoning, Barbary," he said hoarsely.

Barbary's eyes brightened more than ever; his curving lips widened to a full smile. He tried to raise his head. "Fine lads—both!" he gasped. And the next moment he twisted convulsively, and was still.

TENDERLY we bore his body into Benton's room and closed the door upon it. Then while the girl Henrietta sobbed, Matthews and I sought out the portholes Barbary had used his last strength to tell us of.

Under four sliding panels we found them, cleverly cut and cleverly hidden so that neither from without nor within could their presence have been suspected by one not in the secret. Loading the whole dozen muskets and leaving Henrietta with a pair of pistols to fire at the slightest motion of the overhead trap, we cautiously opened a pair of portholes.

Out on deck the sailors sat about carelessly, drinking or sleeping and paying scant heed to ropes or sails save when Benton's voice cried bull-like from the poop above us. This was a great disappointment to us, for we had hoped to shoot him as our first target and thus rid the enemy of their leader.

But we had to be satisfied with what targets we could find, and knowing they would discover the portholes now we had opened them, we both picked targets and fired.

At the last moment I found I could not slay a man, however villainous, who did not even know he was being fired upon, and so shot my man through the shoulder. But Matthews' man, a great hulking fellow, yelled at the report, leaped into the air, and fell to deck where he lay kicking, shot through the body.

For a second the other sailors sat stunned, staring incredulously. Then

with one accord they bolted, some to the fo'c'sle, others to the cover of masts and ship's gear, leaving my own wounded fellow to make his way as best he could, cursing and groaning, to the fo'c'sle hatch. I could have shot the fellow twice over, but figured him already disabled, and Matthews could not bear on him from his side of the cabin.

Now for the first time our hopes rose high. For almost ahead and close aboard we could see the nearing banks of the river, and the schooner must soon come about on another tack or perforce run herself aground. And with us commanding the view of the decks and lower rigging we had hopes that we could prevent the sailors handling the ropes and so force the schooner to run aground before the breeze, whether the helmsman or people on the poop wished or not.

But we had counted without the seamanship of Captain Benton. Down toward the river bank we bore, with us two in the cabin holding our muskets ready to shoot the first man that left cover to handle a rope. Then when it seemed inevitable that we must run aground, the ship's nose began to come into the wind, slowly, deftly, her speed decreasing as she lost the wind.

For a second the sails flapped wildly in the breeze, then came over, slowly at first and finally with a rush. For a moment she heeled over, but then as Captain Benton turned the wheel deftly she eased down and started on her new tack smoothly and swiftly, though even to my landsman's eyes the sails were held too much into the wind and she heeled over more than she should have done.

However she sailed, and our spirits dropped. We could not reach the poop with our bullets, and on its safe planking Captain Benton could work the ship until dark, after which they could handle the ropes as well as ever and we unable to see them.

Matthews groaned with bitterness. "That's the end of us, Andrew," said he sorrowfully. "They'll work safe out to sea before the Government ships can ever come up. And then it will be short shrift for us in the cabin."

But I had been pondering the matter in my own style. "If we could but cut the ropes holding the sails taut—" I said thoughtfully.

He stopped me with a bitter laugh. "And how could we do that? They would shoot us down before we had gone two paces from the cabin door. Also they would rush the door while we held it open, and so force their way inside for a certainty. No, it's all over with us, Andrew."

But I was squinting through my porthole, weighing my plans. "Which ropes would it be necessary to cut to stop the ship from making headway?" I asked.

"The ones that hold the booms and after corners of the sails to the cleats and pins in the deck or bulwarks," said he without interest. "Cut those ropes and the sails would flap and spill the wind and be useless. But how do you plan—to leap out and whack them in twain with a cutlass?"

MEANWHILE I was busy with my muskets, measuring out the powder for the next charge with care and precision. Then I took the musket I had first shot and which I had exchanged for another one already loaded, and carefully I rammed powder, patch and ball home.

"There are a hundred men south of the Ohio," I said, "who would think it child's sport to sever a homespun thread at this distance. But with these rough unrifled muskets, which no woodsman would consider owning, I promise you nothing in advance."

As I spoke I had been laying the musket in the loophole, sighting it to bear on the rope of the forward sail just where it was secured around a cleat. Simultaneously with the report came a roar of derision from the

fo'c'sle and from the poop overhead; they evidently thought I had fired at what I believed to be one of them.

As the smoke cleared I stared anxiously through the porthole. Matthews close alongside of me, squinting out of the porthole, gave a sigh of disappointment. The white splotch of the bullet showed in the wood planking just above and beyond the rope I had fired at.

"*Tcchk!* I knew these sights and bores were not to be trusted," said I. "Now that I know how they err, though, I hope to do better."

Again loading with care to make the charge exactly the same as the time before, I fired again, making due allowance for the amount I had missed the target the first shot.

This time, with the report, the rope to the sail jerked suddenly, and I saw a faint tuft of hempen threads go flying off on the wind.

From above there came suddenly a great roaring and cursing. A couple of fellows poked muskets around the corners of the fo'c'sle door and fired hurriedly at our portholes, but the bullets only imbedded themselves harmlessly in the oak alongside.

In fact, what harm resulted came to the villains themselves, for the next time they showed heads and arms in sight I was ready with my musket and took one of them neatly through the forearm, so that he howled and dropped his gun. Thereafter there came no more shots from forward, and I returned to my shooting at the rope.

Now the rascals on the poop, to thwart my purpose, beat down over the edge of the poop with a great stick to prevent me from aiming, so that I was forced to withdraw my musket barrel almost entirely inside the cabin.

Nevertheless, I fired steadily, with only occasional misses, until all at once the frayed rope parted. Immediately the whole sail flapped wildly, slatting and whipping and spilling the wind so that it was useless.

For a moment the ship's head, now unbalanced with the loss of the sail, shot around into the wind, but the helmsman checked her and held her steady on her course again, though her speed was considerably abated, and it was evident that she steered with difficulty.

The villains in the fo'c'sle and on the poop let out a great roar at the shooting away of the rope, but having experienced a sample of the musket's work, had no great wish to expose themselves to it. The rope to the foresail I shot away at my leisure, so that that too flapped and lost the wind, and the ship's speed decreased by a full half.

But the other great sail was too close to use and the rope securing it was out of the range of the ports. However, Matthews was very cheerful again over it all.

"They can do little better than keep steerage way on her now," said he with great satisfaction. "Likewise they dare not go too close to shore on the tacks. Now if we can just keep them from repairing the damage the Government ships may yet come up with us."

I was fairly sure of doing this as long as daylight lasted. After that it might be a different story. I said as much to Matthews.

"Aye," he agreed. "They will certainly make every effort to storm the cabin during the night when the darkness will give them every advantage. And even if they fail of that they will assuredly repair the ropes and sail the ship at full speed, so that by daylight to-morrow they will be well beyond possibility of capture."

But I had suddenly remembered something. "There is a casement in the storeroom that opens close above the rudder," said I. "Could we not damage the rudder so they could not steer? Or, failing that, we could always escape through the casement at the last. If you are a fair swimmer

we should have a fair chance of getting Miss Henrietta ashore between us, even though she cannot swim a stroke."

His face lighted up with excitement. "A casement? In the storeroom?" he cried. "I must go take a look at it right now."

But presently he was back again, his face bespeaking dashed hopes. "There is no chance of injuring the rudder," he said. "It is big and stout and too strongly built. But we might escape through the casement into the water. While you watch here I will make arrangements toward that end."

Through the long hours I watched, muskets loaded and ready to my hand. But the rascals in the fo'c'sle had waxed prudent, and during the whole day I caught no more than a fleeting glimpse of arm or leg.

When came the dusk the shadows grew so deep that I could not tell whether they were creeping men or pieces of ship's gear that lay out there nestled close to the deck planking.

Then I felt Matthews touch my arm. Silently I followed him back into the main cabin and then the storeroom. The casement shutter was already ajar and we now opened it wide.

Twilight had fallen fast. The water below us was only an unseen murky thing, rippling eerily. The banks and trees that I knew should be somewhere on either side of us were blotted completely by the night's gloom, until there was no telling whether they were ten feet or ten miles distant.

Only astern of us, where the long stretch of water caught the little remaining twilight like a mirror, was there any vista left in the closing shadows.

All at once Matthews clutched my shoulder in a fierce grip.

"What was that?" he whispered tensely. "A boat—a shadow—*something* back in that light streak there!"

Before I could see, could answer, could even turn to peer, there came from the cabin where we had left the girl a terrific noise. The crashing of wood, the splintering of planks, the pounding of timbers, then the crashing report of firearms, and the girl's scream.

"Andrew—Stephen! Quick! The door—the roof-trap! Theyre breaking in!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST DEFENSES.

TAKING advantage of the darkness, Benton and his cutthroats had set to to finish us off immediately. With heavy spars they were battering their way in. Matthews was forward with a bound to her aid even while I, warned by the rasping of the overhead trapdoor, grabbed up one of the loaded muskets we had placed near by in readiness for just such an emergency.

As the trap flew open, a man's legs and body showed, wriggling and scrambling for a foothold. Without aiming I threw up my musket and fired, and, with a howl, he dropped writhing into the cabin.

Immediately after him came another, who was already too far inside to scramble back. At the shot he let go and fell, to land on his feet awkwardly, jarred and unsteady from his leap. With one sweep of the musket butt I beat him to the floor, and then, without waiting to see further, I grabbed up another loaded musket and fired through the open trap.

Another howl told of an unwasted bullet. Then scurrying feet clattered across the poop planking, going away from the trap and toward the ladder leading to the fo'c'sle for all they were worth, their owners fully convinced of the foolishness of any such attack that might be made through the cabin trap.

I could stand out of sight of them above and shoot through the arm or head or leg any man who showed so

much of himself below the trap and in the light gleam of the cabin candles.

Forward, though, luck was kinder to the attackers. The thick wood was giving before their terrific blows, and once the way was open it would be they that would be shielded by the night's darkness outside, while we, inside the cabin, would be plain in the candleglow. And we dared not blow out the lights lest they swarm in through both openings unseen. In the dark it was certain we would have no chance at all.

Matthews knew this as well as I. "Back to the storeroom, both of you!" he cried. "Be ready to swim. I'll be with you as soon as I can knock the legs off this bench!"

But I delayed to reload, so that they were both beside me before I had finished, Matthews dragging the wreck of one of the benches along with him as he came. At the same time the door broke open before the terrific hammering, and only the wedged wreck of it and the barricade held back the attackers.

"Into the storeroom, both of you! And take the arms with you!" whispered Matthews, shoving his wooden bench through the square storeroom door as he spoke and throwing his own musket after. "Slide the bench into the water, Andrew, and then jump after it with Henrietta."

I was already helping the girl through the narrow door, but inside I turned back to Matthews. "And you?" I cried.

"I'll be with you soon," he answered. "I will but hold them a minute to let you get away clear in the darkness, then I too will jump. But hurry, the barricade is giving now!"

Then I became aware that Henrietta was clutching my arm, trying to get past me into the cabin again. "The masterplates, Stephen!" she cried. "They are in the small box beside the arm-rack. Don't let them get them!"

Matthews turned, bent for the plates —and in that instant the barricade gave way.

Matthews whirled like lightning, cocked pistol in each hand. There was something in his poise, keen, tense, that reminded me of a coiled snake ready to strike.

Before him Benton, who had burst into the cabin at the head of his villains, stood stock-still, rooted to the planks, his pistol half raised, his heavy jaw sagging. The rest of the scoundrels behind halted as uncertainly.

"Stop where you are!" commanded Matthews in his quiet deadly tone that cut the stillness like a knife. "You know me, Benton—Hayes—Baptiste! Another step and I fire!"

Benton, under the point-blank muzzles of those unwavering pistols, could only stand and stare. He licked his great ugly lips as if they had suddenly become fearfully parched. But those behind, out of sight of those menacing muzzles, cursed and stamped. "What's the matter?" they cried. "Rush 'em!"

Under the surge from behind I saw Benton realized he must rush, willy-nilly. His mouth closed, his face muscles twitched. I saw Matthews's fingers tighten on the triggers.

Then suddenly, even as I waited for the flash and roar that would at least mean Benton was past all villainy, something happened that we, in our concentration on Benton, had neglected to guard against.

From the rear of the crowd a pair of hands shot out, dashing out the two wall candles that were our best light. In the rush of semidarkness I saw Benton throw himself sidewise even as Matthews's pistols spurted flame. Then the place was filled with men.

The onslaught brought me back to my senses. The girl was beside me, the wooden bench almost under my foot. Scrambling, I found my way to that casement, slid the bench out through it, and caught for the girl's hand with mine.

"Catch hold of this plank and hold tight to it when you strike the water," I whispered fiercely. "Afterward don't make a sound if you hear any one, until you are sure who it is."

"You—you are coming, too?" she demanded.

"I will come as soon as I see how it is with Matthews," I answered huskily.

I DID not tell her I had no hope for him in that rush I had just seen. But in that very instant there came a scraping, scratching sound at the square storeroom door behind us. And against the square of dim light I could see the loom of shoulders and a head.

"There he is coming now," whispered the girl, clinging to my fingers.

But no shoulders as bulky as those could ever have belonged to Matthews, nor any such great bulletlike head. They could have been no one's except that vile bully Benton's.

That in itself told me all. Benton would never have risked crawling through that narrow, cramping hole had he not known for certain that Matthews was already taken care of. Benton had finished Matthews. I doubted not now, and was crawling into the storeroom to catch us trembling in a corner, as he probably expected.

I could hear his hoarse, animal-like grunts as he wriggled his huge body through. Then all at once something seemed to burst in a red fury in my brain.

"Jump, girl!" I cried chokily. "Stick to the plank, and stay quiet." And then, more like an animal than a human being, I threw myself at that bestial thing in the door.

My pistol I had lost, Heaven knew where. But in my rage I wanted only to fasten my bare hands into his throat, to tear and rend like a cornered bear. And lucky it was that he was still partly stuck in the door, or he would have crushed me in that first wild instant as a panther crushes a rabbit.

