ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

A Stranger in Town

by

J. U. Giesy

and

Junius B. Smith

Wanted Law -- Got Love

10¢ PER COPY — APRIL 26 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

ALL-WOOL

Sent On Approval

3-Piece Fancy Serge Suit

Only $5.00 DOWN

5 Months to Pay

Total Price $22.50

Brown or Blue

This is a wonderful opportunity for you to get in on one of the greatest values ever offered.

These suits are thoroughly shrunk, hand tailored, cut and made under the best of supervision and carefully selected pattern and styles. You get not only the All-Wool Guarantee, but we also guarantee each suit to fit you perfectly. Worth more than we are asking on this Special Introductory Offer.

These suits are all wool Whitman worsted Business men's model — three piece—coat, pants and vest. The coat is cut in the most conservative and dignified three button style. Easy fitting, full lined, medium weight for all seasons. Vest has 5 buttons and no collar. Pants can be worn with or without belt. Sizes 34-46 breast; Trousers 29-46 inch waist.

Business Mens Style S785.
We have this same suit in the young men's style — latest model and very snappy — as shown in upper left hand corner. A two button, narrow shoulder, form fitting coat, full lined. Pants made for belt only. Vest cut regular. Sizes 34-42 breast measure. Trousers 29-42 waist. **Young Mens Style S786. Both suits in navy blue or brown. We always send brown unless you state color wanted.**

Pants may be had with or without cuffs
State size of suit if you know it—if not, be sure to give your weight, your chest measure, taken over vest for coat. Waist and in seam measure for Trousers.

Special Offer

Doubles Life of Your Suit!

With every order for a suit received from this advertisement, we will send an extra pair of pants like your suit AT COST, only **$5.** This does not increase amount you pay per month.

Order Today!

You can't afford to miss this chance to get a high-grade, all-wool worsted suit, at this astounding bargain price. If you are not absolutely satisfied your money will be cheerfully refunded. If satisfied you have 5 months in which to pay. Fill out the coupon and mail it with just one dollar. ORDER TODAY!

BABSON BROS., 19th Street and Marshall Blvd., Dept. 14-54, Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed please find $5.00. Send me the three piece Whitman worsted suit at advertised price. If I am not satisfied when I receive the suit, I can return it and get my money back. If satisfied, I will pay the balance in monthly payments of $4 until the total price of $22.50 is paid. I understand extra trousers will be $5.

My weight is.....Extra Trousers (check) [ ] My measurements are: Coat (chest over vest.....) Trousers (waist.....inseam.....)

Color desired (check) Navy blue [ ] Brown [ ]. Trousers (check) with cuffs [ ] without cuffs [ ] Order by No. (check) 5785 [ ] 5786 [ ]

Name_____Street or R. F. D. No._____

City_____State_____Occupation._____

Age._____Married or Single_____How long a resident in your neighborhood and your vicinity?_____

Please give the names of three merchants with whom you have done business at least one year

Name_____Street_____

_____

_____

If you have ever bought goods **on credit** by mail, tell us from whom. If there is anything else you wish to tell us about yourself, write on a piece of paper and enclose it with this coupon. But the coupon alone, fully filled out, will do. **Print all information very plainly.**

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLIX CONTENTS FOR APRIL 26, 1924 NUMBER 5

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

OUT of the sea came Glamours, a mariner with strange, green eyes, bent on the fulfillment of a family tradition, and out of the ranch country came Modesta, the harpist, to honor her martyred grandfather. They met at an ill-starred inn of the marshlands at dusk, and many and mad were the motives that swirled and rioted about them till dawn.

This six part serial, by KENNETH PERKINS, author of "Queen of the Night," beginning next week, is called

SUNDOWN CAFÉ

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

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

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

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FREE!

7-Pieces Genuine Cut Glass

As an **extra special offer** to those who hurry their order for the handsome 6-Piece Fumed Oak Set offered below, we shall include *absolutely* **free**, this entire 7-piece set of GENUINE CUT GLASS: Pitcher of 2 qt. capacity and 6 tumblers of 9 oz. capacity. Each piece is pure, sparklingly clear, thin and dainty; **hand cut decorations** consisting of large floral design with appropriate foliage. A limited number given FREE to get new customers. **Send coupon today.**

$1.00 Down

brings this New Set with Roomy Divan on

30 Days Trial

6 Pieces

Fumed Solid Oak

Yes, only $1.00 with the coupon below brings this magnificent 6-piece set of fumed solid oak living room furniture including a **wonderfully comfortable and roomy divan** — right to your home on 30 days trial. **And special now—7-piece set of genuine cut glass with hand art decorations, FREE, if you send at once.**

6-pieces made of selected solid Oak throughout, finished in rich dull waxed, brown fumed oak. All four chairs padded; seats upholstered with brown Delavan Spanish leather, best imitation of genuine Spanish leather known. **Large Divan**, unusually massive and comfortable with beautifully designed back. Arms broad and comfortable. Measures 46 in. wide outside and 36 in. long inside. Thickly padded seat is 19 in. deep. Hght. of back 22 in. Posts extra massive. **Arm Rocker** is massive, stately and comfortable, with beautifully designed back, wide, shapely arms and smooth operating runners. Seat 19 x 17 1-2 in., hght. 36 in. **Arm Chair** is roomy and comfortable. **Matches Rocker.** Seat 19 x 17 1-2 in., hght. 36 in. **Sewing Rocker**, attractive and useful; seat 17 x 17 in. Hght. 35 in. **Library Table** — Beautifully designed ends to match chairs. Roomy magazine shelf below. Legs of 2 in. stock; massive, dignified. Top 23 1-4 x 34 in. **Jardiniere Stand** matches other pieces. 17 1-2 in. high; top 12 x 12 in. Entire set shipped knocked down construction. Easy to set up. Saves freight charges. Weight about 175 lbs.

7-Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set FREE. Order by No. B7593BA. $1.00 with coupon, $3.00 a month. Price $34.85.

Free Catalog showing thousands of bargains in home furnishings all sold on easy terms—sent free with or without order. See coupon.

Only $3.00 a Month

If you decide to return the set, we will refund your $1.00 deposit, plus any freight or express charges you have paid. But if you decide to keep the set, start paying only $3.00 a month until you have paid $34.85. A full year to pay—at the rate of only a few cents a day. We have only a limited number of sets. We trust honest people anywhere in the U. S. **No discount for cash. Not one penny extra for credit. No C. O. D.**

Cut Price—Send Now

Send coupon and $1.00 **today** for this tremendous value. Compare it with anything you can buy locally for anywhere near the same price—**even for spot cash.** Get your set while this offer lasts. **7 Piece Set of Genuine Cut Glass FREE to those who order at once.**

Straus & Schram, Dept. 9274 Chicago, Ill.

Straus & Schram, Dept. 9274 Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find $1. Ship special advertised 6-piece Fumed Oak Library Set, with 7-piece Genuine Cut Glass Set, FREE. I am to have 30 days free trial. If I keep the set, I will pay you $3.00 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the set with the 7-piece cut glass set within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.

☐ **6-Piece Library Set No. B7593BA, $34.85**

Name .....

Street, R. F. D. or Box No. .....

Shipping Point .....

Post Office ..... *State* .....

☐ **If you want ONLY our free catalog of home furnishings, mark X here**

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AGENTS: $96 a week. New portable talking machine. Biggest seller ever offered. Does more than machines costing ten times its price. Plays any record. Built in just like a suitcase. Carry it with you anywhere. Fully guaranteed. Low priced. Must satisfy customer or money back. Gratz of Ky. made over $6000 last year. No deliveries or collections. Pay you every day. Write or wire for territory. Perry Ludlow Co., Class 2097, Dayton, Ohio.

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AGENTS: Get our big sample assortment free offer. Teas, coffee, extracts, spices, food products, things people eat, 240 fast sellers. Big profits, cash bonus and free automobile. Harley Company, 382 Harley Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

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MEN AND WOMEN WANTED EVERYWHERE to weave rugs, carpet, etc., at home; no previous experience needed. You can equal these earnings: Mrs. Morse $100, Mr. Rozsa $242 monthly. Rush Postal today for FREE LOOM BOOK, telling all about weaving and how to make money with our $9.90 and other wonderful looms. UNION LOOM WORKS, 486 Factory Street, BOONVILLE, N. Y.

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20 acres or more of our best land in Michigan; $20 to $30 per acre; near town 3,000 pop., $10 down, bal. long time. 52 page book FREE. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

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LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

$30.00 DAILY. $22.00 Eastman Kodak free. Lucky Six line combination topcoats, raincoats $3.98 up. $1.00 gift makes sales easy. We deliver, collect. EAGLE RAINCOAT CO., 629 Mid City Bank Bldg., Chicago.

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

TAILORING SALESMAN: Share $100,000 Bonus, big advance commissions taking orders for snappiest Direct-To-Wearer line on earth; virgin wool custom tailored suits $28.00. Representatives are furnished a high-grade tailoring shop in one elaborate case. House of Campbell, State at Congress, Chicago.

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

WONDERFUL INVENTION eliminates all needles for Phonographs. New, different, lasts for years. Preserves records. 12,000,000 prospects. $15 to $30 daily easy. Carry day's supply in pocket. EVERPLAY, Desk 5-D, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

TAILORING SALESMEN. Make Big Money taking orders for "Individual Good Clothes." Guaranteed all wool, tailored-to-measure suits $29.50. Big line of 6 x 9 swatches free. Write today for exclusive territory and complete selling outfit. INDIVIDUAL TAILORING CO., Dept. A, Cincinnati, O.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES, every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.44. 10 orders daily easy. Samples and information free. WORLD MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 9, Newark, N. J.

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RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS: Start $133 month. Railroad Pass. Hotel expenses paid. Common education sufficient. Promotions. Life positions. Test examination questions free. COLUMBUS INSTITUTE, A-6, Columbus, Ohio.

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MEN OVER 18 WILLING TO TRAVEL. Make secret investigations. Reports. Salary and expenses. Experience unnecessary. Write J. GANOR, Former Government Detective, St. Louis.

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., Buffalo, N. Y.

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

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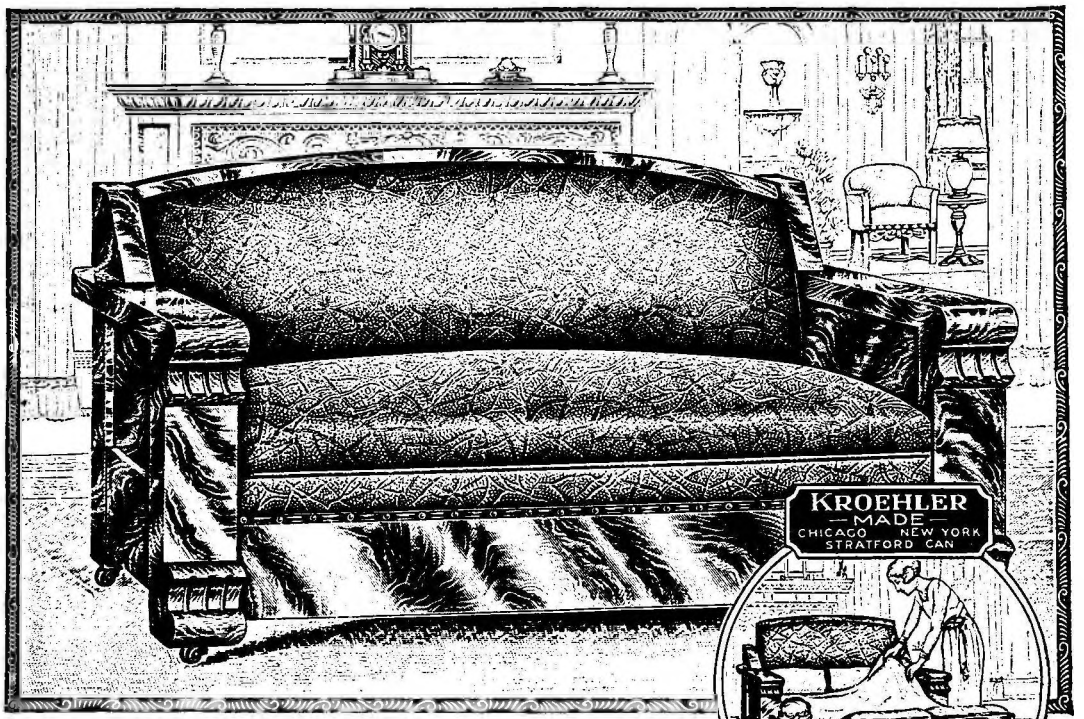
Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



No Money Down

No C.O.D. Nothing to Pay For Davenport on Arrival

Not one cent now. Just mail the coupon and **Hartman, the Largest Home Furnishing Concern in the World,** will send you this splendid Kroehler Bed Davenport, and with it, absolutely **FREE, the handsome 7-Piece Glass Water Set** (pictured below). Nothing to pay for goods on arrival. No C. O. D. *Use them 30 days on Free Trial,* and if not satisfied, send everything back and we will pay transportation charges both ways. If you keep them, **pay only for the Davenport—a little every month. Take nearly a year to pay.** Not a penny to pay for the Water Set either now or later. It is absolutely FREE—a gift from Hartman.

FREE 7-PIECE Cut Glass WaterSet

Beautiful Glass Water Set sent absolutely free with the "Kodav." Includes a one-half gallon pitcher and six 9-ounce tumblers ornamented with cut hand and drop design. Pay nothing for this fine set at any time. It is FREE

Kroehler BED DAVENPORT

Golden Oak, Fumed Oak or Mahogany Finish

Really two splendid pieces of furniture in one—a beautiful davenport by day; a luxurious bed at night. Massive frame of solid oak in golden oak or fumed oak finish; or selected birch in brown mahogany finish. State which you want. Dimensions are: Height, 34 in.; height of back from seat, 18 in.; depth of seat, 21 in.; length over all, 59½ in.; length between arms, 52½ in. Opens to bed measuring 72x48 in. Arms, 3½ in. wide; front posts, 3½ in. Heavy imitation Spanish brown leather upholstering. Soft spring edge seat with 24 springs.

Nearly a Year to Pay

Hartman cheerfully sends the "Kodav" and free Water Set on *30 Days' Free Trial.* If you keep them, **take nearly a year to pay for "Kodav" only**—in small monthly amounts. Davenport shipped direct to you from nearest Kroehler factory.

Order by No. 143FMA62. Bargain Price of Bed Davenport, $49.85. No Money Down. $4.50 Monthly. The 7 Piece Water Set is FREE.

HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO.
Dept. 6522 **Chicago, Ill.**

The Largest Home Furnishing Concern in the World

FREE No-Money-Down Bargain Catalog

Over 300 pages (68 in colors) of world's greatest bargains in **Furniture,** carpets, rugs, sewing machines, silverware; farm implements, etc. **No money down. 30 days' free trial. Easy monthly terms.** Opening an account with us is like opening one at your local store, but we give nearly a year to pay. **Ask for Catalog No. E6522**

FREE GIFTS

This book explains how to get glassware, dishes, silverware, jewelry, table linens, etc.. **FREE** with purchases. *Postal brings this big free catalog.*

"Let Hartman Feather YOUR Nest"

Mail This Coupon NOW!

Hartman Furniture & Carpet Co.
Dept. 6522 **Chicago, Ill.**

Send the
Bed Davenport No. 143FMA62, Price $49.85,

☐ Golden Oak ☐ Fumed Oak ☐ Mahogany Finish

as checked in square above, showing finish I desire, and with it, absolutely **FREE,** the beautiful 7-Piece Glass Water Set. I am to pay nothing for goods on arrival—only the freight charges. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If satisfied, I will send you $4.50 monthly until full price of Davenport, $49.85, is paid. Will pay nothing at any time for the Water Set. Title remains with you until paid in full. If not satisfied, after 30 days' free trial, I will ship both Davenport and Water Set back and you will pay transportation charges both ways.

Name .....

R. F. D., Box No. or Street and No. .....

Town ..... State .....

Occupation of Head of Household .....

This No-Money-Down Offer Is Special to Readers of Argosy-All Story Weekly—This Issue Only

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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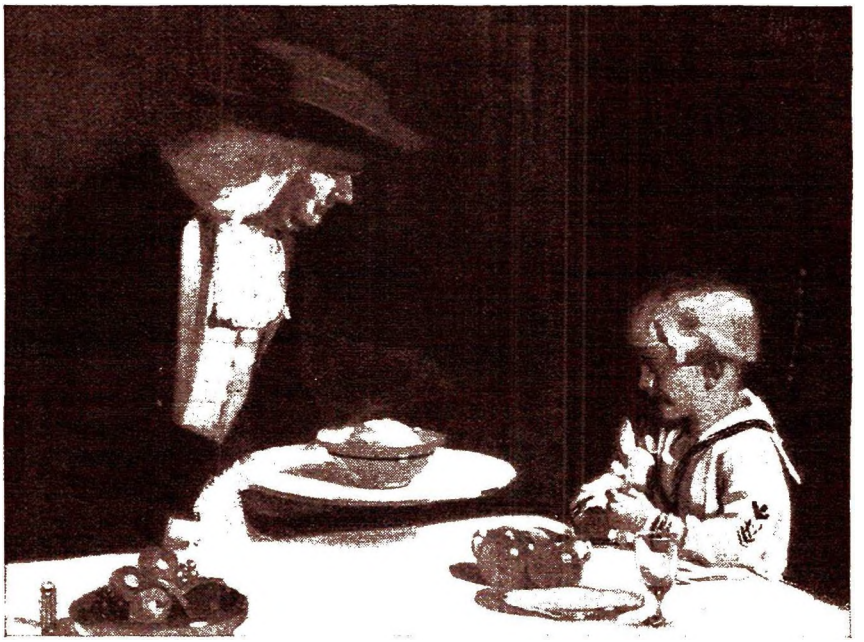

QUICK QUAKER—*Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes*

Are you one of the wives or mothers who know you *should* serve oats often, but don't because of limited cooking time?

Quaker Oats experts have perfected a new Quaker Oats—Quick Quaker. So your grocer now has two styles of Quaker Oats. Quick Quaker cooks perfectly in half the time of coffee. Takes scarcely longer than simple toasted bread.

So start the day now with a hot breakfast—with Quaker Oats, the premier vigor breakfast of the world, steaming, flavory and enticing

Quick Quaker is flaked from the same queen oats as regular Quaker Oats. The only difference is that the grains are cut before flaking, rolled very thin and partly cooked. And these small flakes cook faster.

That rich Quaker flavor is there. All the good of hot breakfasts *quick*.

2 KINDS NOW

Ask for the kind of Quaker you prefer—Quick Quaker, or regular Quaker Oats. But be sure you get Quaker. Look for the picture of the Quaker on the package.

OATMEAL COOKIES

¾ cup shortening, 1 cup sugar, 2 eggs, ¾ cup chopped nuts, 3 cups rolled oats, 1 cup flour, 1 teaspoon salt, ¾ teaspoon mace, ¼ teaspoon cloves, ¾ teaspoon cinnamon, ¾ cup raisins, 3 teaspoons baking powder, 4 tablespoons candied citron, 4 tablespoons candied orange, 4 tablespoons candied lemon, ¼ cup milk.

Cream shortening; add sugar and cream again. Add one egg at a time and cream thoroughly after each addition. Add fruits, nuts and raising, then milk, and stir well. Sift flour, salt, spices and baking powder and mix well with rolled oats; fold into first mixture. Drop from spoon on cookie sheet. Bake in hot oven (400 degrees) for 15 minutes.

Now two styles of Quaker Oats at your grocer's · Quick Quaker and Regular Quaker Oats

Quick Quaker

Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes

Quaker Oats

The kind you have always known

THE QUAKER OATS CO.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLIX SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 1924 NUMBER 5

A Stranger in Town

By J. U. GIESY and JUNIUS B. SMITH

Authors of the Semi-Dual Stories, "The Wolf of Erlik," etc.

CHAPTER I.

EDDIE HAS AN ADVENTURE.

MR. EDWARD HARMON knotted a fresh tie about a fresh collar attached to a well-laundered shirt, and turned his glance from the reflection of his own not unpleasing features out of the window in the Fairview hotel.

He had chosen this huge hostelry on a hill because people had told him it commanded a wonderful view of the bay and the city as a whole, rather than from any other predilection or former experience with its accommodations or service. He was a stranger in the city, as well as on the Coast.

But he had long desired to visit both,

mainly because of those things he had heard from the lips of acquaintances who had journeyed thither from his own home town, and come back to tell, as they always will, of their trip. And he had decided to gratify the desire on his very next vacation. As the time for that approached, he had made his preparations, and now he was here.

He was a rather tall, rather lank young man, as he stood regarding the panorama of the bay, with its ferry boats, its shipping at anchor, its islands. He ran rather to lines than to curves. There was something almost rectangular in the shape of his forehead. There was a hint of squareness both of character and line in the set of his jaw below his firm-lipped, wide mouth. Whether the matter of lines predisposed Eddie Harmon to take up the work of architecture as a profession, or not, is for the psychologists, the physiognomists, to decide. As a matter of fact, that is what Eddie was. Now, however, he was a man on a vacation, in a strange city, with money in his pocket, time on his hands, and nothing very much at all on his mind.

So presently he turned from the vista of water and shipping, islands and farther mist-fogged shore line, with a smile on his mouth and in his dark grey eyes. Leaving the room, he descended to the lobby to place some money and his return railway tickets in the Fairview safe. And then, because he didn't know just when he was coming back, he left his key at the desk.

For Eddie was going down into the city of a hundred hills and explore as his fancy listed. He was going to look about, poke into places of which he had only heard until now, and verify the reports of others for himself. He walked out of the hotel and paused a moment at the entrance to draw in a deep, salt-laden breath, that was like some intangible tonic to his buoyant youth.

And then possibly because of that breath of air, possibly because youth and vital manhood, and plenty of time, were at his disposal, he disdained the seductions of taxi drivers, the clanging gong of a surface trolley, and began to walk.

He walked down hill. It was the only direction in which he could walk from the Fairview hotel. Besides, the business district lay in that direction—down hill and south—and Harmon wanted to view the business life of the city first.

Save for the extra speed induced by the inclination of the sidewalks, Eddie didn't hurry. In fact he rather dawdled along, pausing to inspect a particularly fetching display in a window, halting on a corner to watch one of the few remaining cable cars in existence slide down a tip-tilted hill, cocking his ear to the hum of the cable in the slot, and resuming his saunter when the car had passed. Eddie was out "just for to see and to admire" as Kipling has put it—and he saw and admired a lot before he reached the main artery of activity that intersects the city, running, as any map will indicate, obliquely east and west.

To an accompaniment of shrilling traffic whistles, clanging trolley gongs, darting jitneys, rumbling trucks, and scurrying pedestrians, heading four ways at once, Eddie crossed the street, turned and continued his saunter east. The up-shooting pile of a building more like a greyish monolith than a building, if one overlooked the many windows, had caught his architect's eye. He had heard of it before but hearing wasn't seeing. He made his way toward it with definite purpose but still without any haste. He had started out with three weeks at his disposal and of that there were remaining eighteen days.

As a matter of fact, he wasn't thinking about them, however, as he strolled along. He wasn't thinking of anything much save that the girl before him had a well-turned ankle inside her gauze hose, perhaps—or possibly that he had never seen a Chinese maiden in pigeon-blue blouse and pantaloons, above French heels, and vamps of patent leather, picking her way daintily through a sidewalk press in the middle of an afternoon. Of course there was always the intention to inspect the monolithic building before him acting as a directing mental compass to his mind.

He reached his objective, as it has become the fashion to say, at last. But he was too close. Briefly he inspected the high arch of the entrance with its supporting

carven pillars on either side, and then once more he crossed a street.

It was a street that ran roughly north and south, but mainly south so far as Eddie was concerned, since it started from the street he had been following for some time. On the corner of its beginning, opposite the foursquare building, Eddie took up his stand. And then he tilted back his head and let his gaze climb up toward the distant tower that crowned the structure's equilateral top.

Appreciation leaped into Harmon's eyes. He could appraise the pile of masonry before him far better than one less trained. He stood staring with back-tilted head, oblivious to the hurrying life about him, forgetful of all else save the serried rows of windows tier on tier above him, the mathematical symmetry of the clean-cut ascending dimensional lines.

And then, just as Eddie was lost in pure professional enjoyment, utterly carefree, utterly relaxed because he was on his vacation and could do absolutely as he pleased for the remainder of his three weeks, his hand was suddenly seized and something was thrust into his instinctively closing fingers; somebody's voice barked raucously, "Here's what I owe you," and somebody's hand was brought into stinging contact with his face.

Eddie came back to earth with a gasp. He reeled. Ordinarily the blow would not have shaken him by its force. But he had been taken wholly off his guard, and he had been standing with a back-tilted head. He staggered, stumbled and brought up with a grunt against one of the lighting posts. Its iron contact gave him back his physical balance at least. But his brain was dazed. Somebody—had slapped his face! Somebody had rushed up to him and grabbed his hand and said they owed him something—and—hit him, and—and—dimly he caught sight of a figure darting off through the crowd.

The whole thing had passed in an instant. Eddie glimpsed the vanishing figure—lanky, not unlike his own in both build and dress—and then he glanced at his hand, which seemed to have something in it—something he had held onto even during his carom against the post, and as his fingers unclosed their grip upon it, his gray eyes widened, in a startled unbelief.

It was a hundred dollar bill—a crumpled currency note. The unknown had slipped it into his palm and said he owed him something and hit him in the face. He had hit him and run away—and whatever anybody owed him here or elsewhere, Harman was convinced that the sting of a set of bony fingers was not included in the debt.

It takes time to describe, but Eddie apprehended the whole unbelievable situation in a flash. His cheek was hot where the vanishing man had struck it, and his resentment of the blow boiled up in a surge.

He was a stranger in town. He had been standing here admiring architectural beauty, minding his own business, and—some one—he didn't know who—it didn't matter really who had done it since the fact was established to his satisfaction—some one had run up to him and regardless of anything else, had deliberately slapped him. And no matter what that some one had thought he owed Harmon, Eddie was wholly convinced that *he* owed the other man a debt which should be speedily discharged. He did the only thing a red-blooded youth of twenty-six could have done in his position. He thrust the century note into a pocket, pulled his soft hat lower over his square-built forehead, and started at a reckless dash in pursuit of the man who, by now, had disappeared.

That was natural enough. Possibly no more than a half minute had passed since Eddie had been struck, but it is really surprising how far a man can travel in half a minute or how completely he can lose himself inside the span of thirty seconds, in a sidewalk crowd.

Eddie, however, was giving small consideration to such details as he charged along. No matter how far the fellow might have gone, he was confident he could run him down, unless he had turned into the doorway of some shop, which he hardly believed he had done. Nor was he considering either the comfort or convenience of the others on the sidewalk as he jostled through them, ducking and twisting to escape collision, where the opportunity

offered, or brushing them aside. Feminine outcries, masculine oaths and expostulatory mouthings, were the accompaniment of his progress. But Eddie didn't mind. His fists were clenched in readiness against his body as he forged ahead. His eyes peered in straining fashion straight before him, in search of the one he hoped to find. And when he found him— For the time being that was his sole consideration—*when* he found him. He set his teeth and ran.

Suddenly his searching vision was rewarded. Just ahead he caught sight of a dimly familiar figure—lank, clad in a grey suit and a soft hat and threading the streaming life of the thoroughfare in a quickly dodging fashion indicative of haste. Plainly the fellow thought he had given him the slip. He wasn't running any longer, but he wasn't lingering either. Eddie's square jaw shot out at a somewhat menacing angle. He caught a deep breath preparatory to a final spurt that should land him beside the other. He leaped ahead like a hound in sight of its quarry, and—

The breath was nearly throttled in his throat, his coat was almost torn off his back, as a heavy hand laid hold upon his collar and checked his further progress with a most amazing twist.

"Fast, ain't you!" a heavy voice panted thickly. "But not quite fast enough."

Eddie glared at a bulky blue-clad figure, a red and perspiring face, and buttons of well-kept brass. And the hand of that figure was maintaining its initial grip on his collar. Harmon's expression altered a trifle. Some of the glare of annoyance at this fresh interference with his individual purposes went out of his eyes. Like the average law-abiding citizen, he had a certain respect for the uniform of law and order. He said the first thing that popped into his mind: "Let go, officer. Maybe I was going pretty fast, but—I was trying to catch a man."

"So was I." The patrolman did not release his hold, nor, despite the somewhat facetious humor in his reply, could it be said that he exactly grinned, although his teeth showed for a single instant between his heavy lips.

"But—" Harmon's first annoyance began to give way to something else—something vague, not exactly to be named; "he'll get away, I tell you, if you don't let me go. He— gave me a hundred dollar bill, and—"

"What!" The policeman maintained his unrelenting grip, but his query showed surprise.

It was too late. Eddie knew it. Whoever the man who had acted in such a remarkable manner might have been, he had gained an overwhelming lead. Restitution and revenge would have to wait now, thanks to this interruption. But despite the realization, he was still a good deal excited, and he blurted for the literal truth:

"He slapped my face."

"Who did?" his captor demanded. "Say —what's the notion?"

Eddie took a long breath. "I don't know," he declared. "I'm a stranger in town, and—"

"And so's your story." Once more the policeman bared his teeth. "It's a lot stranger than I'd have expected after your jumpin' on top of me offen that roof an' runnin' out on me for half a dozen blacks."

"But I'm telling you the truth!" Mr. Harmon was growing more and more disturbed as he discovered that no matter what he said, he was not turned loose. And something of a panic seized him at the policeman's words. "I don't know anything about any roof, officer, really— I'm a stranger in town and I've told you exactly what happened and why I was trying to catch him."

The grip on his collar tightened. He became conscious of a ring of staring faces —a wall of fellow beings about him, the jostling, milling press of a sidewalk mob. Toward one side of that press he felt himself none too gently propelled.

He gulped down a strange, round, choking something that suddenly seemed to be rising up in his throat. "Honestly officer—" he began excitedly.

"Aw tell it to th' judge. Come on now —open up there." With the unhesitating manner of his kind, the patrolman began breaking his and Harmon's way through the crowd.