Dazed he must have been, too. He cried out and wriggled, trying to back out of the door frame. Then his threshing hands fell by chance on my neck and face.

I heard him laugh in bestial satisfaction. Then his great fingers tightened around my neck. Flashes of brilliant light darted before my eyeballs, bursting like bombshells in all directions. A great roaring came in my ears. His was a strength that could squeeze a man in two. I went limp with the fearful pain of it.

He felt the slacking of my resistance. He laughed again, brutal, gloating laughter. "Ah, my young forest-loper," he jeered, "did I not tell you I'd bring you to a reckoning? Well, it's come. And now I shall break your back for you!"

FOR a second I felt his fingers loosen, grope along my body. My lungs caught a gulp of fresh air. The roaring ceased, and with it the numbness of my senses as the blood pulsed again to my brain. And also with it went that insane fury that had seized upon me.

I thought like lightning, yet not wildly; I calculated his every movement, where each part of his body should be—his shoulders, his belt. I felt his right hand slip along my legs, around them, while his left slid around my neck and over my shoulder behind.

My own hand crept to his belt, to the knife I had seen hanging always just over his right hip. With a lightning jerk I grabbed it and struck.

I did not need Benton's grunt and shudder to know it had gone home; the solid blow to my hand told me that. I jerked the knife out, only to strike again—and again. Benton suddenly fell with his whole tremendous bulk across my face and neck, crushing me and shutting out all light and sound.

Desperately I struggled to get clear. Then suddenly I became aware of a new din in the cabin beside me. On the decks above also sounded shouts

and the thump of feet. I thought I heard splashing, and hoped it was Henrietta got safely away.

When I had painfully struggled out and to the storeroom door it was all revealed at a glance.

Inside the cabin, cut and bruised, the villainous crew of the schooner was already lining up, being chained securely by sturdy, wholesome-looking fellows in countrymen's dress. Still other countrymen, on the opposite side of the cabin, were keeping watch on them with leveled muskets, lest they try to resist or force an escape.

And bending over Matthews in the corner was that same stocky, red-faced gentleman who had fought in the Blue Anchor Tavern, with a white bandage around his head as evidence of that fight.

Matthews was whiter of face and thinner looking, and I saw the seep of red through his tattered shirt. Yet there was a half smile on his face as he looked up at the red-faced gentleman, who half supported him with an arm placed right under his shoulders.

"The plates—safe in this chest—beside my shoulder," he gasped.

"Damn the plates!" snapped the red-faced gentleman. "My daughter—where is she?"

"In the storeroom—with the forest-runner," smiled Matthews faintly. "All safe—Henrietta, plates, honor. Now I can—yes, die like a—gentleman."

"Die? Nonsense! Who says you'll die?" snorted the red-faced gentleman, and with double vehemence because, as I could perceive, he saw no hope himself.

"But Matthews shook his head slowly. "I'm well—now," he said faintly. "Better than I—had ever hoped—to be—again."

And then his head fell back.

With a great lump in my throat, I struggled to my feet and started to crawl through the storeroom door. But some one else was before me, who flashed white hands past me and slender shoulders, and whose fragrant hair swept my face as she passed.

"Father!" I heard Henrietta cry, and the next minute she had vanished within his encircling arms.

ON the poop of the government ship that next morning, bathed and rested and in borrowed clothing, I spent an unpleasant half hour while we made our way steadily back toward Philadelphia.

Behind us, manned by government sailors, came the schooner Saucy Mary with her sorrowful cargo, yet it was not this that was responsible for my discomfort. It was the fact that for the first time in my life I was being of necessity in the presence of a young lady of fashion, and a most tormentingly pretty one at that.

Explanations as to the timely arrival of the countrymen had been simple. The stocky, red-faced man had recovered full use of his limbs almost immediately after Matthews had revived him, and, riding to the city, had dispatched an armed government ship with many men in swift pursuit.

Then he himself had galloped by land. Once ahead of the Saucy Mary it was easy for him to collect a party of armed men and row out to waylay the schooner, which had been so delayed by our hampering bullets.

This much I had learned from one man and another of the ship, before there suddenly swept up out of the cabin the most fashionable lady I had ever seen, and, as I have said, the prettiest.

Before I had recognized in this marvelous person the girl whom I had known as Henrietta, she had sent the sailor I was talking to flying forward with a peremptory toss of the head and then sat herself down apparently to torment me. For seeing her thus my bashfulness came upon me and I was tongue-tied, and could only answer her

questions with a "yes" or "no," until she laughed in my face and teased me with my timidity.

And I was glad enough to see her father, the red-faced swordsman of the tavern, come forward to join us, but his arrival only added to my discomfort. For nothing would satisfy him but that I should accept his hospitality when we left the ship.

And looking down at my own borrowed, poorly fitting clothing and then at Miss Henrietta's exquisite finery, which by chance she had found on that very ship for transport to Washington, I felt more ill at ease than ever. But no excuse I could give would deter her father.

"It was nothing—I did nothing," I stammered. "Barbary and Matthews it was that defended Miss Henrietta."

But she, the minx, seeing my embarrassment, began clasping her hands and vowing to Heaven that I had saved her alone and unaided. "A veritable St. George in buckskin come to save me from the dragons!" she protested loudly.

As for her father, he snorted in his gruff manner, that I knew now he but used to cover an unusually friendly heart. "A fiddlestick, sir, for your excuses!" he said. "I will not be denied. You will require a lodging and new clothing that will fit, and linen, and divers things, until you can find time to buy your own. Until then you shall regard my house and wardrobe as yours."

"But—but I have friends here—friends of my uncle—who expect me and will provide me with all things needful," I said. "I could not impose myself upon you and—and Miss Henrietta."

My last sentence he chose utterly to ignore. "Friends, eh?" he repeated testily, harking back to my first sentence. "And you prefer their hospitality to mine, eh? Well, that is your privilege, sir. But who may these friends be, if I may inquire, and I might be able to direct you quicker to them?"

"Why, they are not exactly friends of *mine*," I explained lamely. "I do not know them, but I have a letter of introduction here from my uncle to them." And I felt puzzledly in my borrowed jacket's pocket for it, quite forgetting I had left it in my torn shirt." It is a Mr. Calthorpe—a Mr. Thomas Calthorpe."

I stopped searching then to stare at them; for both of them were staring wide-eyed at me. "*Calthorpe?*" repeated my red-faced friend. "Did you say Calthorpe?"

"Aye," said I, "that's it. Thomas Calthorpe. If I could but find the letter I could show it to you."

But suddenly he had found speech and breath simultaneously. "Why, I'm Thomas Calthorpe!" he shouted. "Are you, by chance, named Andrew King? And is your uncle Thomas King, my old friend, whom I promised ten years ago to find a college for his nephew when he should be grown old enough for the tutoring?"

"Why—why—" was all I could stammer, staring like a three-months'-old babe.

And then Henrietta's voice rang out in silvery laughter. Her nose, that had been so disdainful, crinkled in amusement, while her eyes sparkled with sheer deviltry.

"Oh, lawky, lawky!" she exclaimed in affected horror. "To think of having the great Mr. King from Kentucky stay with us, and no one to do the honors as hostess except my poor little self.

"Truly I shall feel like a milkmaid before the elegance of his velvets and laces and silken stockings unless"—and here she winked shamelessly—"unless sometimes he dress himself in simple buckskin and homespun again, that we poor damsels be not dazzled by his splendor—eh, Andy?"

THE END

"What's the matter?" barked the brakeman

The Boy Who Resigned at Sunset and Returned at Midnight

The tale of a lad who took the most momentous trip of his life on a train that didn't leave the station

By BOB DAVIS

ONCE upon a time a certain poor boy in search of a job went to a certain rich man and asked for employment. Said the Crœsus:

"Your coming to me is quite opportune. I've got a line of chain stores up-State, and I am looking for a youth who will begin down the ladder, learn the business, and grow up with it. Just at present these stores are not prosperous, but they should be. Are you interested?"

"Yes, sir, I'll take a chance. When and where do I begin?"

"Syracuse. Here's an order for transportation. Report to Mr. Blank, who is in charge at that point. He will put you to work."

The new broom hit the rattler with high hopes and stepped off at Syracuse the next morning. He started on the pay roll at twenty-five dollars a week, sweated his heart out for eight months, got a desk job at thirty dollars, worked overtime, lost heart, and at the end of the year came to the conclusion that the business was N. G. He took stock of the staff of slaves about him and decided that he wasn't cut out for that sort of drudgery. At about that time young Mr. William Jennings Bryan had got himself nominated for the

Presidency by thundering the dictum at a Democratic convention that "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns—you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold!"

Certainly not! The young chain store student decided to throw up his job at once. His heroic conclusion was reached one pay day about sunset. He cleaned out a hatful of personal papers from his desk, turned the blotter over, wrote a carefully prepared but brief letter announcing his retirement, placed it where it would do the most harm, and went to his lodgings. Bidding his landlady a sad farewell, he gathered his meager wardrobe into a suitcase, and at 10 P.M. sauntered into the Syracuse depot and bought a ticket that would take him e-l-s-e-w-h-e-r-e.

In the mood of one who had escaped from a life of bondage, he climbed aboard the train, which was scheduled to depart at ten fifteen; brushed his teeth, took a drink of ice water, crawled into his berth and began to count sheep. Uneasy lies the head of the jobless man. At ten thirty he turned over with a long sigh and set himself for the getaway. But the train did not start. At eleven it was still and not a wheel was turning on the ten fifteen. Syracuse forever? And then the query began to pound into him: Why was he leaving, anyhow? What was at the bottom of his attempted flight from the scene of his failure? Disgust? Impatience? No: Cowardice!

He rose to a sitting posture in his narrow berth and took stock of his shortcomings. He saw himself running away from his obligations; saw himself a quitter, a welsher, a half-heart making an exit in fear. The swift reaction roused him and he tumbled from his berth as one possessed. Shaping a resolution that did him credit, he dressed with the alacrity of a volunteer fireman, slammed his old-fashioned nightgown into his suitcase and dashed for the door. Syracuse wasn't such a bad place after all.

"What's the matter?" barked the brakeman as the "man who came back" hit the platform.

"Not goin'. I forgot sumpin," replied the runner in full flight out of the station.

He hurried through the deserted city up to the chain store, hid his suitcase in shame behind a crate, roused the night watchman, to whom he gave some satisfactory excuse for appearing at that hour, and went straight to his desk, from which he recovered his letter of resignation, destroying it with infinite satisfaction. The somber shadows engulfed him, but there, in that semidarkened store with its tier upon tier of laden shelves extending to the ceiling, he saw the light of the future. For a man in full flight it was a droll setting in which to stop and get his breath. About one o'clock he departed, slapping the watchman on the back as he passed out into the fresh, clear air.

"So long, Bill. Fine night, isn't it?"

The prodigal recovered his suitcase and returned to his lodgings, where to his landlady he made a clean breast of his attempted exodus from the imaginary ills that beset him. That was over twenty years ago.

It was from this kindly woman, who had been little less than a mother to him, that I gathered the tale which I now impart to every and all terrified who flee when no man pursueth.

The chain of stores from which the runaway could not free himself, and in which he is now one of the strongest links, has paid annually for the last five years over a million dollars in dividends, and the passenger on the ten fifteen who failed completely to become a traveler is one of the powers who direct its destinies.

Moral: One may go far on a stalled train.

THE END

None of the real robbers was hit

The Double Jinx

Friday was bad enough, the thirteenth worse—when they came together Bull Gatchell never had a chance

By WILL THOMAS WITHROW

SINCE the hour when Bull Gatchell had made his début into this vale of steel-barred jails, and blue-coated policemen—which event had occurred on Friday, the thirteenth—he had been relentlessly pursued by these twin deities of ill fortune.

Either the day or the date alone was a sure-fire hoodoo for any undertaking of his, especially since all of his undertakings were of an unlawful nature. But when the two were joined in companionate marriage, as they had been at his birth, it meant a deluge of disaster.

Thirteen always hit him below the belt, and as for the sixth day of the week, there had been no "Good Fridays" in his life; only *bad* Fridays.

It had been one of those bad Fridays on which the old bank watchman for whose murder Bull was doomed to die had been killed at his post of duty. And it had been on another Friday, which was also the thirteenth of the month, that the jury had filed solemnly into the court room after a scant two hours' deliberation and pronounced him guilty of murder, first degree.

That Bull was as innocent of this particular crime as any of the twelve good men and true who had condemned

him made no difference. He had been unable to prove it.

Besides, his record was against him. He was a known criminal, a complete recital of whose lawless exploits, if it had included those unknown to the police, would have made a newspaper column look as long as Brooklyn Bridge.

It even included two or three murders, but he had covered them up so well that they had finally been written down in the police records as "unsolved mysteries."

But the double jinx of *Friday* and *thirteen*, his unlucky inheritance, had remained on his trail, even if the police had not, and it had been trailing him on the Friday night of the bank watchman's murder.

He committed no crime on that day and night, because bitter experience had long since taught him the folly of attempting to "pull" anything on the luck-blighted sixth day of the week, or on the hoodooed thirteenth day of the month.

He never "worked" on those days, but passed his time mostly in the shelter of his room, trying to keep out of the path of his nemesis. They were his *days off*.

He would not even burgle a house whose street number was thirteen or any multiple of it, and residents of Thirteenth Street, in any town of his beat, were forever safe from his depredations.

He had done two stretches in "stir," one of three years and another of five. Both had been for crimes committed on Friday.

In one of the two cases, both the date of the crime and that of his conviction and sentence had been the thirteenth.

Since that salutary lesson he had confined his lawless enterprises to the other six days of the week and the other twenty-nine days of each month, and had found them sufficient to yield the living which he, in common with all criminals, believed that the world "owed" him.

ON the Friday night of the bank robbery and murder, Bull had been in the position of the well-known "innocent bystander" who so frequently suffers from being in the wrong place, or in that particular place at the wrong time, resulting in his being projected into matters with which he has no personal concern.