"Hello, Jenkins—what's the shindy?"

Out of the pack of his fellow mortals, one stepped alertly and fell into pace at the officer's side. He was spare, thin of face, with keen and restless eyes.

A reporter for a thousand, Harmon thought, his heart seeming to sink still further in his breast—a reporter—a news hound—always trailing—always trying to find some sensation to write up—always on the quest for some bit of flotsam to salvage in some such form as would enable it to fill "space."

And Jenkins seemed to know him, for he nodded before he answered: "Counterfeitin', Larry. Cap. Salles pulled a raid on a gang a bit ago in a dump down here on Howard. There was some shootin', but what happened I dunno. All I'm hep to now is that I got this bird."

The reporter gave Eddie a glance. "Made a break for it, did he?"

"Did he?" Jenkins grinned in more human fashion. "He jumped off a one-story roof onto my neck, an' then streaked it up th' street."

"But you got him," Larry said as a call box was reached and Jenkins paused. "Bill, that was darned good work."

Eddie Harmon heard them. But he heard them dimly. Because his brain was whirling, and in all the jumble of sounds, in all the jostling of the crowd that had followed them to the call box and was ringing about them, only one thing was plain.

There had been a raid on a counterfeiting gang—and somebody had made a get-away and Jenkins—this burly policeman—had chased some one for the matter of several blocks and arrested—*him!*

But before that—Eddie caught his breath. There was that bill! Some one had rushed up to him and slapped his face and thrust it into his hand. And now the reason for his actions was clear to Eddie's mind. He had run up and committed this most amazing assault because he had wanted Eddie to do just what he had done—what any man with a spark of real, primitive feeling in his nature would have done in a similar situation. And to fuddle him still further, he had left a hundred dollar counterfeit bill in his palm. Because it was counterfeit, of course. And he had put it into his pocket when he started to avenge the injury done his personal pride.

It was there now, and if they took him to the station they would find it. Of course, he had told Jenkins that the one he had been chasing had given it to him, but Jenkins had treated all he had said with unbelief. He could say he had dropped the thing, if he was questioned—unless the bill was there to speak for itself.

Jenkins released his grip upon him. "Watch him a minute, will you, Larry?" he requested and turned to the box.

Harmon regarded his broad shoulders hunched a trifle as he gave the station from which he was speaking and asked for the patrol. He turned his regard to the reporter and encountered the glance of his keenly restless eyes. He dropped his own and slid his hand into the side pocket of his coat, where he had thrust the hundred dollar note before he started to run after the man who had used him in effecting his escape.

His fingers touched it, began working it into a little wad, crushing it, rolling it, squeezing it, into the smallest possible shape. By and by he would take it out and drop it in unobtrusive fashion just as they were entering the patrol, or, if possible, before. If only he had done it before this—as they came toward the call box, say—it would have been ground into pulp by now beneath the feet of the jostling throng.

"Darned clever, ain't you? What you got there?"

Larry's voice sounded all at once. Larry's hand shot out and gripped him by the lower arm. Larry's other hand darted into his pocket. And Eddie didn't resist. Because, really, it wasn't any use with Jenkins spinning about from the call box as Larry spoke, his grip instinctively closing on his polished club.

Then Larry's groping hand came forth and displayed what his fingers were holding.

"Slick 'un, Bill," he declared in a tone of something like relish. "He was tryin' to clean himself."

And Jenkins took the hundred dollar bill and grinned again as he thrust it into a pocket.

"Good eye, Larry," he rejoined. "I

reckon this is th' last bit of the queer he'll be shovin' for some little time, all right."

A mutter came out of the crowd. Others besides the reporter had heard Jenkins's statement that there had been shooting in the raid. Rumor leaped into being, magnified as it spread. If there had been shooting, some one had been shot, and if so—some one had died—and the prisoner was one of the gang—he had shot in trying to make his escape and a policeman had been killed. Theory drew to fact in the drawing of a breath. The crowd pressed closer. For the first time in his life Eddie experienced the sensation of being an outcast among his fellows, of being ringed by a pack of men, any one of whom would consider it no more than an act of justice to take his life. And suddenly he felt sick, dizzy, unnerved; as though some invisible hand were clutching at his heart. Almost without knowing that he did so, he edged in a little closer to Jenkins's side. After all, Jenkins stood for law and order, and he did not appear disturbed as he stood waiting, feet a trifle apart, the thumb of one hand hooked into his belt, his other hand swinging his club of seasoned ash.

A staccato pounding, a metallic tintinnabulation, sounded dully in Harmon's ears. With surprising rapidity it approached, grew louder and louder. And then it died, leaving a strange blank feeling in the sense it had been assailing and the patrol was backing up to the curb in front of the box where he and Jenkins and the reporter, Larry, stood.

The crowd split apart before it. It reached the curb and stopped with a settling jolt. Jenkins thrust a huge propelling hand beneath his armpit and guided him up some steps. Eddie sank down on the cushion of a lengthwise seat, with a sigh indicative of something like positive relief.

CHAPTER II.

"M. C. ELTON."

THEY got under way with a lurch. They ran a short distance east and then turned north. Out of the tail of the patrol, Eddie saw more of the city. But he saw it in a daze. Its milling life, its architecture, had lost all interest for him now. Now his interest was wholly with himself. He was in a strange city, he didn't know a soul among all its hurrying people, and he was under arrest. He said nothing, but clung to the seat, steadying both his body and his whirling senses, and glowering at Jenkins out of clouded eyes.

After a time the patrol stopped and Jenkins rose, bulking largely. "Come along," he prompted.

Eddie got up and stumbled, and Jenkins took him once more by the arm. He led him into a gray stone building and along a corridor for a little distance and up to a screened-in desk, through the door of a room.

A sergeant sat there. Eddie knew he was a sergeant by his stripes. As Jenkins paused before him, he glanced up in almost indifferent fashion and fastened Harmon with his gaze.

"Name?" he inquired, dipped pen in ink and prepared to write.

"Edward Harmon." Eddie decided to tell the truth and stick to it. That way, no matter what happened, they couldn't mix him up.

"Residence?"

"Chicago. I'm a stranger in town and—"

"Occupation?"

"Architect."

The sergeant wrote it down and glanced at Jenkins.

And Jenkins said: "Counterfeitin', I guess. Leastwise he tried for a get-away from a nest down here on Howard, an' I run his legs off after he'd jumped on my neck off a roof."

"Th' hell you say." The sergeant's pen kept steadily scratching. "All right, Bill—take him back."

"Hold on!" All at once Eddie flared into a protest, just as Officer Jenkins reached out an escorting hand. This cavalier disposal of his person, this callous acceptance of his presence, this routine handling of the predicament in which he found himself, got onto his nerves. They—they were treating him like a parcel of grist—they were grinding him through the mill.

He was brought in, examined, tagged and sent down a chute, so to speak. It flicked his already wounded pride. The thing was enough to drive any innocent man to the extreme in indignation. To be picked up on the streets of a city and booked on a counterfeiting charge was much too much.

"Wait a minute! I tell you it's all a mistake. I don't know anything about any roof or any raid. I never jumped on anybody's neck, nor saw a counterfeit bill to know it in my life, and I've told this man I wasn't the man he wanted. I'm a stranger—"

The sergeant winked at Jenkins. "Don't let that worry you, bo," he interruupted. "If what Bill says is right, you'll be takin' a trip. You won't be with us long."

It was useless. Eddie sensed it with a queer, heretofore unknown, sinking feeling of the futility of words. It wasn't any use at all to explain. These men didn't want explanations. They were satisfied with the situation as it was. They were convinced that they had a guilty man. Already and without a hearing in so far as they were concerned, he was condemned. And—and—the thing to do was to shut his mouth and wait till he could tell his story to some one who had some sense. But it was hard to submit to such a flagrant injustice. He set his jaws, however, and submitted. In silence he went with Jenkins to another room.

And in that room he submitted to a search. He really didn't mind. He stood passive and still silent through its progress. He knew he had nothing incriminating on him—that there was merely a hundred dollars or so in his pockets, together with some odds and ends. He stared moodily at the searchers. He even felt a dull satisfaction, because they seemed more or less disappointed at what they found.

Then Jenkins produced the counterfeit note and explained how it came into his possession.

The officer who had been conducting the search—another sergeant, as it happened—accepted it with a satisfaction manifested in a leering grin.

"Nifty bit of work," he declared after a brief inspection. "Gettin' this bird like you done, Bill, ought to put you on velvet with Cap Salles for life."

And Jenkins shrugged. "Oh, I guess cap knew what he was doin' when he stuck me in th' alley, before th' raid, to copper just the sort of play he pulled. But at that he's a slick one all right. Took me clean by surprise jumpin' down on me after I'd spotted him on th' roof an' told him to go back. I'd a winged him when he jumped, but he shook up my aim, comin' down on me feet first."

"Wonder you didn't lose him altogether," the sergeant remarked.

"Oh, that was just a matter of speed an' keepin' him under my eyes—an', of course, I made better time. Th' crowd let me through when it saw me runnin', like it always does." Jenkins's tone was casual enough, though he expanded visibly under the sergeant's praise. "How about th' rest of the gang; cap get 'em?" he asked.

The sergeant nodded. "Oh, yes. He sent 'em in. He said you was after a guy, and you got him with the goods, it would seem."

It was all disgusting to Harmon. Their satisfaction over his capture, their puffing themselves up over what must sometime—when he could get the ear of some one with ordinary reason—be proved a mistake, filled him with an exasperated rage demanding some expression. He broke his vow of silence.

"He got nothing," he burst out. "I've already told him I was a stranger in town, and not the man he wanted. That man was the one who ran up to me on the street and slapped my face."

"Huh!" The sergeant jerked up his head. Almost imperceptibly the others present edged in a trifle closer. "What's that?"

Eddie picked up courage. He had gained their attention at least. "That's the whole thing," he began, went on and described exactly what had happened in so far as he knew anything about it, from first to last. "And I didn't try to get rid of that bill you're holding until after I heard it was a counterfeiter had left it on me. After I heard that, I knew it was a counterfeit, of course. And I could see the reason why the

fellow had acted as he did. He was trying to get away and he knew I'd run after him if he hit me. You'd have done the same thing in my place."

Silence followed his words. The men about him stared. They exchanged glances with one another, and those glances were amazed. There was something about them that seemed to ask in tacit fashion if any one had ever heard a story quite like this. The sergeant let his eyes stray to Eddie and then dropped them back to the century note in his hand. And after that, he drew a deep breath and his face grew red. Suddenly he chuckled.

"Honest, Blumefeldt," he said, "you're sure an artist. Your yarn's about as good as this bill, an' I gotta admit it's a peach."

Blumefeldt! Eddie stiffened. And then once more his brain began to whirl. The man had called him Blumefeldt. They didn't believe him. The sergeant had said his story was as good as the bill and the bill was—false. There was only one interpretation to the words. They didn't even believe he was himself. They thought they knew him, that he was simply putting up a bluff. He gasped. His mouth came open and he faltered:

"What's that—you called—me?"

The sergeant's manner altered. His amusement vanished swiftly and he squared himself in his seat. He even leaned a little way toward Eddie and his jaw sat out at an unpleasant angle, and his voice, when it came, as it did come quickly, was rasping, sneering, gruff.

"I called you Blumefeldt—an' if you think you can run any such crazy stall as this thing you've just spilled, you might as well save your breath. Why, you cheap crook, we've been onto you for weeks. We've been spottin' your every move since you got into touch with that Murgson, Irak, Welter mob at first.

"An' that ain't all by a long shot. We've been teamin' in on th' play with Uncle Sam's boys. Maybe you never thought it, but we had a peephole in th' ceilin' of that room you were usin' as a phony office, an' we've been wakin' you up in th' mornin' an' puttin' you to bed. That's why we fell on you this afternoon when it looked like you was almost ready to slip somethin' across. Th' whole trouble with you is you simply wasn't as smart as you thought you was."

And if Eddie's brain had been whirling before, that whirling quickened now. He had an odd sensation as though his head were going round and round. Not only did they think they knew him, but they thought they knew what he had done. But they couldn't. The thing was impossible. He was a stranger in the city—and yet this man sat here and scowled in his face and told him he had been watched by both the secret service and the police for weeks.

It was all unthinkable that he, Edward Harmon, should be faced by such a situation—and yet he was. He glanced about as though to assure himself of the fact. He encountered only watching glances. And very much as on the street when the crowd pressed in about him, glaring, he felt oddly sick and weak. The whole thing was rapidly becoming a phantasmagoria of misunderstanding and doubt. He was like one caught in the maze of some horrid nightmare, bound, chained, incapable of doing more than battle blindly for some unseen way of escape.

Or—he steadied himself by an effort—was there not perhaps a way involved in the very words of these men themselves? They had been watching Blumefeldt. It was Blumefeldt they had meant to arrest. And Blumefeldt had been dealing with Murgson and Irak and Welter. And Murgson and Irak and Welter were here in jail. And—suddenly Eddie saw a ray of light in the mental fog. He stared straight back into the sergeant's scowling visage.

"See here," he questioned quickly; "were you one of the men on that raid?"

The sergeant laughed, without any sound of humor, although he seemed in a manner amused. "You know darned well I wasn't."

"Did you ever see Blumefeldt to know him?"

"Nope. But that don't hinder my knowing him when I see him. I'm pretty well acquainted with Murgson and his runnin' mates by sight."

"So that you're just identifying me by a process of elimination? You've got

Murgson and his two associates, and you jump at the conclusion that I'm Blumefeldt because he's the only one you missed. Is that it?" Eddie drew a somewhat unsteady breath.

And the sergeant grinned and nodded. "That's it. Though I wouldn't say we'd missed him—"

"That's your guess." Eddie drove home his point in emphatic fashion. "But—it's a guess and nothing else. Do you suppose I'd be standing here telling you a bunch of fairy tales if I was Blumefeldt really. Wouldn't this Captain Salles you mentioned a bit ago be pretty apt to know me when he saw me if he was at work on this case and had charge of the raid?"

And at last he had made an impression. He sensed it as he paused. Nobody said anything for several seconds, and the sergeant plainly considered Eddie's proposition.

"You might at that, if you could stall us into turnin' you loose on your say-so," he remarked, and turned to Jenkins with a question:

"See here, Bill—do you *know* Blumefeldt?"

Officer Jenkins actually dropped his jaw in a sort of startled surprise at the interrogation before he snapped it up again and answered: "Why, no, sarge, I don't, but—I know th' man who jumped on my neck."

"An' this is th' guy? You're sure of it, Bill?"

"Well, say-y!" Officer Jenkins complained. A quickly combative expression waked in his eyes. His throat contracted inside his collar. One would have said he gulped. He found himself in a most embarrassing position, and the very thing that had won him unqualified praise a few minutes before was impeached by implication at least. It was disconcerting to have his superior take such a stand after all he had done, and he was in no way minded to admit the possibility of an error in his work.

"Sure?" he let out in a bellow. "Say, what do you think I was doin' this afternoon—takin' a sleep? Didn't he beat it up the street like I've told you? An' didn't he try to slough that bill you got in your hand after he'd fell down tryin' to stall me with th' same crazy yarn he's told you, so's I'd turn him loose?"

"Admittin' that—" the sergeant began, glanced at Harmon and left his sentence unfinished.

Because, as Eddie caught his turning regard, he smiled. Jenkins wasn't sure. His manner showed it. No matter what he said, no matter how hard he tried to bolster up his position, he wasn't absolutely certain. For a man in an unassailable stand he was blustering too much. And dimly Eddie knew it and the knowledge brought about a quirking of his lips. That almost involuntary smile the sergeant studied.

"Th' point of the thing, Bill, is, did you lose sight of him while you was after him or not?" he went on at last.

"Well sa—y! Ain't I been tellin' you I didn't? An' anyway ain't he th' same build—ain't he wearing th' same sort of hat and suit—"

Abruptly Eddie interrupted. "There are a lot of gray suits and soft hats being worn this season, sergeant. You can't identify a man altogether by his clothes."

He felt that was rather neat as he said it, and once more he appeared to have produced an effect by his words. Glances passed again between the officers present. All at once they seemed undecided in spite of Jenkins's vociferous avowal. The sergeant studied the century note and lifted his eyes from it to those of the men about him.

"Oh, well," he said at length, having apparently decided to pass the responsibility for the present; "this ain't gettin' us nowhere so far as I can see. Cap Salles will know who you are when he arrives."

"And when will that be?" Eddie's tones were a trifle thickened, as the momentary hope awakened by the manner of his captors, died.

The sergeant shrugged. "Nobody knows. He's still out on th' case."

"And this Murgson, Irak and Welter—if they're here, wouldn't they know if I'm Blumefeldt?" Eddie saw another chance of escape and took it.

"What?" The sergeant gave him a glance of something like admiration. "You're a quick thinker, aren't you? They

might at that, but we ain't taking their word for anything much this evenin'. You wait till Cap Salles gets back."

Harmon's exasperation reached the boiling stage at a bound. He was sadly disappointed and not a little disturbed. Plainly something had happened in this city, quite outside his knowledge, but—it didn't matter. He didn't care a snap of his fingers for what had happened except that by some inconceivable freak of chance he had been drawn into the case. Only—he didn't intend to stay in, and what really interested him now was convincing these muddleheads of something concerning which they seemingly did not wish to be convinced. He could even understand that. He could understand why they would much prefer to have him Blumefeldt than the man he really was. But he had no least intention of becoming a victim to save the official face. He glared about him scowling. The unmitigated asses—the numskulls! They made him sick.

All at once his rage, his disgust of their indifference to either his feelings or convenience, cried aloud for expression. A nice way this was to treat a stranger in their city. He had given them an alternative means of proving his identity and instead of accepting it, of putting it to the test, they had brushed it aside. Their course waked every vestige of resentful antagonism in his breast.

"And I suppose I can rot in your filthy jail until Salles comes back and tells you you're a thick-headed bunch of fools!" he declared and knew he had made a mistake.

Because the words were no more than off his lips before the changing expression of the men to whom they were addressed showed that his was not the only resentment now aroused.

"You're a damned good guesser," the sergeant retorted scowling. "All right, Bill. Take him back."

Yes, Eddie knew he had overshot the mark, had turned reasonable doubt as to his identity into a personal animosity by his ill-timed and hot-headed fling. But the realization only made firmer his resolve to fight, to stand on the inalienable rights of his citizenship and demand the privileges it granted, to win back his liberty so unjustly interrupted.

"One moment," he said as Jenkins started toward him. "Can I get an attorney in this burg?"

"You don't need one yet, and when you do, we'll get one for you," the sergeant advised him gruffly. "All right, Jenkins—"

And Eddie rather lost his head. "You keep off of me, Jenkins!" he roared and turned on the speaker. "You'll get one? You'll put some half-baked saphead that needs the experience, in to defend me, I suppose? Well, not if I know it. I've a right to a lawyer and I've a right to pick him myself as long as I've money to pay him. And I have. You get me a directory or something and let me make my own selection now. I'm a stranger in this town, but I'll back my own choice of the sort of lawyer I want a long way over yours."

For a moment after he brought his demand to a somewhat gasping finish, nobody uttered a sound, and then the sergeant shrugged. Turning to a desk in one corner of the room, he produced a heavy book and extended it to Harmon.

"All right, keep your shirt on," he admonished.

Eddie caught the proffered volume from his hand. He opened it, turned to the list of classified names, found "Attorneys" with very little trouble and ran a searching finger down the page.

"M. C. Elton."

The words leaped at him out of leaded type. His finger paused. "M. C. Elton." He stood there staring at it and breathing rather hard. He hardly knew why this name attracted him more than a hundred others, unless perhaps the double leading spoke of a business acumen, to his imagination—suggested a person of progressive instincts—one who had accepted at its full value the oft-repeated assertion that it pays to advertise. But regardless of any thought-out reason, he made up his mind.

"Here," he said, "you telephone M. C. Elton and ask him to see me at once. Tell him I'm ready to pay him anything within reason, and be sure to get him because if you don't, once I do get out and connect with a man who knows his business, I'll

promise your bunch the merriest little damage suit for illegal arrest you've met in a million years."

"*Yes,* you will. You'll play hades won't you?" The sergeant took the directory from him and flung it back on the desk. His manner was one of a rising irritation and there was a tinge of unwonted color on his heavy features.

"Go on, Bill," he prompted. "We've had enough of his chatter. Take him inside and give him a chance to cool off."

From his demeanor, one might have reached the conclusion that antagonism is an emotion to be evoked on more than one side of a case.

CHAPTER III.

"NOT IN A THOUSAND YEARS!"

MAD all the way through he was, Harmon began to realize the truth after he was in a cell. He had been a fool, he told himself—a fool. There wasn't anything in the cell to hold his attention, even providing it had been less centered on himself. He heard the grating clang shut and sank down on the edge of the cot.

He—Edward Harmon—was in jail! It was an unassailable fact. There had been a dull finality about the clanging of that door. He was in jail, charged with counterfeiting, saddled with another man's name! And he had prefaced his incarceration by antagonizing the police—by threatening in inane fashion the very men who seemingly held his destiny in their hands.

For a moment he experienced something like a mental chill, and then he began an effort to think calmly, to cool off even as the sergeant had suggested that he should. After all, he told himself, he had done nothing really. He was innocent and he had told the truth. Swiftly he reviewed each event of the afternoon, since he had sallied forth from the Fairview, content in the belief that his time was his own to do with as he pleased. Well, for a man who could do as he pleased, he was in a strange position, and the sequence of occurrences by which he had arrived in that position was weird. It was as crazy as a comic movie. Eddie turned and glared at the restraining bars of his cell out of clouded eyes. The last thing they suggested was the surroundings of a man who could do as he pleased.

But—once more he crushed down a gust of rage—it was all a mistake. It was all the result of a blunder on the part of the chuckle-headed Jenkins. If he had accepted his story—and right there Eddie paused. He reviewed that story as he had been reviewing all else. In the stress of crowding events, fresh from its enacting, it had seemed true enough to him. But now that he was alone, he found its verity less convincing. A man had rushed up to him on the street and slapped his face and thrust a hundred dollars into his hand and disappeared. He recalled how his account had been received by the officers who heard it, with questioning glances and stares and covert smiles. He even began to imagine how the thing must have sounded to Jenkins's incredulous ears.

Jenkins had been chasing a man he didn't know by sight, and he had run down a man rushing madly along the street—a man of the same build and wearing the same general sort of clothes as the man he was after—and that man had given as an excuse for his haste that he was himself in pursuit of some one who had run up and slapped him. Suddenly, Eddie's face burned even as when Blumefeldt had struck it. The story was certainly wild. But—he wasn't Blumefeldt—and the whole thing would be straightened out when Captain Salles arrived. He would know he wasn't Blumefeldt, at a glance.

All at once Eddie paused again in his train of thought and swore at himself. In his disturbed mental condition he had forgotten all about his hotel. And he had a room there—his money and railroad tickets were in the safe. He could have demanded that his captors inspect those proofs of his contention that he wasn't Blumefeldt. And he had overlooked that bet! Instead he had given way to the "rattles" and told a most remarkable story and ended up the entire performance by a demand for an attorney, backed up by a definite threat. As a matter of fact, as he sat there, Eddie was none too proud of himself.

And he wasn't very successful in his efforts to cool off. Nice thing it would be if any one should get hold of the story after he reached home. Why the devil didn't Salles come? It was going to be a fine business if he had to spend the night here instead of in his hotel room. A swift loathing of the steel walls, the hard cot, the more or less fetid atmosphere, suggestive of none too clean and crowding human life, assailed him. Why didn't Salles come, or M. C. Elton, that attorney? He wondered if, after all they would try to get the man, or if they would ignore his wishes wholly, because of the threat he had made.

Still he reasoned they would hardly do that. Because he was within his rights and they must know it. And when Elton came, he would tell him the whole inconceivable story and get out of the infernal mess as easily as he could, and then the first train would carry him out of this—this unmentionable town. No matter what he may have heard about it, Eddie felt right then that he had already seen enough of the place to last him the rest of his life.

Right now, however, there wasn't anything to do except wait until either M. C. Elton or Salles arrived.

Eddie waited. He put his elbows on his knees and took his head, with its mop of thick, dark hair, into his hands. In a dull way it was aching, though he hadn't realized it before. The late afternoon light faded as he sat there, and the lights came on. They made the cell seem more than ever like a cage. He began to imagine how a wild beast felt in a menagerie or show. No wonder they growled and lifted lips to show savage fangs, and sometimes howled. He would have liked to howl himself—as a sort of primitive means of expressing his vast impatience and rage.

What was the matter with M. C. Elton? What was the matter with Salles? What was the matter with everybody and everything? Why had Blumefeldt picked him out of all the people on the street, and slapped his face this afternoon? Why didn't some one come and say he wasn't Blumefeldt, and give him a chance to escape from this—this human zoo—this fetid atmosphere of close-packed life.

"Aw keep cool—th' country's savin' fuel."

Somewhere a raucous voice broke out in maudlin singing.

From the next cell, Eddie heard a chuckle. The beasts were beginning to stir in the zoo.

"I was blind—my way I couldn't find."

"Musta been drinkin' wood alcohol, bo, if it affected you that way," a mumble of words came to him.

"In the gloamin'—I was roa-a-amin'."

"Here cut that out." A voice of authority. The keeper was minding his charges.

In sheer harassment of spirit, Eddie sprang up and began to pace his cell—three steps and turn, three steps and turn again, back and forth—back and forth. He set his jaw and clenched his hands. It was all unthinkable—all a mad, insane, inconceivable thing that he, Edward Harmon, should be shut up in this cage. It would be different if he had deserved it—but in every sense of the word, he was a victim. Some one had slapped his face and he had sought to resent it, and outside of that—he hadn't done a thing. Three steps to the end of the cell and turn. Three steps and he faced the grating. A sound of footsteps approaching along the tier of cells. He paused.

And then he forgot everything else for a moment as two fellow beings appeared. One was a warder—and the man was grinning as he came to a halt before the lattice of bars. And the other was a girl. Or at least Harmon called her a girl, in his mind—just a girl with the darkest of wavy brown hair and a pair of violet eyes.

"Here's your party, Miss," the warder announced, his grin becoming broader. He unlocked the door while Eddie stared. "Rap when you're ready to leave."

Without the least hesitation, the young woman entered the cell. She was like a breath of the clean outside air, Harmon thought. But he made no verbal comment for the moment, because her advent left him a bit confused. What, he asked himself in muddled fashion, was this trimly dressed, blue-eyed, brown-haired damsel doing in his cell? Why had the warder admitted her at all? And then suddenly

he thought he understood—that he knew the reason for her coming—what she was. She was a "sob sister"—a reporter. Larry—the man who had caught him trying to get rid of that condemning bill—had turned in a story of his arrest and this girl had been sent to interview him—to play up the human interest side of his dilemma. The thought hardened his attitude in an instant. This jail was a zoo all right and she had come down to write up the latest beast.

He became conscious that she was speaking, as the warder withdrew. "How do you do, Mr.—"

"Never mind," he interrupted shortly. "Take the choice of the cot or stool, and tell me what you want."

"What *I* want?" The violet eyes widened, grew briefly puzzled and then, as Harmon thought, in a quiet way amused: "Aren't you the young man who sent for an attorney?"

"I am," Eddie admitted gruffly.

"Then—I'm M. C. Elton."

"You!" It was very, very rude, but Eddie actually gasped. For he really couldn't help it. And though he didn't know it, he stared. M. C. Elton was a woman—this—this blue-eyed girl. Once more fate had tricked him. He had picked a woman lawyer. No wonder the warder had grinned. What crazy kink was going to appear in the course of the whole infernal tangle next? He had asked for a lawyer and he had selected a girl not much out of her teens. In a sort of daze, he watched her red lips open.

"I, yes. Mildred Elton. I suppose you were misled by the initials, weren't you? You were expecting a—man?"

Eddie nodded. "I—er—that is yes, Miss Elton—the warder had called her Miss, he remembered, with a wholly unreasonable pleasure. But—won't you—er—sit down? You see I'm a stranger in town and I didn't know. You'll—er—pardon my surprise."

Miss Elton took the stool. "I understand perfectly and I'm going to begin with an explanation. I rather trade on the use of my initials instead of my given name. You see many people would hesitate to call a woman lawyer, until she has proved herself and gained a reputation. But my father was a lawyer and he trained me in his profession and—I kept on with what I could hold of his practice when he—died."

"By Jove!" Harmon sat down on the cot. He stared back with a frank admiration, into her steady eyes. All at once he grinned. "You had your nerve."

Little white teeth glinted momentarily as she flashed him a smile. "It was the thing I knew best, and I had to earn my living. But, of course, if you'd rather have a man—"

"Hold on!" Eddie interrupted. All at once he made up his mind. It was all in keeping that he should have picked a woman lawyer. It was as crazy as everything else from first to last. He had insisted on making his own selection, and he had asked for—this girl. "I—I wouldn't rather have a man, than—you. I expected a man, of course. You're right in thinking the initials fooled me. I'm a stranger in town, as I've told you before, and—"

"Don't bother to explain any further." If Miss Elton noted his rather florid avowal, she gave no sign. Her manner became professional in the extreme. "Suppose instead that you tell me all about your trouble, Mr.—"

"Harmon—Eddie Harmon," her client supplied. He did more. He rapidly sketched the entire sequence of events that had brought him into the position where she found him. And suddenly Mildred Elton began to laugh.

Harmon stared. There could be no doubt of her amusement. She laughed with the whole-souled, absolute enjoyment of one who appreciates the humor of a situation. And by degrees, Eddie's first surprise gave way to a rather odd expression.

"I—suppose it is—funny—to the other fellow," he said in a tentative way at last.

"Forgive me." Miss Elton controlled her mirth. "But—he ran up and slapped you—and you chased him—and they put *you* under arrest. You poor boy—they certainly have got you into a mess the way you tell it. Only—if you're not Blumefeldt and can prove your identity by the things you have at the hotel—I don't see why you

need me at all. Why don't you simply wait for Captain Salles?"