Bull was not interested in *this* bank robbery. Not that he was a conscientious objector to bank robberies, in general, but this one in particular, was not his job.

He had not even been aware that it was to take place. Had he been so aware, he would have given this section of the town a wide berth.

But even though Bull was not looking for trouble on this night, *trouble was looking for him.* He arrived on the scene just in time to become involved.

At two and a half minutes past eleven o'clock the bank safe—an old-fashioned "tin box"—had been opened with a heavy charge of "soup." A small rug, taken from the floor of the bank office, had been used to muffle the sound, but the charge had been unnecessarily heavy, and the safe had been blown open with a reverberating crash that was distinctly audible three blocks away.

The blast had been immediately followed by two pistol shots, one of which passed through the brain and the other through the heart of the old watchman. He had been securely tied, as the yeggs thought, and gagged as well, but had managed to wriggle free from the ropes and get the gag out of his mouth.

As he leaped toward the alarm box, intending to turn in an alarm, one of the robbers had opened fire on him with a forty-five automatic, at a range of no more than three yards.

Two policemen on a corner two blocks away heard the explosion and

the pistol shots. They blew their whistles, summoning every policeman within hearing, and came pounding down the street toward the bank, with drawn revolvers, ready for action.

The yeggs, knowing that the police would be upon them in another moment, frantically snatched three bags of gold coin and a large package of currency, and dashed frantically out through the front door of the bank, which they had opened after entering at the side door that gave on an alley.

AT three minutes past eleven—thirty seconds after the blowing of the safe and the shooting of the watchman—Bull Gatchell, sauntering down the street with his record for the day still clean, arrived in front of the bank.

A defect in his hearing had caused him to catch only a faintly dull thump from the explosion and pistol shots, and he had mistaken it for the sound of blasting, which he knew to be under way in a near-by sewer excavation. So he had continued his stroll, unwarned of the impending disaster.

The three robbers came boiling out of the bank's front door just in time to collide violently with Bull, and they all went down in a tangle of squirming arms and legs.

Before they could get themselves untangled and get to their feet, the running policemen had arrived within a few yards, and were firing their pistols into the heaving heap on the sidewalk. But their aim, owing to the darkness and their own excitement, must have been very bad, for none of the real robbers were hit.

Bull, however, had not been so lucky. Just as the yeggs had separated themselves from the heap and fled into the darkness, one of the policemen's bullets had found him and he had gone down again with a broken leg.

The police had gathered him in, together with three bags of gold coin, a large package of currency, and a kit of burglar's tools, all of which had been left behind by the fleeing yeggs in making their get-away.

While Bull was led away to a cell, to be "sweated," and finally tried and convicted as a "triumph of justice," the three yeggs had dashed across the dark street into a narrow, dark alleyway that led between two tall buildings and terminated in a cul-de-sac against a seven-foot brick wall at the rear.

Had they been less agile, they must surely have been taken by the pursuing officers, whose bullets pinged against the wall all about the fleeing men as they scrambled frantically over.

Reaching the other side just ahead of the pursuing policemen, they found themselves in another alleyway similar to the one they had just left, and ran through it to the street, a block from the bank.

Luck was with them, for a high-powered automobile stood at the cufb, and, by still greater luck, the key was in the ignition switch. In a second, the powerful engine awoke and purred like a great cat.

One of the yeggs took his place at the wheel, while his companions piled into the rear seat, where they were thrown violently backward, as the car leaped like a spurred horse.

In a few seconds, it was doing seventy miles an hour, and was already beyond the range of the police bullets that were being fired after it.

THE car was found abandoned, next morning, but no trace of the yeggs was discovered, and Bull Gatchell was left to be the goat. In vain he protested his innocence.

The police laughed at him. The jury laughed at the witticisms of the prosecuting attorney, who, with merciless logic, had fastened upon him the crime of murder while engaged in committing another crime—robbery—although these were the *only* crimes of which Bull had ever been innocent when he had been accused.

It was an air-tight case, the prosecutor had declared, and the newspapers and public sentiment had agreed with him that there was no "reasonable doubt" of the prisoner's guilt.

The escape of the "three other culprits" was deplored, but the fact that one had been caught and made an "example" of, was righteously commented upon in the editorial columns, and the hope smugly expressed that his fate would prove a salutary lesson to others who might be drawn toward a criminal career.

The judge, in sentencing him to the chair, had given him a long, pious lecture, based on the text, "the way of the transgressor is hard," and concluded the homily with a sanctimonious prayer that the Lord might have mercy upon the soul so shortly to be extinguished with a bolt of manufactured lightning.

And then they had led him away to a train on which he had ridden, manacled to a deputy sheriff, to the place of the little green door.

In a few more hours—on the stroke of midnight—he would be led along that one-way route through the little green door, to pay with his life for a crime that had been fastened upon him by his double jinx.

He did not greatly care. He was not afraid of death, nor of what might lie beyond. He did not believe there was anything beyond. He believed that when a man died, he was *dead,* and would always remain so. He had always taken life's beatings standing up, and without whining, neither asking nor giving quarter.

He had no particular objection to being dead; his only objection was that, instead of being snuffed out for one of the crimes of which he had been *guilty,* he was to die for a crime of which he was wholly innocent.

That thought rankled, but, since there was nothing he could do about it, he hunched his great shoulders in a gesture of philosophical resignation, turned his face toward the steel wall of his cell, and slept.

SOME time later—he did not know how long—the footsteps of several men coming along the corridor, awoke him. He arose and looked out and saw the warden, accompanied by two uniformed guards, and a fourth man whom he supposed to be some official, in plain clothes. His natural thought was that his zero hour—midnight—had arrived, and he was about to be led to the deadly chair.

"All right, warden," he said in a dull, flat voice, "I'm ready."

"Ready for what, Bull?" the warden asked.

"To be bumped off, o' course; go on an' do yer stuff, warden; I'll go quiet."

"But you're not going to-night, Bull."

"Why not? Ain't this the thirteenth?"

"Yes, but I have good news for you, Bull. Or, rather, this gentleman with me, who happens to be the Governor's secretary, has. He will tell you about it."

"Good news, hell! I ain't never got no good news, no time in my whole life! But s'posin' I did, would it come on *Friday,* an' the *thirteenth?* Like hell it would! Well, this is *Friday,* ain't it, an' also the *thirteenth,* ain't it? That's the answer!" And Bull turned his back on the party and started back to his cot.

"Wait a minute, Bull," the warden insisted. "I don't wonder you find it hard to believe, but this happens to be the real thing. This gentleman comes directly from the Governor, with the Governor's pardon and an official order for your immediate release in his pocket. You are to be released *now.*"

Bull hesitated, turned and came back to the cell door and, with his head thrust belligerently forward, peered out at the stranger and growled, "Well, whatcher want?"

"Mr. Gatchell," the stranger said formally, as he stepped forward, "I am

very glad indeed to be the bearer of such good tidings as it is my privilege to bring to you to-day, and happy to have even so small a part in preventing what would have been a tragic miscarriage of justice, and—"

"Can the stump speech, pal," Bull interrupted, "an' tell me in plain words o 'one syllable, what's on yer chest."

Abandoning his carefully prepared speech, the secretary drew from an inside pocket two folded papers, tied with red tape and bearing the great seal of the State.

Opening the first paper, he said, "This is a full pardon, signed by the Governor of this State. And this "—referring to the other document—" is the Governor's order for your immediate release."

He passed the pardon through the bars, to Bull, and handed the other paper to the warden, to whom it was addressed.

"I ain't never seen one o' these here things before," said Bull, as he fingered the pardon, "but if the Governor sent it, it must be the real thing. It *looks* official, same as a warrant for arrest does. I've done seen *them.*

"But I ain't goin' to believe what this here paper says till I'm outside the gates an' plum away from this place. More'n likely, yuh got a couple o' bulls waitin 'outside the gate right now, to nick me as I go out—*if* I go out!"

"I can assure you that the pardon and the order for your release are genuine," said the secretary. "The Governor signed them both this morning, and gave them to me for delivery."

"But what for?" questioned Bull, still suspicious and wary. "They said I killed that watchman, an' the jury believed 'em, an' the judge gave me the chair.

"Then why in the hell would the Governor give me a pardon? What's the matter with him? Is he gittin' softenin' o' the brain, like them sentimental saps that wants all killers let off? Or does he think he's Santa Claus?"

"Of course you don't understand," said the secretary. "The evidence on which you were convicted was entirely circumstantial. It was shown that you were apparently *with* the gang that robbed the bank and murdered the watchman, and that you had a criminal record which made your presence with such a gang logical.

"And if you were with them, that fact made you equally guilty with the others, even without evidence that you actually fired the shots that caused the watchman's death.

"You had no evidence to support your own story of how you came to be with them, so, naturally, it was not believed. The only people in the world who could have exonerated you, were the three robbers who got away. And it was they, who at last saved you from the chair."

"They saved me?" queried the astonished Bull.

"Yes. It seems they still remained together after they made their get-away on the night of the robbery and murder. A week ago, they attempted another bank robbery, in a Western State.

"But this time they were not so lucky. They were caught in the act of drilling the safe, and in the fight with the police which followed, all three were wounded, one of them fatally. Four hours after the battle, with a bullet in his lung, he died.

"But before he died he made a full confession of the other affair. It was he who killed the watchman.

"His confession was fully corroborated by the other two robbers, lying wounded in the same hospital. All three signed the confession, under oath, and a certified copy was transmitted by air mail, to the Governor of this State. I congratulate you, Mr. Gatchell."

"Better save the congrats till I see do I git by them bulls that's waitin' at the gate," growled Bull.

The warden's big key was already in the lock. The door swung wide, and Bull stepped into the corridor and faced

in the opposite direction from the little green door.

He drew a full breath, the deepest he had drawn in many a day; and the air tasted sweet in his mouth. Life, after all, was good, and very desirable.

He had suddenly lost his carefully built-up, stoical indifference to death. That had been merely an armor, which he had put on when the end seemed inevitable, just as thousands before him had done; a bravado that did duty in the place of genuine bravery.

IN the warden's office, he received a new suit of cheap, shoddy, prison-made clothing and the five dollars with which the State generously endows its departing guests, and was ready to emerge again into the world, a free man.

"Good-by, warden; maybe I'll see yuh again, 'fore long," Bull mocked, as he started for the railway station, two blocks from the prison.

As he reached the street, he looked furtively about for the "bulls" he was convinced were lurking somewhere near, but apparently there were none.

The flagstones of the sidewalk on his side of the street were sunken into an irregular, undulating line, forming hollows into which the rain gathered in tiny lakes through which the pedestrian had no choice but to wade.

On the opposite side, a new concrete walk had recently been laid. Its level was higher, and the correct angle the workmen had given it resulted in perfect drainage.

Its smooth, comparatively dry surface invited Bull, and he decided to accept its invitation. Hitching his pants up at the ankles he stepped from the curb into the street and headed across.

A trolley car had just turned the corner beyond, and headed in Bull's direction. Near the center of the street, he paused, uncertain whether to give the trolley the right of way, or make a dash for it.

In the few seconds of his hesitation, a terrific crash of thunder split the sky, accompanied by a blinding flash of lightning. At the same instant, the surcharged trolley wire parted and fell to the street. The loose end curled about Bull's feet, hemming him in with a circle of death.

A jump would take him outside the deadly circle. With all the power that fright could give his mighty leg muscles, Bull leaped upward and outward, his one thought being to land as far as possible from the death-dealing live wire.

He had just escaped electrocution at the hands of the law, and was now menaced with the same dreadful end at the hands of a mocking fate. The thing was fearsome, uncanny. Fear seemed to give wings to his feet. He rose into the air and traveled fully ten feet toward the opposite curb before his feet again touched the pavement.

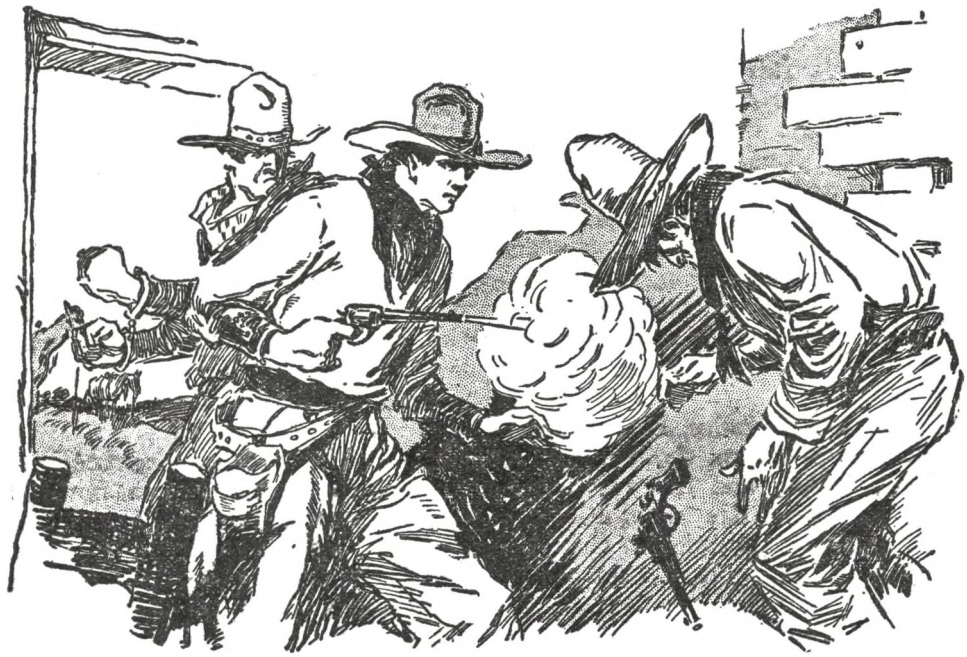
HAD the wire remained where it was when he took off on his long leap, he would have attained safety by a large margin. But a live wire often acts as if it were *physically alive*. This one did.

As Bull rose for his big jump, the wire rose also. It sailed through the air, a fiery arc of death, just under Bull's feet. It struck the pavement a fraction of a second ahead of his flying feet, just in time for him to land squarely upon it.