"Because," said Eddie almost fiercely, "I've done enough simple things to-day already, and each time I've got in worse, and I don't intend staying in this jail a minute longer than I have to. I've d ne nothing at all—everything has been done *to* me, and I've a perfect right to demand my release. Isn't there such a thing as habeas corpus—or—or bail—or—something? I don't know anything about it, but I supposed a lawyer would. And after I get out, I may want to start a damage suit for being wrongfully arrested."

Miss Elton pursed her lips. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Harmon, it is rather hard to collect anything but trouble from the police. Of course, I might take steps to get you out, but doesn't it occur to you that in so far as the police themselves are concerned, you're not really under arrest?"

"Not under arrest?" Eddie faltered. "Well, really Miss Elton, for a man not under arrest, I certainly find myself in a most peculiar position. I—"

"Wait." Once more his little attorney smiled. "Counterfeiting is something to be handled by the federal courts, of course, and even if I started proceedings toward your release, I'm afraid we would have a lot of trouble unless they gave the word."

"Oh, good Lord!" Eddie's tone was one of consternation. "You mean the government detectives are likely to butt in on this? But—they haven't made any charge."

"Not as yet. And don't look so distressed, Mr. Harmon. If you're not Blumefeldt, they are not apt to, in my estimation. That is why I feel sure that your simplest course would be to wait for Captain Salles."

"But—" Of course, her words were sensible enough, only Eddie didn't exactly wish to follow their advice. He had blustered a good deal at the last in his interview with the police and he wanted to extricate himself without any of their assistance—though if the federal agents were going to mix into the proposition—

"It is the best advice I can give as your attorney." Miss Elton perceived his hesitation and pressed home her advantage.

"All right." Suddenly Harmon yielded. If this girl said wait, he would. He wouldn't mind the waiting, he felt all at once, if she would share it with him. He added that as a condition: "I'll do what you say if you'll stay till he comes, and see me out of this mess."

"Oh, dear." Miss Elton eyed him. Her expression was almost comic. "But you funny boy, can't you see that provided always, you've told me the truth, there isn't anything against you, and that everything will soon be straightened out?"

Eddie nodded. "Maybe." He was watching the play of her lips, the quaint little crinkles about the corners of her eyes, beginning to appreciate more and more the trim lines of her feminine figure. "Anyway, I'd—er—prefer to have you remain and—er give me your advice."

"Very well." Miss Elton didn't argue. "Suppose then, while we're waiting, that you tell me what you can about yourself."

Eddie had hardly expected that, but it was easy. Almost any man of twenty-six finds it far from difficult to talk about himself to an attractive girl. He told her about his birth; he gave his age. He mentioned some of his ambitions. He described his work as an architect for the past three years. He forgot time and place almost and was rather dilating on his progress in his profession when once more footsteps came down the corridor and he paused.

The warder and two men appeared, one of them a captain of detectives, dark, alert of word and motion; the other of a quieter bearing with coldly impersonal steel-blue eyes by which one felt little was missed.

"Here you are, captain," said the warder.

And the dark men sent one searching glance into the cell where Eddie sat, to explode in disgusted fashion: "Him Blumefeldt? Not in a thousand years!"

It was all right. Everything was all right. This was Captain Salles at last. He had come back and it hadn't taken him more than a second to appreciate the truth. With a vast surge of relief and gratification, Eddie rose. In a word Salles had exploded all suspicion against him. And now there would be nothing more than the customary formalities, whatever they were, of turning

him loose. His face lighted. He became aware that Miss Elton had also risen.

"We've been waiting for you to come and say so, Captain Salles. Mr. Harmon, being a stranger in the city, had no one to identify him," he heard her begin.

"Well," I've said it," Salles snorted. He seemed more than a little upset to find that Jenkins had so plainly bungled in getting his man. "Blumefeldt's a man grown, as it happens, and this boy's only a kid."

Yes, it was all right. Not only had Salles said he was not the man he wanted, but he was sticking to it, and yet oddly enough some of Harmon's elation vanished at his reaffirming words. All at once he was filled with blended emotions. He flushed. Of course, it was splendid to have his identity vouched for in such unequivocal a fashion, but—what the deuce did the captain mean by calling him a boy—a kid, in front of this girl of the brown hair and the violet eyes and the wise little head?

The way he spoke, it was almost as though he sneered at Eddie's years. He might as well have said he had scarcely reached the age of discretion—would hardly have been capable of doing what Jenkins had alleged. For a moment it was in his mind to resent the imputation. But he controlled his feelings.

"I tried to make your man Jenkins understand that Blumefeldt was the person who handed me that bogus bill," he said.

Miss Elton gave him a glance, and Salles narrowed his eyes.

"Think so?" he inquired.

"Of course." Salles might fancy him a callow youth, but at least he would show him that he was able to use his reason; to take facts and arrive at the logical deduction. Eddie went on to establish that fact beyond any contradiction.

"Who else could it have been? What earthly reason would any one else have had for doing what he did? And in view of the fact that he was trying to make his escape, I should think his motive would be plain."

"You think quite a lot don't you?" For no reason that Eddie could understand, Salles' tone was all at once brittle.

But it was not time for speculation. He answered the question: "I try to use my brain."

"And you think he was trying to clean himself just as you did after Jenkins grabbed you?"

"I think that was part of his object—though mainly he wanted me to chase him. That's why he slapped me. I suppose you know he slapped me, captain?"

Salles nodded. He and the quiet man exchanged glances. "I know all about it, and I get your point," he said shortly. "It's the logical conclusion, provided the bill was bogus. But Mr. Marvin here knows a lot about such matters and *he* says it's *genuine*."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

SMOKE FANCIES

THE day
Is gray,
A mist-wet pall
Hangs over all;
The belching smokestacks
Reaching high—huge crayons,
Trace weird silhouettes
Upon the murky sky.

Margaret Wheeler Ross.

Jeremiah Parsons--He-Man

By HARRY ADLER

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

PARSONS VS. KURTZ.

JEM PARSONS, cow-puncher, was at peace—with himself and with the world. He and his horse, Suds, had arrived in Sky City the evening before and had stayed over for a day or two of rest before proceeding into North Park, where a job with the Bar-Circle-X outfit awaited him. In his pocket reposed forty-five dollars. He possessed neither a debt nor a care in the world. Wherefore, as has been stated, Jem Parsons's soul was at peace.

His clothes carefully brushed, his boots brilliantly polished, he leaned with folded arms against the wall, watching with enjoyment the scene of gayety before him. The annual ball of the Pioneer Fire Company was in progress. An incurable awkwardness when in the proximity of the feminine sex had taught Jem back in the earliest days of his youth that dancing was not his most felicitous accomplishment; but the the sight of gyrating, gliding couples always pleased him and a basic savage strain within him responded to the blaring rhythm of the music.

It was not an altogether unrestrained joyousness and gayety that exhibited itself in Veterans' Hall to-night. There was discernible to Jem's ever inquisitive mind an atmosphere of tension, of apprehensiveness. The laughter was seldom the hearty, unblanketed burst of joyousness indigenous to such occasions. Also an undercurrent of excitement made its drift apparent. Between dances little knots gathered for snatches of agitated buzzing. New arrivals were eagerly interrogated, as if important news were being awaited.

Jem knew the cause of the excitement. That morning the paymaster of the Nancy Hanks Mining & Milling Company, on his way from the bank to the mine, had been held up and robbed of his satchel, containing some eight thousand dollars. He had been found, lying bound and gagged in the rear of his car, by the driver of an ore team coming into town, some three quarters of an hour after the hold-up.

The bandits having been masked, their victim was unable to give any description of them. They had been four in number. They had sprung out at him from the bushes lining the roadway and covered him before he realized what was happening. As they had finished fettering him, a Ford touring car had driven up from the direction of town, the driver being likewise masked. It had probably been standing around the bend, acting as lookout. The four bandits had got in and the car had then turned and driven back toward town.

The sheriff, of course, had immediately gathered together a posse and was still scouring the mountains for trace of the highwaymen. No results had as yet been forthcoming, however.

Jem, being a stranger in town, had been questioned. But as half the town was able to bear witness to the fact that he had spent nearly the entire morning, including the hour of the hold-up, perched on an upturned nail keg inside the entrance of Pete Johannsen's blacksmith shop, while the artist of the anvil equipped Suds with a new set of shoes, the cow-puncher's detention had been but of a few minutes' duration.

The excitement in the center of which he found himself, without being a part of it, added the seasoning dash of spice necessary to round out Jem's contentment of spirit.

The couples on the floor before him, circling and eddying, bunched into the corner where Jem was leaning. He uncrossed his ankles and drew his feet in closer to the wall. As he did so, the dancer closest to him stumbled. He lurched awkwardly in the effort to regain his balance and his heel came down crushingly on Jem's unoffending toe.

Jem winced; but in furtherance of the social amenities his face started to form a grin of cheerful pardon.

The dancer, however, seemed otherwise disposed. Angered, apparently, at the awkward spectacle he had made, he flashed on Jem in a rage.

"Keep your damned feet out of the way!" he exploded.

Jem's half formed smile congealed—then dissolved. An infinitesimal spark struck across the clear blue eye.

"You talking t' me?" he inquired mildly. He still leaned against the wall and his arms still hung in a listless fold across his breast.

"I'll do more than talk to you!" the other man roared in a strange excess of fury. "I'll mash in your ugly mug!"

"Ugly mug!" A broad grin of derision broke over Jem's face. His eye was deliberately and unmistakably insulting as it moved lingering over each detail of the other man's features—from the heavy-browed, narrow-slitted, green eyes and the great, broad nose, flattened out at the bottom against the heavily mustached upper lip, to the deep scar that twisted the thick-lipped mouth into a perpetual, asymmetrical snarl.

Up and down Jem's eyes roved in palpable insolence.

"Why, stranger," he drawled at length, "I reckon you don't need no police protection t' keep the ladies from mobbing you when you exposes your map t' the public gaze."

A deadly stillness ensued. The music had trailed waveringly into silence at the first words of the altercation and the floor, with the bright dresses of the girls, was like a distantly seen field of motionless flowers. Those at the farther edges of the room

moved steadily closer, and Jem sensed those spectators that had been lining the wall at either side of him falling away from his proximity with a celerity unmodified by the attempted air of casualness.

"You dirty, yellow pup, you!" the man then rasped. He spat forth a stream of curses. "I'll—!"

He never finished that sentence. None of the witnesses, in the thrilled, whispered, corner postmortems later held, could quite agree on what happened. Jem's fist, leaping from apparently no position at all, had flashed through the air and in the fraction of an instant his reviler lay sprawling on the floor.

With catlike agility, though, the man wriggled over onto one knee and his hand snapped to his hip pocket. It was a movement Jem had been expecting. A swift swing of his boot and the gun went skating across the floor. With a yelp of pain its owner seized the limp wrist in his other hand. His hate shot eyes glared into the barrel of Jem's revolver.

For several moments Jem held his opponent thus.

"Get up," he then commanded.

Sputtering vile imprecations the man obeyed.

"If it ain't too much of a strain," Jem said, "try an' act like a gentleman. There's your partner—she's waitin'. Go on an' dance." He waved a commanding hand at the orchestra.

Hesitantly the musicians resumed their instruments. The motionless spectators wavered, then started circling with gathering spirit.

The belligerent stranger glared uncertainly at Jem, wavered before the unflinching gun muzzle, then turned to his partner, a lady of a multitude of tight, blond curls, deep red cheeks and lips, and chalk white nose and chin.

"You've got me this trip," he snarled over his shoulder. "But I'm going to get you for this, and don't you forget it!"

"Come for me any time you're ready," Jem invited. "I guess I'll always be around handy any time you're lookin' for me."

He watched the man's stocky figure become blurred among the other dancers. Then he slipped his gun back into his pocket and dropped again into his posture of indolent spectatorship. About him he heard the excited buzz of the adventure's retelling. He noted with a gratified self-satisfaction the glances of admiration turned in his direction as the dancers sailed by his corner.

Perhaps five minutes elapsed. Then Jem felt a light touch on his shoulder. Instantly alert, he jerked his head round. An elderly man, with lined, sober face, drooping white mustache and heavy white eyebrows, was standing at his side.

"Stranger," the man accosted him, his voice low, audible to Jem's ears only, "I'd like to have a word with you. If you'll come out of the hall we can step down the street a ways."

He turned and started for the door.

Jem hesitated. This might be—probably was—a trap of his antagonist. Outside the hall, he would probably be fallen upon by the other man's friends in force, or be led into an ambush.

Jem's jaw set grimly. His eye was alight with the gleam of battle.

"Jem, my son," he told himself, "it kinda looks to me that your leetle vacation is over. Looks like there's a wagon load of excitement headed right smack in your direction and she's due to onpile right smack on your haid."

He grinned.

"All right," he finished. "There ain't nothing that sets easier on my stomach than excitement, nohow."

He moved towards the door, in the old man's wake.

CHAPTER II.

THE TOWN THAT LOST ITS NERVE.

THE wariness with which Jem edged out of the shelter of the building into the open street seemed unwarranted. The street was dark and quiet. About the entrance of the hall a group of men stood, snatching a brief smoke. The stranger who had invited Jem out was a few paces down the sidewalk. Otherwise the street was deserted.

The man looked back over his shoulder and jerked his head for Jem to follow. The latter's taut nerves did not relax; nor did his fingers leave their position of poised proximity to his gun butt. He stepped forward, though, and strode by the other man's side.

At the corner the man turned and beyond the edge of the building stopped. He faced Jem.

"My name is Lawton," he introduced himself. "I'm county judge."

He paused a moment.

"Here's what I called you out for," he resumed. "I want to give you a bit of advice. You had better get your horse and slip out of town as quietly and quickly as possible.

Jem's eyes opened inquiringly.

"And for why?" he queried. "Who says I got to get out of town?"

The other man shook his head.

"You haven't got me right, he answered. "Nobody says you've got to. It's a friendly tip I'm giving you. You've licked and shamed Bill Kurtz—licked him and shamed him publicly, before his own gang and us folks of the town." He leaned forward earnestly and laid a hand on Jem's shoulder. "Stranger," he continued, "no man has ever done that. And no man that does do it can hope to get out of this camp alive. Listen to me—you've still got a chance; take it."

"You a-tellin' me to skin out of this here camp and run from this flat nosed son of a horse thief?" Jem's voice was injured and full of reproof. "Why, thanks, judge," he drawled on, "I appreciates your kindness of intention in warnin' me—but Jem Parsons ain't never run from no man yet—and I guess maybe he won't yet fer a while. Anyhow, not so long as he's got a gun on his hip and an arm in good mechanical condition to operate it with."

Judge Lawton still held Jem's shoulder.

"Stranger," he said, "I'd give my right eye to have you stay in this camp. It just warmed me clean down to the soles of my feet to see you back in that hall. It made me feel good all over to see a real he-man stand up on his two hind legs and talk up to that ugly bully. We need a few men like you in this town. But, just the same, I know this camp and I know Kurtz and his gang. I admire courage, but I can't stand by and let you just be butchered by that crowd."

"Who is this hombre that you're so worried about him?" Jem inquired curiously. "He must be some fancy little hell-raiser."