The damp soles of his prison-made shoes made a perfect conductor. The lethal current lunged through his body like a thrust sword, and he fell, writhing and quivering to the street, with the overcharged wire wrapping itself about his legs, while the sickening odor of burning flesh filled the air.

Above the great arch of the prison gate, the symbolic figure of justice, done in heroic bronze, looked down upon the scene—and seemed to smile.

THE END



Peter's .45 was smoking on his hip

Trouble Ranch

When the Spoffords have played their crooked game about long enough, P. D. Q. takes a hand—and things begin to happen with startling suddenness

By GEORGE M. JOHNSON

Author of "Squatters' Rights," "Tickets to Paradise," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

PETER DE QUINCY wanders into the cow-town of Cactus Springs at just about the time that Banker Spofford, who is a crooked skinflint, is beginning to plot to get hold of the Three Star Dot ranch of Peggy Winsome and her young brother, Newt.

Banker Spofford unofficially controls the town, with the help of some professional gunmen, and some confidence men. He aims to get Peggy's ranch because he finds out that, secretly, a syndicate is planning to buy it at a big price as the site for an irrigation dam.

Spofford intends to get the ranch by making Peggy miss an interest payment on the mortgage which he holds. And he tries to make her miss paying the interest by having one of his thugs, named Carl Davis, hold up young Newt when he rides toward town with the money.

Newt outwits Davis, and pays the money to Banker Spofford, only to have the banker switch the receipt for the money from him by a sleight-of-hand trick. A few days later Spofford insists he was not paid, and tells Peggy that he will foreclose the mortgage at

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the end of the month unless she marries his worthless son, Spofford, Jr.

Peter De Quincy comes to visit Peggy and Newt just as Spofford, Jr., has turned ugly after his proposal of marriage has been rejected. Peter knocks young Spofford down.

Spofford, Jr., rides right back to town and insists to Carl Davis and to Mexican Charlie, another one of his father's bruisers, that they get busy right away and earn the thousand dollars apiece which he has offered them for the killing of Peter De Quincy.

The despicable three plot Pete's death in a room above Sid Varney's Red Front saloon. Luckily Sid's bartender, Aleck Carmichael, gets wind of the conference and gets Pete into the adjoining room.

There Pete overhears that they intend to kill him by firing with a rifle, equipped with a Maxim silencer, from a room across the street from the Phoenix Hotel, where Pete lives. Mexican Charlie and Davis intend to shoot at Pete's shadow on the window shade as he sits reading his paper before going to bed.

Pete arranges the lamp so that his shadow is not cast on the shade, that night; and gets Aleck Carmichael's promise to come up to his room at about eleven o'clock the next night.

Whatever Pete's plan is for the following night it will probably include some of the extremely quick action which makes both his friends and his enemies call him "P. D. Q."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRIKE.

OLD Eb Sanderson had been wholly in earnest when assuring Newt that he would find gold enough that month in Apache Cañon to pay off the encumbrance on Peggy's ranch. Eb believed this himself, having a serene confidence in his own ability to make good, even though past performances hardly justified such faith.

"Why, I *got* to find it," he reasoned. "I'm the only hope Miss Peggy has, an' I sure ain't the feller to fail her, after what she's done fer me."

The fatal weakness in old Eb's make-up was that he puttered; he was one of those pitiful individuals born to failure as inevitably as the sun is due to rise in the morning. Men of his type always appear busy, but inefficiency and misdirected effort whittle down what they desire to accomplish.

Through long experience Eb had acquired a certain limited knowledge of ores and minerals, yet lacked the knack of putting this information to practical use.

More than likely he would fritter away endless time and energy fussing over a perfectly hopeless lead; on another occasion, perhaps, he might disgustedly give up a prospect that most miners would have considered well worth careful investigation.

In fact, one or two of his abandoned claims had been taken over by others with notable success, for which Ed blamed hard luck rather than his own shortcomings.

"I been onfort'nit," he often declared, "all my life. Thet's the only trouble with me—but one of these days the luck'll break my way. Then I'll show 'em."

Eb was a little vague as to the identity of these nameless persons who were to be shown, but the prediction satisfied him and seemed to provide an alibi for failure.

Peggy Winsome had shrewdly sized up Uncle Eb, recognizing his want of stability and pitying him for it. Naturally she had no expectation of help from so unpromising a source.

But, under the sharp spur of Peggy's sore need, Sanderson started with fresh determination and renewed vigor on the uncertain trail of fortune. Nor did he wait for the white-clad lady of

his dreams to point the way. Eb's faith in her was beginning to weaken.

"I'm goin' to project along thet porph'ry ledge above Skunk Gulch," he decided. "Ought to be color some-'eres on the outcrop, an' ef I stick to her mebby I'll find it."

The ledge of porphyry referred to was crisscrossed by a number of quartz veins, though none gave evidence of golden content. Ignorant of the fact that at least a score of prospectors had worked his formation before him, old Eb painstakingly investigated its full length, breaking off and examining endless specimens for the telltale yellow glint. Two days were required for this, and the result of his labors was zero.

"They ought to be gold here," Eb muttered. "Now why can't I find some trace o' her?"

Again he went back over the ledge, trying out more favorable portions for the second time, and with no greater success. Certainly if the quartz shot porphyry contained precious metal, it did not show near the surface.

A lifetime of disappointment had made Sanderson philosophical to the ups and downs—principally downs—that the prospector encounters. He accepted this as merely a temporary check, but one that had no effect on the final outcome.

"I'm a dummed fool," he muttered, "wastin' my time on this no-'count rock! They's plenty better lookin' ledges further up the cañon."

He spat contemptuously at the despised porphyry, and then started onward to seek a location more promising. Toward the upper end of the outcrop, which extended for a total length of two or three hundred yards, scattered clumps of brush were growing, and here Eb jumped a young cotton-tail rabbit. Thoughts of broiled bunny instantly filled the old man's mind.

"Ef I only had some shells fer my gun now," he mused wistfully.

The cottontail stopped fifty feet away, sitting up quite unconcerned.

"Mebby I kin knock him endways with a stone," Eb thought.

Cautiously he approached to a point where the chances for a direct hit were encouraging; with a grunt he threw, but the missile landed three feet beyond its target, and the rabbit ducked for cover, disappearing down a burrow left by some larger animal.

"I'll twist the little devil out," Eb muttered, as he saw his prospective dinner take to earth, "ef I kin reach him with a stick."

Before he had time to attempt this scheme the rabbit bounced out of the hole like a rubber ball, evidently fleeing from a foe more dreadful than the strange, two-legged animal that had flung the stone. For a short distance it ran, its leaps erratic—spasmodic; then quickly stopped, weak and trembling. A moment later it expired.

"Shucks!" Eb protested. "Thet's a rabbit I ain't got any use fer. A snake bit him in the ribs, er I'm a liar!"

He walked back toward the burrow, curious to see how this little tragedy of the wilds might be concluded. Sure enough a large rattler was in the act of crawling forth. At sight of Sanderson the reptile threw itself into a coil, rattling and full of fight.

"Dawgone it!" Eb growled. "Spoil my fresh meat, will you!" and he proceeded to demolish the snake.

THEN something in the loose earth about to burrow drove from Eb's brain all thought of snakes, rabbits, or even dinner. He spotted a tiny chunk of quartz, half buried, but glittering in the sunlight. Eagerly Sanderson clutched at it; the fragment lay heavy in his hands, flecked with fair-sized specks that flashed with a sheen of rich yellow.

"Might be pyrite!" Eb muttered feverishly, losing no time in testing a bit of the mineral with his knife. Real

gold is soft; iron pyrites—the worthless fool's gold—is harder than glass.

"It cuts!" he shouted aloud in a frenzy of excitement. "It cuts jest like lead. This here's gold, by Heaven! *Gold!* I've made my strike!"

A hasty search disclosed several other particles of metal-bearing quartz scattered through the soil about the burrow's mouth, their presence easily to be explained. During the course of its excavations, the animal responsible for this hole had encountered a gold vein or pocket, and naturally enough brought to the surface some precious fragments along with other material of no value.

The porphyry ledge Sanderson had been exploring thrust upward less than a dozen paces distant, its front marked by a narrow seam of milky quartz, exactly like the quartz of Eb's specimens, save for the gold the latter contained.

"I was right all the time," the old man exulted. "They *was* yaller metal in thet thar porph'ry, only it never showed; it's in the quartz farther down."

Sanderson had a light pick, and with this he began feverishly tearing at the burrow, opening it up, eager to feast his eyes on the uncovered treasure below. The pick, however, proved a poor implement, quite unsuited for his purpose.

"Got to hipper back to camp and git me my shovel," he at once decided, and accordingly left the scene of his strike, hustling down Apache Cañon at a speed that soon had him panting and all but exhausted. An hour later Eb was again on the job, shoveling until the sweat streamed from his leathery, weather-beaten face.

At a depth of six feet he struck bed rock, porphyry, and quartz, the latter rich with gold even beyond Eb's wildest expectations. A sudden spell of weakness seized the prospector, and he sat on the edge of the pit, fanning himself with his old felt hat.

"She's a real strike," he panted. "Yes, sir, a real genuwine strike. Now Miss Peggy won't lose her ranch."

The gold-bearing mineral showed surprisingly little evidence of decomposition, and with his pick Eb was able to break off only a small supply, which he carefully saved in a burlap bag.

He dug for a few feet toward the porphyry outcrop, finding that the gold traces presently disappeared, but in the opposite direction, as far as uncovered, the prospects were glorious. How far downward the lead extended no one could foretell.

"I got to have some stone drills an' giant powder, though," Sanderson concluded. "I can't loosen up this here quartz with jest a pick."

After duly pondering the matter, Eb decided on an immediate trip to Cactus Springs, where the needed supplies and equipment could be very easily obtained.

"I'll sell what ore I've broken out," he told himself. "That 'll give me cash enough to stock up. Then I'll come back an' git to work. When I'm in town I kin make arrangements fer to have the ore treated at the stamp mill. This here stuff 'll run thousands of dollars to the ton. Mebbe she pinches out 'fore I git very deep, but anyway they's a young fortune in sight a'ready."

It would have been impossible to conceal the evidences of his work, but Eb shoveled loose earth into the bottom of the pit, covering the gold-bearing quartz. Then he methodically put out the usual claim notices.

"It ain't likely anybody 'll be coming up through here," was his thought, "but I aim to play her safe. Now I made my strike I don't intend to lose it."

He had secured altogether perhaps twenty pounds of ore, roughly estimating the gold content as five or six ounces; that is, approximately one hundred dollars' worth. At this rate his mine would run about ten thousand

dollars to the ton. A few tons would be enough to make him rich.

"I ought to raise better'n seventy-five on this batch o' ore," he reasoned. "That 'll give all the cash I got to have right away."

His first impulse was to stop at the Three Star Dot and tell Peggy Winsome of the lucky find. But at length Eb made up his mind to the contrary.

"I'll wait awhile—until I can turn some cash money over to her. Likely Miss Peggy 'll kinda kick about taking it. But shucks, I'll make her! Spofford ain't goin' to boot Newt an' her offen thet ranch. Thet's what I promised Newt, an' I'm sure a guy what sticks to his word."

Eb possessed an ancient horse, still good for an occasional trip into Cactus Springs. By mid afternoon the prospector was on his way, the burlap sack of ore fastened back of the saddle.

At the stamp mill he managed to raise sixty dollars on the mineral—a ridiculously small sum, but all the mill operator would pay. Eb grumbled; yet his need for ready cash forced an acceptance.

"I ain't in the business of buying ore anyway," said the stamp-mill man. "This here's just a favor I'm doing you. Take it or leave it."

When Eb finally concluded his business at the stamp-mill, located on the outskirts of town, it was too late to buy supplies, for the stores were closed.

"I'll stay over," Eb concluded, "an' git a good early start back home in the mornin'."

He feasted royally at a restaurant, and then wandered forth. An unaccustomed sense of exhilaration possessed the old fellow—a delightful feeling of independence. Did he not have a pocket full of money? And did he not own a gold mine, from which wealth untold would soon be pouring into his lap?

No longer was he a tramp prospector, poorer than Job's turkey, but a gentleman of standing in the community. Before long people would be pointing him out, seeking his friendship, envious of him. Eb Sanderson threw his shoulders back proudly as he strode along the streets of Cactus Springs. The years dropped away; he was ready to spit in the world's eye—and tell it to go to hell.

"I ain't had a drink fer a long spell o' moons," Eb thought, finding himself opposite the Red Front. "Here's where I libate."

He entered, making directly for the bar.

"Whisky!" was his husky order, and with a royal flourish he slammed a double eagle on the mahogany.

Eb Sanderson's stomach was unused to strong liquor. The potent stimulant sent the blood coursing madly through his old veins, banishing like magic the fatigue born of that back-breaking labor up in Apache Cañon.

"Fill 'er up again!" he told the barkeep grandly.

THOUGH Eb Sanderson was not generally known to most citizens of Cactus Springs, some few were acquainted with him; at least they knew the old desert rat by sight. Among these last were Carl Davis and Mexican Charlie. They chanced to be in the Red Front when Sanderson entered, and did not miss his display of sudden wealth.

"Where the hell did that old skate raise any coin?" Carl demanded of Mex. "Been flat broke ever since I can remember, and now he's throwing cash around like he's lousy with it. Let's look into this."

Mexican Charlie was agreeable, and presently the two ranged themselves on either side of old Eb Sanderson at the bar.

"It's been a nice day, pard," Davis ventured.

Sanderson emptied a glass of whisky—his fifth.

"You're damned right it's been a fine day!" he declared, already speak-

ing a trifle thickly. "H-hava lil drink on me?"

"Don't care if I do," Carl rejoined. "Know my pard, do you? His name's Mex."

"Haven't had the—hic—pleasure," Sanderson mumbled. "Pleashed t' make your 'quaintance, Missher Mex. Hava lil drink?" and Eb waved hospitably toward the bottle.