"He's dredge master of the Blue Buttes Dredging Company. Their camp is about twelve miles south-east of town. They operate two dredges there—one up Coyote Creek and the other on the Rapid River. He's got about thirty-five men at the camp and, believe me, they're the toughest lot of pirates that ever was collected in one bunch. When Kurtz hires a man for the dredges he don't care whether he knows the digging ladder from a screen grizzly. All he wants to know is how quick he is with a gun and whether his soul is black enough to fall in with Kurtz's rascality."

"Why don't you wipe him up? Why don't Sky City take him to a cleaning and either make 'em behave theirselves or wipe their camp off the map?"

The judge gave a bitter, mocking laugh.

"Sky City?" he demanded sarcastically. "Say, there isn't a man in town that's got guts enough to even think of anything like that. They've degenerated into a bunch of old women. A man used to be able to say he came from Sky City and hold up his head. But a few years of Kurtz's bullying and any old ladies' home out on its annual picnic could come in here now and spank all our leading citizens. You couldn't collect enough spirit from all our men to equip a starving alley cat with spunk enough to steal a hunk of liver from a meat market."

"Well, what's the idea? Where does that get this fellow Kurtz?"

"Just natural orneriness, I guess. Likes to lord it over the town. He's carried on a regular, systematic campaign of intimidation until he now has this community completely overawed and cowed. Take tonight—I was standing near you and saw the whole affair. You weren't any more at fault than I was. And even if you had been, it was accidental and just an 'excuse

me ' would 've settled it with anybody else. But what did Kurtz do?—He snapped right onto it. That's the deliberate method he and his gang use, with the result, as I said, that they've now got the town into a chronic condition of nervous strain."

" If the town ain't got guts enough to put a stop to it theirselves, why don't they complain to the dredging company's home office? Why don't they get Kurtz fired? It's bad business for the company—why do they stand for it?"

Judge Lawton shrugged his shoulders.

" Why should they worry? The general superintendent of the company gets around here on his inspection trips two or three times a year. If any complaints are made to him, he talks to Kurtz about them. Kurtz denies most of it and claims he's got to use hard-boiled methods to hold his own men in line, for one thing, and for another thing says that keeping this district afraid of him keeps down their tax assessments—which is true enough. The assessor doesn't dare put on what the property ought to stand. So as it seems to be saving the company money, and as the dredges seem to be operating all right—Kurtz is a good dredge operator, no getting around that—why, that's the end of the company's interest."

" And now you got a gang of highwaymen," Jem remarked. " This community is playing in tougher luck than poor old Job."

" Sure! What's to be expected?" demanded Judge Lawton bitterly. " As soon as it gets spread around a bit the sort of spineless place this is, we'll be flooded with every sort of crook going, looking for an easy spot to work. This robbery this morning isn't the first. Six weeks ago the bank was broken into and nicked for four thousand dollars. For about a year there have been robberies and holdups and burglaries of one kind or another all through this district. And what's been done about it all? Harry Goss is good enough as a sheriff, but you've got to have the force of a strong public spirit behind you to get anywhere in law enforcement. Harry scrapes together a few men willing to help him, and they ride around the hills a day or two; they don't find anything, and then it's dropped. The bank got some Denver detectives on the job; but after a couple of days they threw it up. It was no use, they saw, without anybody taking any particular interest or giving any particular help. It 'll be the same in this case—you mark what I tell you."

As if in answer to his statement, the chug of automobiles sounded up the street. Three cars filled with men came into view. As they approached the corner the judge stepped out into the light of the street lamp.

He waved his arm at the driver of the first car.

" Any luck, Harry?" he hailed.

The car slackened its speed a bit.

" No, judge," came the answer. " Could not find a thing. No clew of any kind. Looks sort of hopeless."

The cars went on down the street in the direction of Veterans' Hall.

Lawton returned to Jem's side. In his eye was a gloomy triumph.

" What did I tell you?" he demanded. " That's Sheriff Goss. He's been out all day with the other boys, but they might as well have saved their trouble for all the good it 'll do."

Punctuating the close of his sentence there crashed suddenly through the night stillness a fusillade of shots from the direction of the hall. Women's shrieks and the outcries of men followed.

Judge Lawton and Jem leaped for the corner. From the entrance of Veterans' Hall an excited stream of men and girls were gushing. Through the center of the broader flow a swifter, narrower current cut a channel, and at the edge of the sidewalk emerged into view as a small, compact group of men with drawn, threatening revolvers. At their head Jem recognized his antagonist of the encounter earlier in the evening—Kurtz. A few of the men had women clinging to their arms.

The group darted across the street to a row of automobiles. They jumped in and, amid a sputtering of starting engines and open cut-outs, they shot off up the street. As they swept by the corner, Kurtz's quick, darting eye espied Jem standing beneath

the light. With a shouted curse the dredge master flung down his gun and cut loose. Jem, on the instant, was at the curb, answering. But the flight of the car and the uncertain light rendered both fusillades innocuous.

The judge started on the run toward the hall, Jem at his heels. The crowd by now had wavered in its panicky flight and was surging back through the door. Jem and his companion pushed through the mob and into the hall. They forced their way to the spot that seemed to be the center of interest.

There, on the floor, lay a young man of perhaps twenty-three or four. His eyes were closed and his face white. The floor about him was wetly crimson. By his side knelt a man whom Jem recognized as Dr. Moore.

A few feet away a girl lay prone and senseless, several women at her side calling for water and more space with the usual hysterical incoherence of such an occasion. Another figure pushed through into the center of the crowd, forcing his way with the assurance of authority. Jem recognized the sheriff, Harry Goss—big, sandy haired, with eyes that struck Jem immediately as shifty.

"What has happened here?" he demanded. "Who did this?"

CHAPTER III.

JEM ACCEPTS A CHALLENGE.

A MAN stepped forward, volunteering the requested information.

"One of the Blue Buttes gang—Herb Hoskins. George and Amy were dancing, and as they passed close by Hoskins he slipped some insulting remark to the girl. George, being hot-headed, snapped back. They exchanged words a couple of times, and then Hoskins pulls his gun and cuts loose at George. Got him, too, I'm afraid."

The sheriff turned to the doctor. "How does it look, doc?" he inquired.

The physician rose to his feet.

"He's hurt pretty badly," he stated. "One bullet got him through the lung; another one shattered his arm; but it's the lung wound that is dangerous. We'd better get him out of here right away."

Goss turned to the crowd behind him. He waved his arm.

"Clear out of here," he commanded. "We've got to have room. Sam"—he addressed one of the men that had pressed in behind him—"you and Joe go down to Dr. Moore's office and get the stretcher."

Milling reluctantly, the crowd retreated through the doorway. Judge Lawton, by virtue of his official position, remained; and Jem, in companionship with the judge, stayed at the latter's side. A dozen or so other men likewise remained—officials of some sort or other, Jem surmised, or other important personages.

In a few minutes the two messengers returned with the stretcher. The wounded man was placed upon it, and, accompanied by the doctor, was carried out. The unconscious girl had revived sufficiently to be likewise removed.

"Well," one of the officials remarked, "I guess this pretty nearly evens up Kurtz for the licking he got to-night."

Goss looked up inquiringly. "Was there more trouble here to-night?"

The first man jerked his thumb toward Jem.

"This stranger had a little run-in with Kurtz." He briefly sketched the incident.

The sheriff turned upon Jem a keen, searching look. There was a subtle sneer in his voice as he spoke. "You're some scrapping kid, ain't you?"

"Oh, no!" Jem drawled. "I'm a man of peace and quiet. But I guess I knows which end of a gun is which when the occasion trots itself forward."

Goss's voice was resentful, accusing. "I suppose it was that foolish scrap of yours that made Kurtz and his friends sore and brought this on. Now poor George has to pay for it."

Jem's face flushed darkly beneath its tan. "More likely he's payin' for a lack of guts in the officials hereabouts in enforcin' the law and keepin' down this cheap bunch of hell-raisers," he retorted.

The sheriff's eyes narrowed. "Are you intending any particular insinuation?" he

inquired menacingly. "Because if you are—"

"You heard what I said," Jem returned steadily; "and you know what I mean. That gang was able to shoot this poor kid down in the middle of a crowded hall and get away from town without a shot bein' fired at 'em. And you was right in front of the hall at th' time. So far's I can see, there ain't been no move made, neither, toward goin' t' get this fellow Hoskins."

"What business is it of yours, a stranger, to come in here and tell us all about what's the matter with us and criticize us? We've managed to struggle along a few years without your help. I guess, maybe, we can pull along a while longer the same way."

Jem shrugged his shoulders.

"Sure thing," he acquiesced. "It's all right with me. I ain't hankerin' none to reform this here camp. It ain't nothin' to me. If you'll remember, my remarks was brought forth by certain remarks of yourn."

"Just the same," Judge Lawton interpolated, "this man is right, Harry. What are we going to do about this? Are we going to let that gang of ruffians get away with this just like they have with everything else?"

Goss turned to the judge. His manner was softer than it had been toward Jem.

"Now, judge," he remonstrated, "you know Kurtz, and you know his men. Of course, I'll drive out to the camp to-morrow and talk to Kurtz and see what I can do. But you know as well as I do that I can't do anything. No man can go into that camp for a prisoner and come out alive. And you know how much chance there'd be of getting a posse together in Sky City to go out to the Blue Buttes."

Jem could not restrain the gleeful chortle that shook his entire body.

"Damned if this ain't good!" he chuckled. "The sheriff says he'll go out and 'talk to Kurtz.' Do you aim, maybe, to take along a little conversational assistant like a six-shooter, or are you relyin' entirely and alone on your or'tory to get you by? You must be Dan'l Webster, Abe Lincoln and William Jennings Bryan all rolled into one."

Sheriff Goss took a threatening stride forward.

"Now, you listen, stranger," he snapped, his eyes gleaming venomously. "You've rattled your gab about as much as I've got a mind to listen to. You're mighty long on talk—but I ain't seen so much action, in spite of what the boys say happened here to-night. It's just plumb luck that you ain't lying in Petersen's undertaking parlors right now. By an accident you managed to get the drop on Kurtz ahead of him, and it's gone to your head and puffed you up so you think you're just a regular hell-raising, fighting fool. If you're so damned cocky, what's the matter with you going out there to-morrow and bringing Hoskins in yourself?"

"Me?" returned Jem. "I'm a stranger. What call is it of mine? And anyhow—am I sheriff? What authority have I got to arrest a man?"

"Here's your authority." The sheriff snatched a badge from his pocket and thrust it into Jem's hand. "I hereby appoint you a deputy."

A sneer of scorn overspread his face.

"Didn't expect that, did you? Figured you had lots of opening to crawfish, didn't you?"

Jem turned the badge thoughtfully in his fingers.

"As I said," he remarked, "I'm a stranger, and this ain't no business of mine. Jus' the same, I knows a challenge when I sees one. And I ain't never yet backed away when I seen a challenge hankerin' t' make my acquaintance." He thrust the pin of the badge through his vest front. "You'd better dust out your jail," he went on. "To-morrow morning it's goin' to start earning some returns on the money the taxpayers of this here community has got invested in it."

He hitched up his trousers. "I s'pose this bird, Hoskins, will keep till morning. His experience with this town ain't likely to scare him into skipping out."

"He'll be there all right. You won't have any trouble finding him around the bunkhouse. He'll be waiting to receive you, any time you get there, I guess."

"Well, he won't have long to wait."

"Sure you won't be troubled with insomnia to-night and decide that seeing as you can't sleep you might as well get on your way toward North Park during the night?" Goss inquired sarcastically.

Jem sauntered off toward the door. "Me, when I sleep," he tossed blandly over his shoulder, "give a first class imitation of a sheriff chasing a bandit."

CHAPTER IV.

AT BLUE BUTTES CAMP.

BUZZING along the road to the Blue Buttes camp early next morning in the Ford car the sheriff had furnished him, Jem belabored himself for a meddling fool. What call had he to get himself mixed up in the troubles of Sky City? What affair was it of his, anyway? A fine mess his boasting and chestiness had got him into! It was as Goss had said—a bit of luck had given him the advantage over Kurtz, and the victory had gone to his head. He was certainly in a nice racket now. Dog-gone lucky he'd be to get out of it with his skin intact, let alone with the prisoner he was after.

He, single-handed, going into a camp such as Judge Lawton had described Blue Buttes to be, to take one of their number prisoner and bring him into town to answer to what might develop into a charge of murder!

"I must 'a' been plumb out of my haid," Jem lugubriously reflected. He tried to remember whether he had partaken of anybody's bootleg hospitality, to which he might lay the blame for the mental condition that must have possessed him the previous night.

Well, he was in for it now. And, being in for it, his mood quickly passed and his spirits bounded to the level of the high adventure upon which he had embarked.

"They may get me, but, by gum, they will know somebody's been out to camp by the time they get through," he chuckled grimly.

The road to the Blue Buttes camp ran high around the edge of the mountains. On one side the green mountain slopes rose steeply to their snowy summits, while on the other they dropped to the river bank some distance below.

The last mile of the road dropped sharply to the clearing, near the cañon's level, wherein the rude camp nestled. Jem, halting for a few moments as he came into sight of the camp, saw a cluster of rough, log buildings. From far up the river, above the rush and roar of the water, came the distance-muffled crash and grind of the dredges.

Driving into the camp, Jem's acutely alive eyes roved about him. In the center of the settlement, by the main roadway, stood the largest building, probably the bunkhouse. The other houses were scattered about in indiscriminate irregularity. Jem circled around behind the bunkhouse and brought his car to a halt in front of the door, headed in the direction back toward Sky City. He throttled his engine down to a low mutter, but did not kill it. He was playing his hand with extreme wariness.

He climbed out of his seat and strolled toward the door. His manner outwardly was all calm, cool insouciance; but beneath that careless exterior every nerve and every muscle was set at hairtrigger tension, ready for instant action.

The door of the bunkhouse was standing ajar. Jem stepped to the doorway and looked within.

In the large general room of the bunkhouse ten or a dozen men sat idly at the table or tilted in their chairs against the walls. The doors to the inner bunkrooms were closed.

With the impact as of a physical blow there struck Jem's consciousness an atmosphere of expectancy about the men before him. The cards on the table lay in carelessly bunched stacks. All chairs were facing the doorway, and in each eye Jem seemed to be aware of a light of happy anticipation. His glance, roving over every detail of the room, flickered an instant over the telephone on the wall. What pregnant activity had that instrument, now so blandly inscrutable, been party to in recent hours?

In the foremost seat by the table sat Kurtz himself, his ugly snarl now a sar-

donic mask of evil joy. A dredge master at this hour of the day idling with the off-shift men in the bunkhouse! The cloudy vagueness of Jem's suspicion condensed into certainty.

He dropped carelessly against the door jamb. His thumbs hooked in his belt. On his vest gleamed prominently the badge of his authority.

" 'Morning, gents," he greeted cheerfully.

" Welcome, stranger," Kurtz answered. " Glad to see you—honestly, we're tickled to death;" which Jem was quite ready to believe.

" Does there happen t' be a gent here by the name of Herb Hoskins?" the new deputy sheriff inquired.

A young man, his face alight with insolent braggadocio, seated in the place of prominence across the table from Kurtz, spoke up:

" You're lookin' at him, stranger. That's me."

Jem gave him a calm scrutiny.

" I'll have t' trouble you to come with me to Sky City," he announced. " There's a little difficulty of last night that's got t' be settled for."

" That so?" Hoskins drawled. " Now jus' supposin' I ain't feelin' in the mood for travelin' this mornin'?"

" Wa-all "—Jem's voice was mildly regretful—" in that case I reckon I'd have t' try to persuade you that maybe travelin' would be good for your health, jus' like the doctors tells us."

" You figure you're a regular dog-gone devil of a persuader now, don't you?" sarcastically inquired Kurtz.

" There has been times that I've won my argument," Jem admitted. There was an unmistakable pointedness in his tone that shot an angry flush for an instant across the other man's sneering features.

" Any particular style of argument you intend using?" Kurtz demanded.

" Ye-es—" Jem drawled. *" This!"*

A gasp came from the men within the room. With the first word of Jem's reply he had been leaning idly against the door jamb. The second word had been exploded across a pair of menacing gun barrels. It was as if Kurtz and his gang had been viewing the celluloid strip of a picture film and, examining one scene of Jem lolling against the door frame, had then jumped immediately several yards farther down to the picture of Jem, menacingly hunched forward, his weapons trained on his antagonists. In that camp of skilled gunplay it was a performance to produce an awed thrill of admiration.

" I guess maybe these ain't such rotten persuaders at that!" Jem's voice was again drawling, with a little tight note of menace in it, however. " Now, will you gents kindly raise your hands high over your heads? Yes—that's the way—I'm much obliged. I don't like to have to mess up anybody's shirt front. It ain't many complexions that harmonizes good with bright red."

He paused a bit to study the situation.

" Now I'll have t' trouble you further to stand up an' turn round with your backs to me—not fergettin' for one teeniest, weeniest, leetle mite of a second t' keep astrainin' your shoulder joints tryin' t' grab a holt of the ceilin'. There, that's the stuff," as, with black, raging faces, they complied with his request. " Now line up against that wall, all of you. One by one, as I call t' you, take four steps backward. And as a last warnin', don't let your minds wander from th' fact that I'm a gent of a very nervous disposition; it's a family failing and I'm sorry—but I know you'll all be glad t' humor the weakness and not do nothing t' provoke it. All right, young feller, you at the end—four steps backward!"

The man directed performed as requested. Jem slipped his left gun back into his pocket, but kept the other trained on the backs of the row of men before him. He ran his left hand over the person of the man before him and abstracted the gun he found in the pocket. He stuck the weapon into his belt.

" All right; back to the line for you. Next!"

One by one he disarmed them. Kurtz, as he started back to his place in the line, Jem could not refrain from assisting forward with a taunting lift of his knee.

" Now, Mr. Herbert Hoskins, if you've decided that maybe this *is* a fine morning

for a little trip, after all, step back and we can ramble. The rest of you gents had better stay jus' the way you are for a little while. Your doctor wouldn't recommend much activity for you right now."

He pulled a set of handcuffs from his pocket— Goss, tauntingly sarcastic, had completely outfitted him—and locked Hoskins's hands behind his back.

He stepped back to the doorway. His belt bristled with the collection of weapons he had stripped from the men.

His hand felt on the inner side of the door. It found, as he had expected, the unused key hanging by a string from the knob. He jerked it free and inserted it into the outer side of the keyhole, his eyes still trained on the row of men against the opposite wall.

He stepped to the outside of the door sill.

"Come out, Hoskins," he commanded.

He reached past his prisoner, pulled the door shut and twisted the key in the lock, dropping the key into his pocket.

"Hop in the car—make it snappy!" Jem ordered.

When his prisoner was in place Jem snapped another set of irons on his ankles and slammed shut the door. Then he ran around to the other side of the machine, leaped into his seat, and the next instant he was tearing out of camp.

CHAPTER V.

THE AMBUSH.

JEM knew that he could not figure on too great a lead. The outcries of the imprisoned men would quickly arouse the rest of the camp and as soon as the door could be broken down and the men could rearm themselves, they would certainly dash forth in search of revenge and the rescue of their captured comrade.

But it was not the pursuit that hovered most disturbingly in Jem's mind. His mental eye flashed the image of that telephone on the wall. He felt certain that the moment the door of the bunk house had closed that instrument had been electrified into activity.

His seething brain ran back to Goss's remark the preceding night: "He'll be waiting to receive you, any time you get there." That might have been general sarcasm, of course, and yet—

"Well, they certainly was waitin' for me, that's a lead pipe cinch," he reflected; "Kurtz and Hoskins settin' up in front by th' table, jus' like the stage all set for a show."

The accomplice in Sky City that had warned the camp of Jem's visit was certainly by now apprised of the result of that visit. And it was action at that end of the road that caused Jem's brow to wrinkle anxiously. He had no intention, after the risk he had run to secure his prisoner, of losing him now through treachery in the town. The challenge he had accepted from Goss and that he had thus far pursued successfully, he was determined to defend to a victorious conclusion.

Hoskins, who had been sitting in black, gloomy silence, awoke to momentary conversational life.

"Smart as hell, you think you are, don't you?" he sneered. "Think you're going to get away with this?"

"Well," Jem confessed, "I do sort of figure on that."

"You damn fool!" the other scorned. "You won't even get as far as Sky City."

"That so? Who you figurin' on meetin' and stoppin' me?"

There was a momentary silence; then Hoskins dilated:

"You don't suppose Kurtz and the rest of the boys are jus' settin' round and cryin', do you? Don't you suppose they've got autos in the camp?" But his tone was lame, his manner that of one attempting to repair an unguarded slip.

Jem brought the speeding car to a stop.

"This is a pretty rough deal I'm going t' hand out to you," he addressed Hoskins; "but I can't help it. It's your own pals that force me to it."

He jumped out of the machine. Rummaging among the tools he brought to light a tow rope.

He unshackled his prisoner's ankles and helped him down to the ground.

"We're going to climb this hill. Show some speed," he ordered.

Hoskins in the lead, scrambling with difficulty with his manacled hands, they climbed up the steep, wooded slope rising from the roadside. Two or three hundred feet they went; then Jem called a halt. The spot was absolutely screened from the road by the thick pines and underbrush.

Jem forced his prisoner to a sitting position, with his back against a tree trunk. With the tow rope he securely tied Hoskins to the tree, and gagged him with his handkerchief. Trussed, helpless and gagged, Hoskins glared viciously at his captor.

"Sorry, old-timer," Jem again regretfully said. "I can't take no chances, though. Hope I won't have to leave you here very long."

He dropped back quickly to the road, resumed his seat behind the wheel and sped on his way.

He had two motives in the procedure he had just followed: first, should his suspicious be justified, there would be no danger of his having his prisoner taken from him in any encounter that might eventualize; and, secondly, if a fight were to come, he knew it would be against considerable odds and he would need to be unhampered in his movements.

For some distance he sped along. All was quiet about him. He was still on the narrow side trail connecting the Blue Buttes camp with the main highway from Sky City to Hampden and consequently he encountered no other travelers.

He had gone about eight miles and was within a short distance of the junction of the trail with the highway when a heavy log, drawn across the roadway, forced him to jam on his brakes. One end of the log rested on the base of the mountain's rising slope at the right; the other end projected out into the air beyond the road's edge at his left. There was no possible passage, without removing the obstruction.

Jem cast a keen, piercing eye over the surrounding scene. His glance lingered long over the green, breeze swayed hillside at his right. But nothing unusual made itself visible. Yet that log had certainly reached its present position through human agencies —and that, since he had traveled that road less than two hours ago.

In order to proceed Jem had to remove the log.

He made sure his gun was resting easily on his hip. He slipped over the side of the car, on the far side from the mountains, and approached the log.

He stooped down—and a sharp report cut the stillness. The dust at Jem's feet spat up in a little puff.

On the instant Jem flung himself on the ground behind his car. His guns blazed away at the spot on the hillside whence the shot had emanated.

Another shot from the ambushed enemy and Jem's front tire went flat with a duplicating report. His rear tire met the same fate.

And then, from up the road, came the roar of straining motors. Around the bend they swept, bearing down upon Jem with certain annihilation. Kurtz and his gang!

Jem flung away the two guns he had emptied at the blank mountainside and seized two more from the formidable arsenal bristling in his belt. But he realized the hopelessness of his defense, even as he swung the guns into play. Flanked by the invisible enemy up on the hillside he could not cover himself from the attack of Kurtz. Besides, Kurtz's men could split into several parties and while one group kept him engaged from the front, another group could climb up the mountainside and move around to his rear, under cover of the trees.

Kurtz and his followers were by now disembarking from their machines. Some of their guns were already beginning to spit viciously in Jem's direction.

Jem flung a final fusillade at them, tossed aside his weapons and leaped over the edge of the road.

Slipping and sliding, his hands and face ripping on the brambles, he flung himself down the steep slope, toward the river.

Shouts and curses broke forth from the men above. The next moment they were at the edge, sending volley after volley after his leaping form. But now he was shielded by the swaying trees, his own darting form, too, making a difficult target. The bullets sank into the obstructing tree trunks or whistled harmlessly by his ears.

A sudden ominous stillness caused Jem

to halt momentarily in his flight and cast an apprehensive backward glance. What he saw sent a sudden chill through his heart.

"Good night!" he gasped.

His pursuers were heaving and rocking an immense bowlder that hung at the edge of the road, directly above him. Even as he looked, the rock lifted, trembled a poised instant, then lunged forward and downward —seemingly at his very head.

A grinding and crashing of trees rent from their roots—a fierce shout of triumph from the grouped men in the road.

Jem made a wild, sidewise leap, flinging himself prone at a sheltered hollow. There was a roaring in his ears. The world about him heaved and crashed. A shattering concussion jarred his body from crown to sole—and then all went black.

CHAPTER VI.

IN CAPTIVITY.

WHEN light again came to Jem's senses he found himself lying on the floor of a dim cabin. At his first attempt to move he discovered his hands were tied behind him. His body felt stiff and sore and his head throbbed with a tremendous, pounding ache. There was a sharp, biting pain over one temple, external to that inner throbbing.

He struggled to a sitting position and gazed about him. In the murky gloom he could make out the unlined walls of a log shack. The one window was glassless and had been boarded over. A rusty wood stove without any chimney stood in one corner. A rickety, blackened table and a home-made bench completed the room's furniture.

He had no idea as to where he was, nor how he had got there. His muddled thoughts and throbbing brain painfully reconstructed his adventures since his arrival in Sky City. But beyond that last crashing shock on the mountainside his mind was a total blank.

Resting a while, his brain became somewhat clearer. He wriggled to his feet and walked to the window. He peered out through the slits between the boards.

The cabin appeared to be set alone, up on a hillside. A short distance below him, through the trees, he could see a camp—Blue Buttes, he at once recognized it.

It was easy for Jem now to guess at what had happened. If the huge bowlder loosened by the gang that morning had hit him, he would never have lived to realize the occurrence. One of the many smaller rocks, loosened by the slide, must have struck him; or perhaps a falling tree had brained him. In any event, he had been knocked senseless and had been brought by Kurtz to this cabin, disarmed and imprisoned—for what later purpose he could not know; but it required no clairvoyance to surmise that it was for no purpose beneficial or healthful to himself. They had probably thrown him in here until he should recover from his coma.

From the length of the shadows without Jem judged it to be late afternoon. He had been lying senseless since mid-morning.

"That must have been one hell of a wallop," Jem mused ruefully, and he winced as the pain above his temple gave a particularly sharp twinge.

He walked to the door and turned his back against it, gripping the knob between his palms. He turned the knob, but the door remained closed. As Jem had suspected, it was fastened on the outside.

He peered through the chinks where the plaster had fallen away. On a stump about ten feet from the door sat a guard, smoking. Kurtz seemed to be taking no chances with this prisoner.

Jem sat down on the bench for a study of his position. That it was fraught with evil to himself was patent; and of escape he could discern no possibility.

Once again and with more careful particularization he inventoried the room's contents: the stove, a broken section of blackened crowbar, apparently having served as poker, the table and the bench. The most thorough and repeated examination could discover nothing other than these. The walls and ceiling were blank. There was no lighting equipment in the room, although Jem, on his visit that morning, had observed an electric transmission line traversing the camp. This shack was too distant

to justify the line's extension for service; also, apparently, judging from the dust that lay thick everywhere, from the boarded window and the bareness of the equipment, the place had not been in use for a long time.

To shout and cry out would be futile and silly. It would simply serve as notice to his warden that he had recovered from his stupor. There could be no gain in hastening the return of their attention and activity to himself. Better, Jem reflected, would it be to maneuver for such respite as he could. Perhaps, in the meantime, some scheme of salvation would present itself.

The racking pain in his head had grown more intense. With a coolly philosophical acceptance of his position Jem slipped to the floor in the position in which he had found himself on returning to his senses and closed his eyes in an attempt at sleep. The rest would soothe and clear his head and he would be likely to need a clear brain when he awoke. The guard, glancing in from time to time, as he probably would do, would think him still unconscious.

Fifteen minutes later Jem was snoring as peacefully as though rolled in his blanket under the stars on the moon-washed mountain slopes, with Suds tethered by his side.

When he awoke the air in the cabin had thickened to a dense grayness. The throbbing in his head had gone and only a slight twinge reminded him occasionally of the wound above his temple. He felt refreshed and strengthened—and with the improvement in his physical condition came a corresponding buoyancy of spirit. He felt a new surge of reckless confidence.

He got to his feet and went to the cracks in the window. Night had fallen. The camp below twinkled with scattered electric lights.

As he stood there at the window, the sound of voices and a fumbling with the door fastenings came from without. The door opened and his guard entered, bearing aloft a common keorsene lamp. Behind him came Kurtz.

The guard placed the lamp on the table and departed, closing the door behind him.

"Well," Kurtz said, "you finally come to, I see. That rock took a good bit of the starch out of you, I guess."

He struck a swaggering, taunting pose, his hands on his hips.

"I guess you ain't quite so cocky, now. Don't think quite so much of your persuading ability now, huh?"

"Oh, I don't know," Jem drawled. "I ain't lost the argument yet—not by a damned sight."

"No? Well, maybe it won't be so long till I can prove to you that Bill Kurtz ain't such a slouch of an argufier himself."

He seated himself on the stool.

"There's one thing I'd like to find out first: Where's Herb Hoskins—what did you do with him?"

Jem grinned.

"Got you worried, have I?" he gibed.

The other man flushed angrily.

"Worried? Oh, no," he retorted. "I reckon you'll loosen up and tell me, all right."

"Yeh?"

"Yes." It was Kurtz's turn to open a wide grin. "You forget I told you I was some little persuader myself."

Jem understood the implied threat. Kurtz was quite capable of resorting to primitive directness of method and attempting to force the information from his prisoner by torture.

"I'm an awful stubborn feller," he remarked. "Contrariness sure does make me stiffen out my laigs."

"Now that's sure too bad," mourned Kurtz. "When I was a kid I used to wrastle horses some. When I got a stubborn horse I'd break him right enough, same as a gentle critter—but it sure was tough on the horse."