"Table over there," Carl suggested. "Might as well sit down and be comfortable while we libate."

"Thassha good idee," Eb assented, and he allowed the two worthies to escort him to a seat.

Carl Davis thoughtfully took a bottle with him. Glasses were filled—and emptied.

"How you been hitting 'em, old-timer, since I last saw you?" Carl inquired.

Eb had acquired a mild case of intoxication in a surprisingly short time, in part from the fact that he was quite unused to liquor; also because of his physical weariness and the mental stimulus that came from his stroke of good fortune. He had now reached the genial stage, ready and willing to be friends with anybody.

"Been hittin' 'em fine!" he proclaimed. "Yesshir, fine!"

"I'm certainly glad to hear it," was Carl's cordial response. "Luck been with you, eh?" He filled Eb's glass.

"You said it," Eb mumbled, reaching an unsteady hand for the drink. "Yesshir—I made a strike. This mornin'. And she's a humbinger. Thash what!"

Mex and Davis exchanged significant glances.

"A strike, huh!" Carl said. As usual he did most of the talking, while his companion played a silent rôle. "Whereabouts did you hit it?"

Eb laughed in drunken shrewdness.

"Thash all right where I hit her. I ain't tellin'. Nosshir! Like to git in on the ground floor, wouldn't you? Sure you would!" He leered wisely at them. Not a chance, boys! You're too damn—hic—late! My strike's only split two ways—me and the party that put up the grubstake."

Eb straightened himself in a ludicrous attempt to achieve affronted dignity.

"I come int' town, lookin' for some gent t' gimme lil grubstake. Do I git it? Huh! Like hell I—hic—git it! But they'sh one party never turned me down. They'sh one place where I allus git a grubstake."

"Well, then, they's one party that's in luck, old-timer," Carl declared enviously. "Who is it?"

"It's 'Mish Peggy W-Winshome," Eb stated. "There'sh the lil lady thet cashes in on my strike. Fin-ish lil lady in the country, too."

"Does she know about it yet?" Davis asked.

"I'm savin' the good news fer—hic—s'prise," Eb replied.

Carl Davis knew enough of Banker Spofford's plans to be aware that here was an unexpected development which threatened their ruin. The estimable Mr. Davis saw a chance to regain some of the prestige lost when he slipped and fell on the holdup assignment. Decidedly Spofford must be warned. He bent over, whispering into Mexican Charlie's ear.

"Keep this drunken fool from getting away, will you, Mex? I've got to tip Spofford off, and see what he wants done."

"We have that other beesiness—you know?" Mex replied, with a suggestive lifting of his eyebrows.

"Sure, I know. But they's plenty time. The evening's only just started. I'll be right back. Don't let this hooch hound get away. Stick to him, whatever happens."

He turned to Sanderson.

"I'm obliged to leave for a few minutes, old-timer, but I'll be around again. Then mebbe we can get up a poker game or something for a little excitement."

"Don't 'pol'gize," Eb said generously. "Your pard an' I'll have 'nother lil drink."

DAVIS lost no time, hoping against hope that Spofford might be in his office.

"If he ain't there the Lawd knows where he will be," was his thought, turning in at the alley which led to Spofford's headquarters.

A light glowed faintly through a window, proof that the place was occupied.

"Luck's with me for once," Davis grunted. "Hope to hell they's nobody with him. This here business has to be handled private."

Spofford was alone, and without any delay Davis told what he had learned.

"Thought you ought to know this," he concluded.

"Harrumph!" Spofford rumbled, scowling as he digested the information. "Beginning to use your brains—about time, I'd say. You're doing better."

"What do you want done about it?" Davis asked.

"Who knows of this strike? You any idea?"

"Guess not many folks, if any. Mex and I've been sticking by him ever since he started libating over at the Red Front. He got pretty well oiled before opening up a-tall, after which he spilled out plenty. It ain't likely he'd talk while sober."

"Only one thing to be done," Spofford said. "Put him out of the way—so he'll never talk again."

"Salivate him, you mean?"

"Of course, that's what I mean. It ought to be easy—if you've got him stewed already. There are a lot of means by which a drunk can be disposed of—and no questions afterward."

"Sure—it's easy enough. The usual tariff, I suppose."

"Naturally. Now move on. That's all."

Davis moved on, but as he returned to the Red Front his thoughts took a new trend. It would be short-sighted in the extreme to kill the drunken prospector and let the secret of that gold strike go with him to the grave. The proper thing to do was hold off for awhile—only long enough, however, to find out where the strike was located.

"We could make the old soak talk," Davis grimly reflected. "They's ways to loosen up a guy's tongue. But I wisht everything didn't bust out all at once."

Davis found his partner and Sanderson still at the table, the prospector still further advanced toward a state of total intoxication. "We've got to get him out of here while he can travel on his legs," Carl whispered to Mexican Charlie. "My room's a good place. I'll tell you the rest of the plot later."

Old Eb complacently fell in with his new friends' proposal that they all take a walk. Arm in arm the trio left the saloon, heading for Carl's room. Once there, Sanderson toppled over on the bed and promptly began to snore. Davis made his explanations brief.

"But thees red-head we are suppose to keel to-night," Mex objected. "How about heem?"

"We can turn both tricks," Davis insisted. "We'll split up—you taking care of the drunk while I stay behind to salivate De Quincy, provided he gives me the chance.

"My idea is for you to get a wagon and cart the bum out to our shack in the cañon at Eagle Crick. I'll come out there to-morrow, and we'll make him tell us about his find. Then salivate him.

"That way we'll collect all around—from young Spofford, for killing De Quincy; from his dad, for killing the desert rat; and also have this strike, which sounds like a good one. Any objections?"

Charlie, meditatively puffing a cigarette, ventured no protest at this callous

outline of a double murder and robbery. Taking a human life meant less than nothing to him, provided only that the killing could be accomplished with a minimum of risk to his own precious hide.

"You got the softest part of the job anyway," Davis went on. "This stew's plumb helpless. And the best part of our salivating him is that nobody'll give a dawgone whether he's dead or alive. And they ain't a Chinaman's chance that killing the puncher'll be pinned on us either.

"We're sitting pretty, Mex. A few days from now we'll be on easy street. Once I get a good healthy poke together I aim to duck out. Don't mind saying I'm sick of taking orders from old man Spofford. He's my idea of a tough boss."

"He pays well, though, thes Señor Spofford," Mex interposed.

"Yeah, he does, at that. But he raises hell when a guy falls down." Davis grinned ruefully. "Got a way about him Spofford has, of making you feel like thirty plugged coppers. I'm afraid of him, kind of."

"You're not afraid of thees redhead, are you?" Charlie inquired with a chuckle. "Thees broncho-forker they call P. D. Q.?"

"I wouldn't exactly care to walk up and slap the guy in the face," Davis readily admitted. "I don't want him pulling a gun on me. But after midnight or thereabouts I won't be worrying, eh, Mex? And you won't, either."

"You better not mees heem when you shoot, *mi amigo*," Charlie remarked. "Eet ees one bad beesiness —to mees a red-head."

"Don't worry about that," was Carl's confident reply. "I won't shoot unless I'm sure. Now we'd better start things moving. Get a lumber wagon, and leave it on the side street. Then we'll dump the rat aboard, and you're on your way. Somebody might be curious if you drove up in front here. Shake a leg, Mex. I'll wait till you come back."

Mexican Charlie departed, returning within half an hour.

"All set?" Davis asked, to which his partner nodded.

Carl approached the bed on which old Eb was peacefully and noisily slumbering. He gave the prospector a vigorous shake, rousing him in some degree from his drunken stupor.

"Whassa matter?" Sanderson mumbled sleepily.

"Snap out of it!" Davis ordered. "We're going to take another walk."

"Don' wanna walk," Eb protested. "Wanna sleep."

"Grab him by the other arm, Mex," Carl said. "We'll rush him along between us."

Paying no heed to his feeble protestations, the two carried Eb out to the street and around the corner to where the wagon waited. With a vigorous heave they dumped him aboard.

"He'll be dead to the world for hours, likely," Carl remarked. "But just to make sure, you'd better tie up his arms and legs when you get to the shack. Good luck, Mex. Don't do anything about it till I come. See you later.

"*Adios*," Charlie responded.

The wagon started with a jerk, rattling slowly on through the night. Davis consulted his watch.

"Eleven o'clock, and time for me to get on the job. No telling what time De Quincy'll turn in."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BULLET THROUGH THE WINDOW.

AT about the time when Mexican Charlie was driving out of town, Peter De Quincy sat waiting in his room at the Phœnix House, waiting in the dark for Aleck Carmichael.

A faint knock sounded at the door, which Peter had prudently left locked.

"That you, 'Aleck?" he called softly.

"Sure, it's me," came in Carmichal's voice. "Open up, and let a guy in."

Peter did so, admitting Varney's bartender.

"Why all the dark, P. D. Q.?" he demanded.

"Because," said Peter, "they's a gent across the street watching for a chance to pot me."

"What's the etceteries to the plot—and so on?" Aleck demanded.

"Take a look at the plant when I scratch a match," Peter suggested. "That little light won't show up across the street, most likely, but I'll be careful of her."

A match snapped in Peter's hand, the glare shielded by his cupped palms. Occupying a chair between table and window Aleck perceived a dummy figure. Its head was formed from a piece of board, the profile carved to a very passable imitation of Peter De Quincy's manly features.

"I been right busy to-day," Peter admitted complacently, as he estinguished the match.

"I'll say you have," Aleck echoed. "Seems to me that the layout is perfect. She's sure a work of art."

"I tried her out early this evening," Peter went on, "with a blanket hung over the window. The lamp throws one mighty fine picture on that shade."

"Mebbe your little friends won't pull the game this evening," Aleck said.

"Why not?"

"They were drinking with an old desert rat over to Varney's, and it looked like the three of 'em might be going to make a night of it."

"Drunk, were they?" Peter asked, interested.

"Only the rat. He was plenty libated, but both the others was sober—at the time, that is. All three went out about an hour ago. I ain't seen the crowd since."

"I don't believe anything'll be liable to stop 'em," Peter declared confidently. "Young Spofford was plumb set on having me wiped off the slate by to-night at the latest."

"Most likely you've sized it up right, P. D. Q. But where do I come in?"

"You're to touch off the lamp, Aleck, while I sashay forth to nab the gent who does the shooting. Anybody downstairs know you're with me?"

"Nope. I came in the back way, like you suggested. Nobody's wise I'm even in the building."

"Good boy!" Peter applauded. "Now here's the scheme as I've plotted her out on paper, as you might say. In a little while I'll slip out by the back, the way you came in.

"Then I'll sneak around to the street up toward Varney's place and stroll along in this direction, casual like, entering the Phœnix at the front and making myself plenty conspicuous, so whoever's watching will be sure to see me.

"I'll go in the washroom, but instead of coming upstairs I'll make another swift exit at the rear, duck around in front again—*down* the street this time—and cross to the other side. I've got the lay of the land over there and I aim to be waiting outside the door when the guy inside takes a crack at my dummy. When he comes out I hop him. How does all that sound, 'Aleck?"

"Couldn't be beat, P. D. Q.," was Aleck's admiring tribute. "That's a great head you're wearing."

"Got the details all straight, so you know what to do?" Peter asked.

"Yeah. Everything but the timing. How long will you need to get placed? It would ruin things a lot if I made a light before you were all set for business."

"Fifteen minutes would be plenty," Peter concluded. "It's more'n I really need, but we'll add on a little extra just to play safe. And when you light the lamp, Aleck, do it like a prudent gent; keep out of line with the window. I expect a bullet to swoosh through in about thirty seconds or less after our

picture flashes on the shade."

"That there's a tip I don't need, P. D. Q.," Aleck said dryly.

"We'll give him a quarter of an hour longer," Peter remarked placidly. "I don't know whether it's Davis or the greaser, but both of 'em are yellow, though less so than Spofford, who's so full of saffron juice it's a wonder to me he don't splash when he walks. I remember you made remarks along that line the first day I hit town.

"Now, when a yellow gent's on a job of this sort, waiting is sure tough on the nerves. Give him a long enough wait, and what little courage he's got just naturally begins to ooze out through the soles of his boots."

"What you planning to do with the hombre—after you've got him?" Aleck asked, voicing a pardonable curiosity. "Aiming to salivate him on the spot, Peter?"

"Why, no. I'm intending to bring him up here—for awhile," Peter responded. "Then just before daybreak I expect to transport the gent to a nice little hang-out I ran across a few days ago. I'll keep him there till I want to use him, and I aim to use him considerable—later on. If I ain't mistaken he'll be a great help in putting the skids under a certain party in this town. Likely you know who I mean."

"I can make one blame good guess, Peter. Here's wishing you luck!"

THE two friends chatted and smoked in the darkness until nearly midnight.

"Might as well get busy," Peter finally remarked. "Light up at twelve fifteen, Aleck. Want to wait here till I come back with what Santa Claus leaves me?"

"You bet!" Aleck cordially agreed. "Watch your step, P. D. Q."

"I'm treading soft and low," Peter assured him. "Same as if walking on eggs. See you after a little while, Aleck." Whereupon he departed.

Nonchalantly Aleck Carmichael continued the task of waiting, counting off the time as best he could. When it seemed that ten minutes had elapsed he consulted his watch, striking a sheltered match, which he instantly extinguished.

"Pretty close," Aleck muttered. "Four more minutes to go."

At twelve-fifteen exactly he lighted the lamp, keeping his body well below the window level, then ducked off one side to a position of even greater safety. Fascinated, Aleck watched the shade, on which appeared a clearly-defined outline of the dummy. He had not long to wait.

With a sudden sharp *pop* there opened in the center of the shadowy head a small round hole, and under the force of a bullet's impact Peter's dummy slumped limply from its seat, very much as a man might have slumped if shot through the head.

"So far so good," Aleck thought. "The rest of it's up to P. D. Q. I'm putting all my blue chips on him."

Peter, in the meantime, had carried out to the letter his announced plan of campaign. Twelve thirteen found him crouched by the door of the room which sheltered his would-be murderer.

At thirty seconds after twelve-fifteen he heard from within a barely audible puff, unmistakably the report of a silencer-equipped rifle. Peter smiled grimly to himself, pulling his deadly gun from its holster.

Steps crossed the room and the door opened, disclosing the indistinct figure of a man.

"Shove 'em up, hombre!" Peter growled, and the muzzle of his .45 jabbed into the unknown's ribs with vicious, bruising emphasis.

Mr. Davis, demoralized and startled, betrayed his identity by a sudden exclamation. He had recognized Peter De Quincy's voice, and with a decided goneness at the pit of his stomach bitterly conceded that the game—to all practical purposes—was up.

How the plan had missed connec-

tions so dolefully was an unsolved mystery; Carl, however, was through. Obedient to the harsh command he raised his arms.

"Hold the pose!" Peter ordered, relieving Mr. Davis of his weapons, which he tossed back into the empty room. "I'm going to take you up to my headquarters," the victor went on. "If you know what's good for your health, they'll be no remarks when we go by the desk. The night clerk at the Phœnix ain't in on this game and I don't want him to be."

Davis had no desire that his attempt at murder should be publicly known; sullenly, though without protest, he accompanied Peter through the lobby of the Phœnix House and on upstairs; at twelve-twenty they stepped into Peter's room.

"Quick work, I'd call it," Aleck Carmichael said judicially.

"They's a pair of steel bracelets in the table drawer," Peter told his friend. "Dig 'em out, will you?"

Aleck obliged and Peter decorated the wrists of his captive with the trinkets.

"What you going to do to me?" Davis grumbled, with a sour glance at the dummy which had received the bullet which was intended for De Quincy.

"I ain't quite made up my mind," Peter replied frankly. "It depends some on how you behave. I might decide to let you go, even though hating like hell to turn you loose on the world. Then again I might take a notion to give you the same sort of dose you just tried to wish on me." He paused, beaming on Davis with quite a benevolent air.

"What is it you want?" Carl demanded unhappily.

"Information, mostly. I got a few questions to ask and I prefer to have 'em answered correctly. Already I know considerable—enough so I can likely spot any time you're tempted to let your imagination romp along unchecked. I rile up easy if a gent gets careless with his facts."

"You'll leave me off if I come clean?" Davis asked with a trace of anxiety.

"Yes," Peter told him, "probably I will. But if you don't come clean, may Heaven have pity on your worthless soul, because I won't. I'm plenty peevish at you right now, hombre," and Peter's grim glance strayed to the bullet hole in the window shade.

"I know when I'm licked," Davis grumbled. "I'll tell the truth."

"You better!" Peter assured him. "Getting right down to brass tacks, where does old man Spofford come into this play to-night?"

"He don't come in a-tall. It wasn't the old man who wanted you salivated. It was his son. Young Spofford's sore because you been socking him pretty regular lately."

"Where does the Three Star Dot ranch come in?" Peter went on, thus convincing Mr. Davis that he indeed knew quite a bit of what was stirring in the evening breeze.

"The Three Star Dot is the old man's game," Carl replied. "He don't care anything about you, from what he told me the other day, but he is interested in the Winsome ranch. The kid cooked up this stunt of getting you killed on his own account, without telling his dad. Being's he was too yellow to kill you himself, he hired the job done."

ALECK CARMICHAEL smoked on in appreciative silence as the inquisition proceeded. Peter showed comparatively little interest in the doings of young Spofford, but he pumped Carl relatively dry on the subject of Spofford, Sr.

Davis, assured that his only hope of escaping alive lay in humoring De Quincy, talked freely, even to the point of confessing why the banker had a hold on him. Thus did Peter gain much added information.

One important point, however, he missed, through not knowing that it might have a bearing on the case of the Three Star Dot. This was the part played by Eb Sanderson in the plans of Spofford, Davis, and Mexican Charlie.

During the conference, which lasted for some time, nothing was said as to the identity of the desert rat with whom Davis and his pal had been drinking earlier that same evening.

"I'm glad you're here to take all this in, Aleck," Peter at length told Carmichael. "Might be you'll have a chance to appear as a witness against Spofford when the show-down comes. Meanwhile I better be moving, 'fore it gets too light. I got a couple of horses waiting down the line, and this hombre and I'll use 'em."

Business in the Phœnix was not rushing enough to require the services of a clerk at this hour, and the three found the lobby downstairs deserted.

"Much obliged for your help, Aleck," Peter told his friend as they separated. "I'll see you again soon, most likely."

"Anything you want anytime let me know," said Carmichael. "Take care of yourself, P. D. Q."

Peter led his captive, still wearing the handcuffs, down the street to where he had thoughtfully left two horses.

"Where we going?" Davis inquired.

"That," Peter informed him blithely, "is for me to know and you to find out."

Forth from the silent, dark town they proceeded, heading north; few words were exchanged between them. Davis rode listlessly, displaying scanty interest in the course his captor followed.

Gradually the dimness of night was replaced by the faint gray which marked the advent of another morning. The topography became more rugged as they left farther behind the flat country which surrounded Cactus Springs.

The attitude of Carl Davis subtly changed; to some extent the man's indifferent lethargy dropped from him, and a close observer might have thought him expectant—hopeful. Peter De Quincy, however, did not seem to notice this change in his prisoner; at least, he gave no evidence of having noticed it.

"This here's too good to be true," Davis though jubilantly to himself. "It's better'n I dared hope for. I bet the son-of-a-gun's heading for that shack where Mex and me used to hang out. Mex'll be there now, with a gun at his belt. With any luck a-tall we'll give this damned broncho-forker the surprise of his young life. The game ain't lost yet.

"Hell! We *got* to kill him now. He knows altogether too dawgoned much. After to-night my neck will never feel right safe with him walking the earth."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GRIM REAPER WHETS HIS SCYTHE.

As a means of rapid transit, especially if the route followed is more or less rough, a lumber wagon leaves much to be desired. Though it lacked an hour of midnight when Mexican Charlie departed from Cactus Springs, he did not finally reach his destination until nearly sunrise.

The objective of his pilgrimage was a substantial cabin, located at the margin of a pine grove which grew in a park-like enlargement of Eagle cañon.

The driver first dumped forth his passenger. Poor old Eb was still dead to the world, falling limply to the ground like a sack of meal.

Mex left him lying there while he drove the team around to the rear of the camp, where the dense stand of pines afforded concealment to team and wagon. Next Charlie dragged Sanderson within the shack; its scanty equipment included a makeshift cot bed, on which, with no great show of gentleness, Mexican Charlie placed his captive.

A number of intriguing thoughts had been seeping through this gentleman's fertile brain during the tiresome journey from town, thoughts that did no particular credit to his sense of the obligations due from one pal to another.

Mexican Charlie's fancy had been captured by Sanderson's tale of his rich strike, and the mere notion of having to share that wealth with Mr. Carl Davis caused him acute attacks of severe shooting pains. Mex was pondering ways and means by which he might double-cross Davis, thereby diverting to his own use the fortune which was lately discovered by the ill-fated prospector.

Without doubt, this was a delicate matter, as Mex shrewdly realized, requiring a notable amount of discretion, and withal involving no small danger. Yet it could be worked.

First, of course, the prospector must be brought back to consciousness; then be made to talk. After talking, he must be killed, and in such a way that Carl Davis would readily believe death to have resulted from overindulgence in Sid Varney's cheap whisky.

But could Sanderson be forced to tell the location of his precious strike? Mexican Charlie answered that question with a confident shrug of his shoulders.

"I'll make heem talk!" said he. "Me—I theenk he weel be glad to talk—when I get started on heem."

A small stream flowed down the cañon bottom, and from this Charlie procured a pail of cold water, expertly going about the task of sobering up his captive.

His utter contempt for Sanderson led him to neglect following the suggestion of Carl Davis; so that Eb was still unbound. Little by little the whisky fog rose from the prospector's brain; finally he sat up, glaring around him, mystified by the strangeness of his surroundings.

"Gimme a drink!" he muttered.

Mex was prepared for this, and he allowed the patient a moderate pull from a pocket flask.

"Needed thet bad," Eb grunted. "Now some water—a lot of it."

Feverishly he drank, while Mexican Charlie stood by, a grim smile on his swarthy face.

"Where's your pard?" Sanderson presently demanded.

"He ees not here."

"Humph! So I see. But where the hell is he?"

"*Quien sabe?*" and Charlie twitched his shoulders.

"What's the game, anyway? Eb asked.

"The game ees," Mex told him coolly, "that you are to tell me where eet ees, this strike you make."

"I am, eh? Suppose I don't?"

Again a shrug of the shoulders.

"I theenk you weel be glad to tell." There was an unmistakable and sinister significance about the way Mexican Charlie spoke. Old Eb realized full well that he was caught in a tight hole, with all the chances against him.

But Eb was not yet ready to admit defeat. The thing to do was stall his captor along for a while, if possible, until he had regained a little more physical and mental vigor.

Eb was really recovering fast, thanks to the water; but he closed his eyes, feigning far more weakness than he actually felt, while Charlie silently regarded him. He poured a dipperful of water over Sanderson's face.

"Wake up, you!" was his savage order. "Thees ees no time to sleep!"

Eb did not respond, giving every indication of a man who is totally unconscious. Mex shook him, without result; then pried open his lips to force in a few drops of whisky. Eb swallowed—and choked.

"Gimme some more water," he whispered.

Charlie lifted the old man to a sitting position on the cot, supporting him with one arm while he held the dipper to his lips. But Sanderson did not

drink. With a muttered oath he dashed the dipper away, and his lean, talon-like fingers closed tight on the Mexican's windpipe.

Eb's captor was taken wholly by surprise at this unexpected attack from one apparently so far gone.

He staggered back, gasping, while the old prospector stayed with him, fingers never once relaxing their vise-like grip.

"Aimin' to steal my strike, was you!" Ebb panted through clenched teeth. "I'll fix you!"

Mexican Charlie's right hand dropped swiftly to his gun; he drew the weapon, but, instead of shooting, crashed the butt heavily against the side of Sanderson's head. Eb's bloodshot, feverish eyes grew blank; his fingers lost their deadly grip on Charlie's throat; his jaw sagged downward. An instant later he fell to the floor.

In a sudden outburst of ungovernable rage Mex leveled his gun at the unconscious form, spitting forth a vicious stream of Spanish oaths. About to let the hammer fall, he caught himself.

"I must not keel heem yet!" the fellow muttered, venting a portion of his spite by a kick in Eb's ribs. "Car-r-ramba, but he ees a devil, thees old rat! Very nearly has he torn my throat apart."

Picking up the limp body of the prospector, Mex dumped it ungently on the cot; then, for a second time, began an attempt at resuscitation. Haste was necessary if he were to accomplish his purpose before Carl Davis arrived.

But Eb's stupor was now quite unfeigned; unquestionably he had been knocked cold.

"Maybe I hit heem too hard," Mex thought gloomily. "Eet looks like I am short from luck. Hees skull eet must have the theekness no greater than the shell of a pollita's egg."

Charlie mingled his ministrations with harsh words, but both were ineffective.

IN the meantime Peter De Quincy and Davis continued their way, Carl becoming more and more certain that he knew their destination. At length they swung into Eagle Cañon.

"What you aiming to do with me way off here?" Davis demanded, masking his exultation under an air of bluster. "Didn't I fill my share of the bargain?"

"The game ain't played out yet," Peter told him. "I'm counting on checking you here for a spell," and he nodded toward a cabin looming up just ahead. It stood at the edge of a pine grove, apparently deserted.

Mexican Charlie was so intent on his efforts to bring Sanderson around that he failed to hear the riders' approach. As the door opened he leaped back from the cot, tardily aware of visitors.

Peter had shoved Carl Davis on ahead of him into the room, in spite of the other's willingness to hold back. Then things developed fast.

A glance showed Charlie what had happened, or what he *thought* had happened, namely, that his partner had betrayed him even as he had planned to betray Davis.

With a snarl like that of a wild beast, Charlie's hand leaped for his gun; its first bullet would be for the red-head, its second for his faithless partner.

And in that split second of time Mexican Charlie wholly forgot that he had to deal with a man whose deeds had won for him the sobriquet of P. D. Q.

Peter's .45 was smoking on his hip even before the muzzle of Charlie's weapon cleared its sheath. The Mexican's swarthy, evil-stamped features froze in a sudden expression of bewilderment; fingers of the left hand clawed at his breast where Peter's

bullet struck, while his own gun was discharged harmlessly into the floor.

Thus did Mexican Charlie die.

Peter flipped the exploded shell from his gun, replacing it with a fresh one from the cartridge belt which circled his waist. Thoughtfully he spun the cylinder; then sheathed the Colt in its holster, tied low on his right thigh.

"Well!" young Mr. De Quincy remarked. "That *was* a surprise, wasn't it? All the way round. I never suspected your pard would be waiting for us here. Did you?"

Carl Davis, quite crushed by the cruel disappointment of this sorry fiasco, mumbled to himself.

"Who's the hombre yonder?" and Peter pointed to Eb Sanderson.

"He's an old desert rat we picked up last night over to Varney's," Carl grudgingly informed him.

"Oh, yeah. I heard something about that. I remember now. What's the idea?"

"What d'you mean idea?" Davis hedged.

"You know dawgoned well that I mean! What's he and your measly partner doing here? Last night all three of you were sopping up hooch. I'm more than eager to hear what's the rest."

One glance at Peter's stern face helped Mr. Davis decide that it paid to tell the truth.

"He claimed that he had made a strike."

The confession was illuminating—at least enough so for Peter.

"Oh, I see. And you two scaly polecats were scheming to get it from him—after he'd sobered up. A fine pair, I'd call you!"

Peter ceased speaking, his brow wrinkled with thought, for this development made necessary a reorganization of plans. He happened to note Charlie's pistol, lying on the floor, and with his toe Peter absently shoved it along to a hole in the planking, through which the weapon dropped.

With it passed Carl's last hope of getting his fingers on a gun. He had been eying Mexican Charlie's six-gun, wondering if he dared make a dive for it.

"You and your pard used this shack for a hang-out, do you?" Peter asked.

"Now and then," Davis admitted glumly.

"Kind of a queer break," De Quincy cogitated. "Now I don't know what to do."

He walked over and examined the unconscious body on the rough cot.

"Still dead drunk, eh?" he mused. The prospector's hair covered the spot where Charlie's pistol butt had landed; so Peter's mistake was only natural. Besides, Eb was redolent with whisky fumes.

"I aimed to jail you up here to-day," he told Carl. "But shucks! Now I don't know whether to or not. Though your society sure will be a cause of embarrassment in what I'm planning."

Speculatively he glanced at Carl Davis; then of a sudden seemed to make up his mind.

"No, sir, I ain't going to have you tagging me any more for a spell. I'll just leave the bunch of you here together—you, Charlie, and the stew. I ain't got anything against the rat, and he can climb out a window if he wants to.

"Anyway that's the only way he can get out, being's I intend to fasten the door very solid when I leave. And just to make sure you're anchored, I'll handcuff your hands behind your back. It'll keep you from going through a window."

"You don't have to do that," Mr. Davis protested, in some alarm.

"I know I don't have to," Peter stated mildly. "But it's what I expect to do just the same. Any objections?"

"Lots of 'em. Why that damned old rat might whale the tar out of me when he comes to. He might get a

notion I was trying to steal his strike, and I couldn't do a thing against him, if left the way you say."

"No, I don't guess you could," was the cold comfort he received from Peter De Quincy. "And I wouldn't blame the rat a-tall if he was to wake up feeling goshawful peevish.

"Here's another thought," and P. D. Q.'s voice was stern. "Don't you pull any dirty work on him while he's getting his beauty sleep. I'll be coming back to get you later on, and if anything happens to the rat while I'm gone, I'll take it out of your hide—and a lot more too."

"You're a hell of a guy!" Davis exclaimed rashly. "I—"

"Listen here, hombre," Peter said, and his voice rasped like a saw biting into a hard knot. "You tried to push me in here ahead of you a little while ago, knowing your partner was waiting and hoping he'd get his gun to blazing 'fore I got mine.

"Likely you were aiming to hop on me from behind about the time he started shooting. Just remember that you're practically a dead man right now, with only one slim chance of saving your life—a thing you likely value a sight more'n I do. It's up to you to play pretty, savvy?"

"You going to leave me here with a dead man and a drunk prospector that'll like as not sober up fighting mad at me?" Carl Davis gasped. "Leave me with my hands locked, behind my back?"

"You said it, hombre!" Peter told him. "At that, you ain't so bad off. Just figure how much luckier you are than the Greaser there. You got a good chance to pull through yet. Mex ain't; he's shot all his chances. How'd you like to swap places with him, hey?"

Mr. Davis did not answer, which, considering the state of his captor's temper, was just as well. Peter shifted the jewelry on his wrists, so that Carl's arms were pinioned behind him. Immediately thereafter he left, not neglecting to secure the door on the outside.

CHAPTER XV.

PETER COMES BACK.

PETER DE QUINCY'S first visit at the Three Star Dot brought about a decided improvement in what might be called the morale of that establishment.

Peggy ceased to worry over the future, while Newt was jubilant that his predictions regarding his cowboy friend had been fulfilled in so glorious a way.

Shortly before noon of the second day afterward—it was the same day he had left Davis in the cabin over Eagle Cañon—Peter rode blithely back to the Winsome ranch. Newt was delighted; as for Peggy— Well, her smile assured the visitor of a hearty welcome. No girl ever smiles quite like that if she were sorry to see a man.

"You're just in time for dinner," Peggy said, congratulating herself that she had planned a somewhat more elaborate meal than usual.

"I always was lucky," Peter grinned, "except mebbe now and then at cards. But you've heard what folks say about that."

"I don't believe I have," Peggy confessed dubiously. She found it hard to tell when Peter De Quincy was serious and when he was joking, which, in some respects, made him all the more appealing; it added zest to their acquaintance.

"Thought mebbe you'd know," Peter remarked, twinkling his eyes at her most engagingly. "'Unlucky at cards, lucky at love.' See?" Then without giving Peggy a chance to reply, he hurried on: "But I sure am carrying around a lot of empty space with me. Skipped breakfast most complete this morning."

"What a calamity!" Peggy said, refusing to take the admission at its face value. "How did you ever happen to miss a meal?"

"Business," Peter declared plaintively, "kept me from clamping the nose bag in place."

"Business!" Peggy echoed, tossing her head as if disposed to question this statement. "Sure it wasn't a poker game?"

Peter bestowed on her a doleful look. "That there's the reward I get," he mourned. "Miss Peggy, I'm plumb disappointed. I never suspicioned *you'd* be doing me wrong." Peter put a telling emphasis on the personal pronoun.

Peggy regarded him doubtfully. He *sounded* very serious, and yet—

"It was something about *my* affairs?" she faltered. "The ranch?"

"Partly that," Peter dubiously admitted.

"Oh, dear!" Peggy sighed, in genuine contrition, and by now quite ashamed of her doubts. "I thought you were fooling, Mr. De Quincy. Honest I did. I'll hustle things on the table in a jiffy."

"I might help. Don't mind, do you?"

"Why, no, if you want to," Peggy said graciously.

"I'd think you'd be glad to have me," Peter said without cracking a smile. "Most ladies usually figure it's a good thing to get a fellow housebroke and gentled early. Saves lots of trouble later on."

Peggy stopped short in the middle of the kitchen, a platter of ham and eggs in her hand.

"Now just what do you mean by that remark, Mr. De Quincy?" she demanded accusingly.

"Name's Peter," he grinned. "And I meant just what you think I meant. You know!" Then with characteristic speed he abruptly changed the subject by ingenuously asking: "What'll I put these here spuds in, Miss Peggy?"

Decidedly he was a smooth article, was Peter De Quincy. Peggy tried to pretend that she was angry at the way he seemed to be taking things for granted, but the effort fell flat. Absolutely! So she compromised by laughing merrily at him, which Peter somehow did not seem to mind at all.

They enjoyed a hilarious meal together, the three of them, quite as if Peter was a member of the family. At the end he offered to pay his way by wiping the dishes, a generous offer that Newt promptly accepted, since it let him out.

"Then we might have a little pistol practice," the boy suggested. "I still got a lot of those shells you gave me."

"Old timer, I'm 'fraid we can't," Peter told him regretfully. "I ain't making a social call this time. After talking a little with your sister I've got to hustle on back to town. It's my busy day."

"You'll be back again, though, won't you?" Newt asked anxiously.

"You bet I will," Peter stated. "I'd like to stick around and shoot the bottom out of a dozen tomato cans this afternoon, but I don't see how it can be arranged."

Newt accepted the verdict like a good sport.

Not long afterward Peter had an opportunity for his business chat with Peggy.

"You remember what was said the other day," he began, "about my handling this deal my own way?"

Peggy nodded, realizing that now, at least, Peter was serious enough.

"I remember," she said. "What do you want me to do, Peter?" Instinctively Peggy knew that he wanted something of her—perhaps something quite unusual.

"I'd like you to give me a bill of sale for your ranch."

"Certainly," Peggy assented, as if that was the most natural thing in the

world for Peter to request. "But I'm not just sure how to make one out."

"Write down what I tell you," he suggested.

Peggy supplied herself with paper and ink, glancing at him expectantly. Peter cleared his throat.

"Head it," said he, "'To whom it may concern:'"

Peggy made a few motions with her pen.

"I've got that down, Peter. What next?"

"'This is to certify that for the sum of one dollar and other valuable considerations I have this day transferred to Peter De Quincy the Three Star Dot ranch, together with all land, buildings, live stock, *et cetera,* belonging thereunto.' That's all," said Peter. "Now sign it, Miss Peggy."

Obediently Peggy signed.

"Here's your money," and Peter handed over a silver dollar. "Give me the bill of sale."

"It means I've sold you my ranch, doesn't it?" Peggy remarked, surrendering the paper without hesitation, and accepting Peter's dollar.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied soberly, "you've sold your ranch—for a dollar. The confidence you're showing in me, Miss Peggy, is something I appreciate more'n I can say. I've got a plan in my mind—"

He paused, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"I know you have, Peter," Peggy said softly. "I'm not worried—over the ranch. But be careful, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll take good care of the property," Peter grinned.

"I meant be careful of yourself," Peggy whispered, and blushed prettily in some little confusion. "I've been told that Spofford has some dangerous and unscrupulous men on his pay roll."

"Yes; so I've heard," Peter remarked dryly. "But I don't think they're half as dangerous as they take credit for. Barking dogs ain't always the worst biters."

Not long afterward the caller departed. When Newt came in, Peggy told him the news.

"Peter De Quincy's bought our ranch," she said.

"Gee!" Newt gasped in amazement. "How much did he pay you, Peg?"

"One dollar."

"Gee!" Newt repeated, dazed at the smallness of the sum. But he instantly revived, rallying to the defense of his hero.

"I don't care what he paid for it," the boy maintained stoutly. "Anything Peter De Quincy does is all right. He's as straight as they make 'em, Peter is."

"That's what I think, too, Newt," Peggy assented.

"Just what's he aiming to do, Peg?" her brother demanded.

"I haven't the least idea. He asked me for a bill of sale, and I gave it to him."

"I bet he's gunning for old man Spofford," Newt shrewdly surmised. "And when Peter starts out to collect a fellow's scalp, that guy's sure out of luck. I wouldn't, I tell you, be in Spofford's boots for a whole lot of cash."

"I only hope Peter doesn't get hurt," Peggy mused, half to herself. "Spofford has such a bad reputation."

"It 'll be worse'n bad before Peter gets through with that hombre," Newt assured her. "It 'll be plumb ruined—and Spofford, too. He don't know what he's up against yet."

YOUNG Spofford awoke that morning with the comfortable feeling that his troubles were about over. Two thousand dollars, he reflected, was considerable money, but getting rid of an enemy like P. D. Q. was worth it.

Curiosity drew him down street at a fairly early hour. Neither Davis nor Mexican Charlie was to be found in their usual haunts, and Spofford

strolled on past the Phœnix House, eager for evidence as to the previous night's affair.

An upward glance disclosed a small round hole in the window of the room occupied by De Quincy, and a warm glow of satisfaction suffused his being. The job was done!

Spofford indulged in a couple of drinks by way of celebration, and then went to his office, expecting that the two gunmen would presently show up to be paid off. The morning dragged slowly on with no sign of them, which caused young Mr. Spofford a vague feeling of wonderment. It was not like Carl or Mex to be backward on such an occasion as this.

Another matter bothered Spofford a little—the lack of excitement in connection with the killing. It seemed queer.

"Likely they haven't found the body yet," he mused, but this explanation failed to give complete satisfaction. It was unnatural that a chambermaid had not visited De Quincy's room to make his bed, with, of course, a discovery that its occupant had been shot.

In this event the hotel management could be counted on at once to notify the authorities of Cactus Springs, which would result in a prompt investigation and immediate publicity. It *was* queer—very!

Spofford's puzzled bewilderment at length came to be replaced by a feeling closely akin to doubt and fear. There was something mysterious about it all. The inexplicable absence of Carl and Mexican Charlie; the utter silence from the Phœnix House; the bullet hole through the window.

Spofford, Jr., found the whole thing highly disturbing. He wanted to ask questions, but dared not, lest by so doing he betray a guilty knowledge of what might or might not have taken place.

Several times he wandered past the Phœnix House, attracted there by a sort of fascination he could not resist. Continually he prowled around on the search for his hired killers, but without success.

Eventually he reached the point of inquiring guardedly after them, yet learned nothing. Apparently not a soul in town had seen the men since the previous evening. The strain was telling on young Spofford.

At about four Spofford came out of Varney's and headed again down toward the Phœnix, finding it impossible to keep away.

"I wish I knew whether that damned broncho-forker's really dead," he muttered, glancing up at the telltale window, as he had already glanced so many times. Peter De Quincy himself answered the question, emerging from the hotel lobby, in person and certainly enjoying the best of health.

The blow was a cruel one for Spofford, who goggled dumbly in the presence of the man he feared and hated. Part of the mystery was solved, but only part. How had he escaped the trap? And what had become of the men hired to kill him?

Peter bestowed on Spofford a hostile look as he passed by, a look whose hidden meaning made Spofford, Jr., squirm in a fresh spasm of terror.

"Mebbe he knows," Spofford thought, dismayed. "If he does he'll kill me sure. Perhaps he's already killed Mex and Carl. I think that fellow is the devil himself."

He longed to pull his gun and shoot the cow-puncher in the back, but lacked the courage. Instead Spofford stood there, watching Peter's leisurely progress up the street toward Varney's. A little further on was the Spofford's banking house.

At a safe distance Spofford, Jr., followed, beset by lively curiosity as to De Quincy's destination. Within a short time his curiosity was satisfied; Peter turned in at the entrance to the private bank of Spofford & Son.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

CRIME GALORE!

"A LITTLE bit for everybody," is our policy, and we've been doing our best to secure feature stories that will satisfy all your various demands.

For the Western fans we recently announced Charles Alden Seltzer's new novel, "The Raider." For the pseudo-scientific enthusiasts we secured Ralph Milne Farley; for the "different" story fans, Slater LaMaster.

Now you fellows who have been clamoring for detective and crime stories can have your day in court. Dr. Giesy and Junius B. Smith have just turned in another fine Semi Dual story. *And* Hulbert Footner has reported again with a *Mme. Storey* serial that is a knockout!

Whoa! Hold your horses for awhile. ARGOSY is necessarily scheduled so far in advance of publication that it will be some months before we can dish out these stories to you—but we have them and you will get them as soon as we can manage it.

MEET MR. AKERS

AMONG the newcomers in this issue is Tom Akers, who has barreled up many a grin in "Still Waters Run Cheap." In response to our invitation, he introduces himself:

Portland, Ore.

Born in Lexington, Kentucky, July 20, 1876—add that up.

Attended private schools, Kentucky State College, Center College and Colorado School of Mines. Specialized in *football*.

Left college for Spanish-American War—1898. Served in that struggle in the Philippines; also in Philippine Insurrection, Boxer War in China and World War. Mustered out as a major. Awarded D. S. M. for no particular reason.

Worked as miner and prospector in Alaska; also mushed dog team as mail carrier in that section. Returned with plenty of experience, but no nuggets.

Employed by Northern Pacific Railroad as telegraph operator running a block signal station in the Washington forests. Later by Western Union in Chicago.

Tried two seasons with a negro minstrel company as a black-face comedian and later a season with a quartet in vaudeville, but quit to enter newspaper work. Allowed by a lazy city editor to stick on the job long enough to become worthless at anything else, so kept at it.

Have been everything from cub reporter to editor; orbit of activity, including Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Arizona and Oregon.

Deserted the newspaper field three years ago to take a political job, but resigned after two years to try and earn an honest living. Still trying. Hence, invasion of the fiction field.

Kind, sound, gentle and moderately ambitious. Married, but no children. Like golf and once broke one hundred, but can't prove it. Hope some day to go back to Arizona to live.

Not a Confederate veteran, but sorry.

Chameleon in politics. (Depends on the paper I'm working for.)

Height, six feet; weight, one hundred and ninety pounds; hair, hair colored; eyes, blue—startled fawn effect. TOM AKERS.

MISSING PERSONS

LATELY several of our readers have requested that we publish notices addressed to their missing relatives. We have no department of this sort in ARGOSY and so are unable to oblige with this service, much as we would like to do so.

However, *Detective Fiction Weekly*, another Munsey publication, does conduct such a missing persons' department and extends to ARGOSY readers an invitation to make use of this free service at any time.

ACCURACY?

EVERY so often one of our readers pounces upon an inaccuracy, or supposed inaccuracy, in one of our stories,

and writes to us about it. Good; that is the sort of coöperation we want. But, of course, it is only fair to hear the author's side of the argument also.

This reader disagrees with the transportation in John Wilstach's recent novelette, "The Real Inside on Dirt."

Columbus, Ohio.

I like your magazine as a general thing, but your issue of August 11 has a fault in it that needs correction so badly that I am impelled to call it to your attention, even though many others, including the New York Central Railroad, probably have done so. On page 115, John Wilstach has his hero arrive in the Grand Central Station—from Florida! Well, it might be done, but I'd like to know how. I've always come in either at Penn Station or one of the steamship piers. Otherwise the story is good.

Yours for more *accuracy*. ELGY.

But Mr. Wilstach stands by his guns as follows:

I am informed by the New York Central that hosts of people depart for the South and arrive from there at the Grand Central Station. A majority of the Eastern delegates to the Houston Convention were routed New York Central to Cleveland, and to Cincinnati, with Southern connections. The hero in "The Real Inside on Dirt" started north to Atlanta on the Atlantic Coast line, to Nashville on the Central of Georgia, to Cincinnati on the L. and N. From Cincinnati to New York he proceeded on the New York Central.

The information bureau says he might have made connections from the Florida East Coast to the New York Central at Pittsburgh, thence to Buffalo, and into Grand Central Station on the New York Central.

ANOTHER MacIsaac booster—and truly, their number is legion!

New York, N. Y.

I have often been ridiculed by my friends for reading such trash as the ARGOSY, and in every case I bought said friends a copy of "such trash," which immediately added another ARGOSY enthusiast to your long list.

I read everything from *Printers' Ink* to the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and I can truthfully say that I reap greater results, both from an educational and an entertaining viewpoint, from the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY—and it only costs *a thin dime*.

Some time ago I was sadly disappointed to note a change of policy in your magazine. One that cheapened it. I was about to stop purchasing ye ARGOSY when, lo and behold, the Readers' Viewpoint returned, the stories reached their past rich quality, and Western stories were more restricted—both in number and in style.

In my humble opinion, Fred MacIsaac is the best author on your talented staff. I have read many books, but such stories as "The Great Commander," "The Vanishing Professor," "The Seal of Satan," "The Big Voice," "Those Lima Eyes," and now "World Brigands," are unsurpassable. Mr. MacIsaac is unique and distinctly different from most authors in that he does not write a story unless he has personally been in the location of the territory in which said story takes place. Needless to say, I and my brother—who also reads this delightful periodical—turn first to MacIsaac's stories. A. L. MENKIN.

OVER eight hundred copies of ARGOSY—quite a stack that! Yet some of our readers probably can beat Mr. McMaines's record:

Macksville, Kan.

I have never done anything like this before in my life, but it has come to the point where I must say something. I have to laugh when I read such letters as those of C. D. Merrill and Philip H. Hoelzle in the August 11 number of ARGOSY. They are all wet, I think it would be well for all readers if they would dry up. If they don't like certain stories they are not forced to read them.

I can safely say that I am one of the "old-timers," as I started reading the ARGOSY forty-three years ago, and I have been at it ever since. I have lived all my life in the West, and I know what it is, and still I like Western stories. I have more than once ridden horseback from our place to town through a blinding rain or a howling blizzard to get my ARGOSY, and it was worth it. I now have over eight hundred numbers of ARGOSY without a break, in my basement, and it is a great pleasure to me to browse among them for some good stories that I have long since forgotten. Some day I shall turn them over to some hospital so that the poor afflicted inmates may get the pleasure out of them that I have. Keep the old ARGOSY just as it is, for it is as near perfect as any human agency can make it, and as long as I can raise the price I will continue to read it. Yours for more ARGOSY readers, the best magazine on the stands to-day.

F. M. MCMAINES.

AN interesting sidelight on Garret Smith's novelette, "You've Killed Privacy!" is this bit of news from Dayton, Ohio:

Dayton, Ohio.

May I come in for a few words? I am a very interested reader of ARGOSY—have been for a number of years. I enjoy the stories more than any other magazine on the market, and I read several. Of course, there is occasionally one or two that do not appeal as much as some others, but maybe the other fellow likes them if I don't.

But my object in writing this letter is to call attention to Garret Smith's story of a few

weeks ago, "You've Killed Privacy! Most readers will imagine this another tale of the Jules Verne type, but let me say this, and this statement may be checked up and verified—that the very week the story came out that right here in Dayton, Ohio, was born a corporation to put on the market that very article. I am in a position to know, being a stock-broker and officer in the corporation. We call the article a "Detectoscope." It fits the description of the story machine to a T in every detail, but one and that is, we have so far been unable to take the photographs in the dark, but we have hopes.

We have hopes the underworld of crooks will let us alone and not seek us out for revenge as in the story. A. M. EATON.

A BRAND new reader is this one—with a system of traveling we heartily recommend:

Chicago, Ill.

Last Tuesday I made the trip from Philadelphia to New York and a discovery. If a person travels by Pennsylvania R. R., it is a ninety-mile jaunt and requires two hours. However, if a person does as I did—travel by Pennsylvania-ARGOSY—it *eliminates* the time element and costs but ten cents extra fare.

I have not read a copy of ARGOSY-ALLSTORY for years, and the reunion was a happy one.

Unquestionably your "regular readers" are in a better position to criticize or compliment, but you know there is a little bit of editor in all of us.

Therefore, half cocked, as probably I am, here goes:

The "feature" stuff is instructive and easy reading. Let's have more of it.

"Fair Exchange," in my opinion, is No. 1 of the complete stories in the July 7 issue.

As for the serials, regardless of how good the synopsis, I can't get smoked up on a story after starting with Chapter XXVII. So "Two-Gun Magic" is the only continued I read.

This yarn is a *wow!* Last week I lost no time in getting installment No. 2, and my newsdealer assures me that to-morrow I'll have the wind-up.

If this bird Hobart has a speedy, logical solution for this tale—my hat is off to you for picking a winner.

If he hasn't—and Two-Gun just tapers off to finis—you'll hear from me again.

W. C. SPRONG.

ARGOSY has been cast in many rôles; now there enters ARGOSY-ALLSTORY, M. D. Certainly, we strive to make the magazine an antidote for "that tired feeling."

New York City, N. Y.

Eight years ago, when I was having sleepless nights, by reason of being unable to banish business affairs from my mind, my associate urged me to read the ARGOSY. I have never missed a copy since that time. The type and character of the stories had the desired effect, and I believe if I became bankrupt and read the ARGOSY every night I would forget the sheriff.

It seems that many of your readers complain of too many Western stories, say they do not like imaginative stories, criticize this author or that story, offering nothing constructive. I look upon ARGOSY as a complete meal of literary entertainment, from soup to black coffee—I nearly said cordial. A well operated restaurant serves a varied menu to please many tastes. I dislike carrots and mutton, but others enjoy them. A restaurant which only served food that specially appeals to me would soon go broke. There is no law compelling a person to read what he does not like. If any reader feels he is getting short changed because a ten-cent magazine happens to print an occasional story which he does not like, he should give his dime to charity and read the dictionary. He might find that ARGOSY means a richly freighted, varied cargo and not a load of pig iron.

Mr. Editor, you are a humdinger and handle a difficult job masterfully. As Shakespeare, Al Smith, Shorty McCabe, or some one else, said: "You seen your duty—to a supercritical public—and done it noble."

The only improvement I dare suggest would be an occasional historical romance of the Hugh Pendexter type, they being both instructive and intensely interesting.

CHAS. E. DODDRIDGE.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

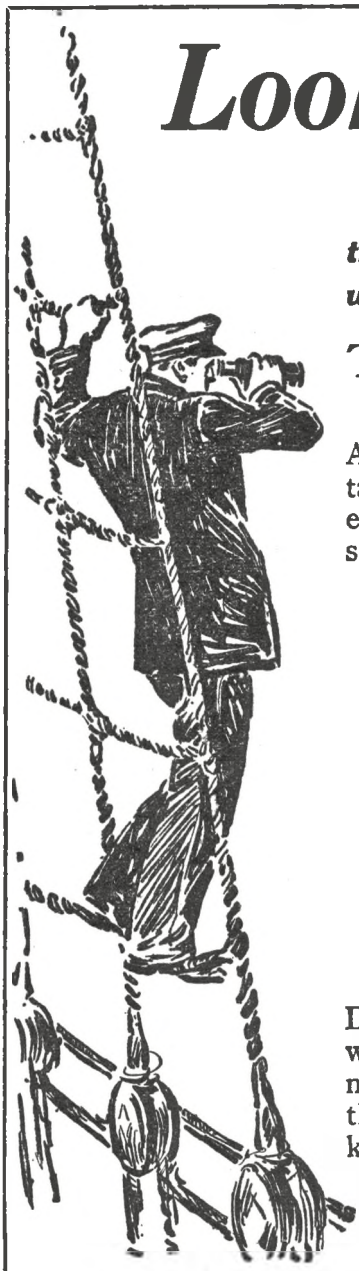
because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

9-22



Looking Ahead!

Pirates ahead! And a tough, salty crew they are—Roaring Bill Gentry and his human wolf-pack. You will meet them all in

THE MASKED BARMAID

by DON McGREW

An Eighteenth Century tale of the sea is this—a tale of adventure, romance, fortune, and of the elemental passions of man unleashed on the scent of gold.

Coming to you next week—in the ISSUE OF SEPTEMBER 29th

Also there will be

"KILL HIM, JIMMIE— OR I WILL!"

A Complete Novelette

by W. WIRT

During the last election the eyes of the nation were turned on Chicago. This tense action novelette is laid in the stormy underworld of that great city—and written by a man who knows whereof he speaks. It is a tale rampant with excitement, yet told throughout with the unmistakable ring of authenticity.

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Handsomely engraved 18K Solid White Gold wedding ring, 5 genuine blue white diamonds. $2.38 a month.

CA7 $36.75
New, lady's friendship ring, 18K Solid White Gold, 3 perfectly matched, blue white diamonds. $2.98 a mo.

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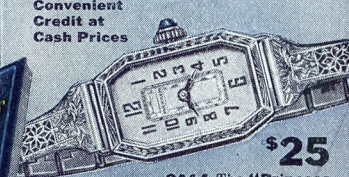
The *"Marjorie"* 18K Solid White Gold, beautifully hand pierced lady's mounting. Finest grade, genuine blue white diamond. $4.71 a month.

CA9 $75.00
Artistically hand engraved 18K solid white gold, newest style lady's mounting. 3 fiery first quality, blue white diamonds. $6.16 a month.

CA10 $37.50
Exquisitely hand engraved and pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's ring. Finest quality, genuine blue white diamond. $3.04 a month.

CA11 $47.50
Gents 14K solid Green Gold ring, 18K white gold top. "A. A. 1". blue white diamond $3.88 a month.

Convenient Credit at Cash Prices



$25

CA14-The **"Princess Pat"**, 14-K SOLID WHITE GOLD, engraved case. Accurate, dependable, 15 jewel movement. Genuine "WRISTACRAT" flexible bracelet. $2.00 a mo.

ELGIN "Parisienne" Model

$35

CA12-The **"Madam Jenny"** The latest from Paris, expressing the modern vogue. Guaranteed **Elgin** movement. As dependable as it is beautiful. Supplied in GREEN JADE, BLACK or RUBY ENAMEL. $2.83 a month.

$26.50

CA15-Nationally advertised, **Elgin** or **Waltham**, gentleman's strap watch. Handsomely engraved, Green or White Gold filled case. Warranted 20 years. Radium dial, accurate and dependable. Specially priced. $2.12 a month.

CA16-Ultra fashionable, diamond wrist watch, hand engraved 14-K SOLID WHITE GOLD case, 15 ruby and sapphire jewelled movement, 2 blue white diamonds, 4 French blue sapphires. Genuine "WRISTACRAT" bracelet; patented safety clasp. $2.79 a month. **$34.50**

CA17-Gents combination, nationally advertised, **Elgin** or **Waltham** thin model movement. 12 size, engraved octagon design, green gold filled case. Guaranteed 20 years. Complete with knife and chain. $1.79 a mo. **$22.50**

ESTABLISHED 1895

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