"Jus' the same, I'll bet the bronco got a lot of satisfaction out o' seeing you sweat an' cuss an' tear around."

Kurtz rose to his feet.

"All the same," he stated emphatically, "don't you forget this one little fact: When it was all over—*that horse was broke!*"

He stepped close to Jem, his hate filled eyes gleaming maliciously. He gave his prisoner's nose a vicious, insolent tweak.

"Just think that over, big boy," he advised. "I think I'll give you all night to do it, and then maybe by morning you'll be a mite more talkative."

He swaggered out of the door. Jem could hear the fastenings being replaced. A short exchange between Kurtz and the guard followed. Then all was silent.

Jem's nose twitched from the insulting touch of Kurtz. He glowered at the closed door.

"Oh, boy!" he murmured. "When I get my hands on you!"

CHAPTER VII.

A SONG OF FREEDOM.

JEM sat down on the bench to ponder. His situation had now assumed the seriousness of a definite danger. He knew Kurtz would have no compunction about killing him off as soon as his use for him was ended. So long as the secret of Hoskins's disappearance remained a secret Jem believed his life to be safe. But Kurtz had quite plainly indicated what his procedure was to be in the matter of extracting that information from Jem; and the latter was of no mind to permit himself to be a subject for the experimentation of Kurtz's devilish inventiveness.

A long time Jem sat there—an age it seemed to him—and still no hope presented itself to him. The situation remained unchanged from what it had been when he had resolved the possibilities earlier that afternoon. His eye roved the room. There had been no change in any particular—except one. His glance halted on the lamp upon the table. There was one factor that had not existed previously. What hope lay hidden there, could he but discover it?

Well, there was the glass shade. A broken glass edge made a first class cutting tool. If he could get his hands free, that would be a very decided step in advance.

Jem's brain was working furiously. And at length a grin of satisfaction broke over his face.

He dropped to the floor by the stove and twisted to where his hands, behind his back, could grasp the crowbar poker. With this gripped firmly between his fingers, he wriggled to his feet again and approached the table. He stood with his back to the table and poised his bar. He twisted his neck over his shoulder, estimated his position, and swung the poker with a sharp tap against the lamp shade.

With a brittle tinkle the shattered glass fell to the table top.

Jem listened breathlessly; but all was silent. The guard apparently had not heard the slight noise.

Several impatient minutes Jem waited until the glass should cool off sufficiently for handling. He laid his bar down on the table, groped for a large sized piece of the glass and backed up against the wall. He wedged the glass between the log chinks and began his attempt to cut through the ropes binding his wrists.

Laboriously he drew his fetters once or twice across the edge with greater resultant injury to his own wrists than to the rope. Then the glass broke off and fell to the floor.

He got another piece and continued his experiment; with similar results. He persisted until all the usable glass had been exhausted. Then he returned to his bench, disappointed and downhearted. His wrists were cut and bleeding; beyond that he had achieved nothing.

Another long period Jem sat in desperate cogitation. The possibilities of the lamp still lurked in his brain and refused to be eliminated. And once again hope flared up within his heart, in comradeship to the wavering flame that smoked and swayed in the air currents.

Jem rose and again backed against the table.

This experiment required a steady, unflinching nerve, but he felt certain of success this time.

He drew the lamp a little closer to the table edge. His groping fingers turned the wick a little higher. He paused a moment, trying to judge his position; then stretched his wrists as far apart as the fetters would permit and lowered the rope into the flame.

With a sharp cry he snatched his hands away. He had miscalculated his distance and the flame had seared his hand.

He gritted his teeth and again lowered his wrists. This time his judgment was better. The smell of scorching hemp rose to his nostrils and never had he experienced

odor more savory. The wavering flame now and again lapped his flesh; but he tightened his jaw and never flinched.

One by one the strands severed and at length, with a sharp tug, Jem jerked his wrists apart.

He breathed soothingly upon his scorched, black streaked wrists.

"Strenuous treatment," he murmured, "but it did the business."

He unfastened the remnants of rope clinging to each wrist. He swung his arms about joyously in his newly acquired freedom.

But after the first surge of satisfaction, Jem returned to the sober reflection that his position was really not so much improved, after all. He was still a prisoner within that cabin, with no apparent method of freeing himself. The door was fastened on the outside; and even if he should overcome that difficulty, there was still the guard to be taken care of, he himself being unarmed.

He examined the window boards. They were heavily spiked and cleated. Breaking them down could not be accomplished without considerable noise, which would be sure to attract the guard's attention—his attention and the fire of his gun.

Looking down at the camp, Jem noticed that but few of the lights were now burning. It must be quite late, he reflected.

He went to the door and stared through the chinks. A glowing cigarette tip told him of his warden's presence, although his person was indistinguishable in the darkness. If only the man would enter the cabin for some reason or other, Jem would take a chance with him, unarmed though he himself was. And, at that, he was not unarmed! His eye fell on the section of crowbar on the table. What a fine weapon that short bludgeon made! Just let him get his jailer's head within cracking reach of *that!*

Jem picked the bar up and swung it. Now to get that ruffian within range.

A boyish grin crept over Jem's face. He filled his lungs and opened his mouth.

"'O bury me not on the lone prairie,'
These words came low and mournfully
From the pallid lips of a youth who lay
On his dying bed at the close of day."

Never had the "Dying Cowboy" been wailed with deeper, more intense feeling than Jem now rendered it. Loud and mournful, his voice rolled out of the room.

A few minutes he howled without effect. Then a loud banging sounded on the door without.

"Hey, you!" a voice outside called. "What's the big idea? Lay off that stuff! How'd you get that way?"

The protest stirred Jem to more intense efforts.

"O bury me not on the lone prairie,
Where the wild coyotes will howl o'er me,"

he ululated.

"Great guns!" his jailer protested. "That smack on the head must 'a' knocked him cuckoo! Shut up!" he shouted. "Cut it out!"

"And the blizzard beats and the winds blow
free
O'er his lowly grave on the lone prairie-e-eee,"

was his only reward.

Another few moments of dismal howling on Jem's part; then the other man's nerves could stand no more.

"By jiminy," he snorted, "I'll make you shut up! This 'll drive me nutty if I have to listen to it!"

The frantic pawing of the outside fastenings came to Jem's listening ears.

As the doorknob turned Jem's singing abruptly ceased and a swift leap took him from the center of the room, where he had been standing, to the wall by the entrance. The guard swung open the door and started bellicosely into the room—then sank with a soft sigh to the floor.

Jem's bludgeon had descended on the man's skull like a load of pig iron. Jem dragged the limp form into the room. He knotted together the pieces of rope he had removed from his own wrists and bound his victim. The man's gun he transferred to his own pocket.

The service the bludgeon had rendered him had endeared it to his affections; besides, he might still have need of calling upon it. He tucked it under his arm, turned out the lamp, and stepped out into the brisk night air. He drew shut the door and fastened the bar.

Jem's spirits soared to lofty pinnacles. He was free and he was armed—doubly so, with gun and club.

"I've got the world by the tail!" he chortled, and started down the slope toward the Blue Buttes camp.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BANDITS' COUNCIL.

AT the edge of the camp Jem halted for a little reflection as to the course to pursue. He could skirt the camp and strike the trail beyond, and then make for Sky City. There he could get Judge Lawton to gather a few reliable citizens, get a car, and come back to the spot where he had left Herb Hoskins. And his adventure would then be at an end.

That was one course. But that made no provision for vengeance on Kurtz for the insult of that tweaked nose. Wherefore the plan was promptly discarded.

Jem surveyed the camp speculatively. Just where was he likely to find Kurtz? Apparently it was quite late. All was quiet and dark. No lights shone in the camp—Yes, one cabin, down at the far end, still showed a light.

Jim sped along the road. The cabin stood alone, some little distance from the edge of the camp proper. As he approached, the sound of voices came to his ears.

He crept stealthily to the window and peered within. Six or seven men were seated around a table—rough, villainous individuals, all of them. One of them was Kurtz and one—Sheriff Harry Goss!

"Well, well," Jem ruminated. "Looks like I've run into something again. So that is who my friend up on the hillside was this morning!"

The room was a bare cabin, as unused, apparently, as that in which he had been imprisoned, since the only furniture consisted of the table and the chairs that the men were occupying. This room, though, being along the main road, had an electric light bulb dangling from the center of the ceiling. The floor was warped and the door, standing partly open, was wedged against the lifted floor boards.

A heated discussion seemed to be in progress.

"There's no use talking, Kurtz," Goss was saying. "I've been trying to make you see it, and you've got to cut some of this rough stuff out. The town is beginning to get pretty sore, and there's going to be a bust up sooner or later."

"Sky City?" Kurtz sneered. "Don't worry, Harry—they'll never work up spunk enough to do anything. They'll sputter a bit, maybe; but that's all."

"Don't you fool yourself," Goss warned. "There's a limit, and they've pretty near reached it."

"Just the same, we've got to do it," Kurtz insisted. "We've got to keep 'em cowed and spiritless. If we ever let them get up any spirit at all, they're likely to turn it in another direction, and that won't be so good for us."

"Maybe so," Goss grumbled. "Just the same, I'm afraid you're carrying it too far. Besides, you ain't going to be able to hold your own crowd that way all the time. It's all right for our little bunch here—we know what we're doing, and why—and we are getting ours out of it. But how about the rest of your men who ain't in on this part of the game and who don't know what is really back of it?"

Kurtz laughed.

"Don't worry about them. That's why I pick 'em that way. They're just natural hell raisers—that's the only kind I hire—hard-boiled devils that have got to be raising hell in order to be feeling just right. Let 'em go ahead and keep the town properly tamed—and we can do our stuff on the side."

There was a short pause.

"Well," Goss said, "I guess there's nothing more we can do to-night with this cocky stranger. I've already told 'em in town that he's skipped out, so you can dig out of him in the morning what he's done with Herb and then settle with him to suit yourself." An evil snarl crossed his face. "Go as far as you like—you won't make me mad!"

A harsh, ominous laugh came from the other men's throats.

"Seeing as we're all here," Goss contin-

ued, " we might as well settle up on this last job."

" Yes, I suppose so," Kurtz agreed, rising from his chair. " The bag's in my safe in the office. I'll go get it."

Jem, outside, had absorbed Goss's remarks with lively interest. So they had been holding a council to decide what to do with him! Deep regret filled his soul that he had not arrived sooner. The discussion would undoubtedly have been fraught with the extremest interest to himself. Well, the situation still seemed full of promise, so he settled himself to watch the proceedings.

Kurtz had left the cabin and disappeared in the blackness toward camp. In a few moments he returned. In the darkness Jem could dimly discern some object in Kurtz's hand. As the dredge master entered the light of the room, this object revealed itself as a leather satchel, which he deposited upon the table before him as he resumed his seat.

As the light fell upon the bag Jem's lips nearly let slip a cry of astonishment. On the side of the satchel was stamped in gold: " Nancy Hanks M. & M. Co." The highwaymen of the day before, and the rest of their outlaw band, were seated in that room before his eyes—and one of them was the sheriff himself!

" Now, there's another thing," Goss was saying in an aggrieved tone; he seemed in a disgruntled mood. " Here we are, fooling around with little dabs like this, when you've got a chance at gold bricks worth forty thousand dollars apiece."

" Nothing doing on that." Kurtz shook his head decisively. " In the long run this will pay us better. Why, just think of the fine cover this dredge gives us! There can't any suspicion even fall in this direction. If that idea should come into anybody's head, what's the first thing that would strike them? The same thing that you're kicking about. They'd say that if I wanted to go in for that sort of thing, I've got a much better chance at something big, rather than fooling around with little dabs of six or seven thousand dollars. It's a beautiful cover.

" That gold is going to be accounted for to the last grain of dust. Besides, we can keep this up indefinitely. With the dredge gold we'd have to skip at once. You can be sure the company 'd get busy with real detectives on anything like that."

Jem, at his post by the window, was racing his brain frantically.

He dismissed as futile the thought of boldly holding them up. The position of those men sitting opposite the door made any unobserved approach impossible, and to cover all of the bandits so as to prevent resistance he must get fairly inside the room.

A suggestion flickered through his mind. If conditions were suitable, it might be worked. It would require a cold nerve, but he would chance that if the mechanics could be arranged.

Long experience in isolated cow camps, out of prompt reach of expert professionals, had equipped Jem with a certain smattering of mechanical knowledge. He stared up through the darkness to where the two wires must run that furnished the light to the interior of the room. Of course, it was too dark to see them. In all probability they were bare copper, the usual material in cheap camp construction. Now, if he knew where—

He left the cabin and slipped back into the camp. He soon located, by both the smell and sound, the stable building. He stole quietly inside. He dared not switch on the electric light, for fear it be seen and arouse investigation.

It required the burning of several matches; but he found what he had hoped for—a good length of heavy log chain, used for fastening loads on the trucks; also a lot of rope, of similar utility.

He tied the rope securely to one end of the chain, coiled his find over his arm, and slipped back to the cabin.

CHAPTER IX.

A SHERIFF AT WHOLESALE.

THE pole line approached the shack from the side, so that Jem could not be observed through the partially open door. He dropped the loose rope

onto the ground. The chain he sent sailing into the air in a wide arc over the electric wires. The rope lay across the wires, the chain dangling loosely at the other end.

Holding the rope in his hand, Jem crept again to the window. The men within were still disputing, the leather bag resting, undisturbed, on the table. Jem fixed clearly in his mind a picture of the room's arrangement; then, scarcely breathing, he stole round to the wall by the entrance. Now, if only luck were with him—if those wires were bare, and not weatherproof insulated—

He drew in on his rope. He felt the tug as the knot of the junction of the rope and chain caught and passed across the first wire. Another arm's length pull, and the knot caught the second wire. It stuck; he jerked, the knot crossed—and the room went suddenly dark!

A jubilant thrill shot through Jem. His guess had been correct. The iron chain, lying now across the two wires, had caused a short circuit. No other lights in the camp being lit, no undesired attention would be attracted; and as the fuses on the camp transformer would blow, the high tension line serving the dredges would not be affected.

Within the room sharp exclamations had broken forth at the sudden darkness.

"Damn!" Kurtz's voice sounded. "I suppose it's that fuse on that damn transformer again!"

There were calls for matches and the scraping of chairs as the men shuffled to their feet and fumbled in their pockets.

Jem, at the first moment of darkness, had dropped his rope. He drew a deep breath, then stepped softly, swiftly into the blackness of the room amidst the blurred, shuffling figures. He stumbled over a chair or two, but his mental sketch of the distance was good. He touched the table; his fingers groped, found the bag; and in an instant he was outside the shack again, his prize clutched in his fingers.

The beating of his heart and the tightness of his breath were nearly stifling him; but a glorious sense of daredevil achievement danced in his soul.

He dropped the satchel hastily into the thick bushes behind him, then stiffened up to regain his breath and control. A boyish, mischievous curiosity to see the finish of his prank drew him to the window.

It had been a matter of but seconds. Matches were now being struck, and with the first glow a sharp cry came from Kurtz's lips.

"The bag!" he exclaimed. "Who's got the bag?"

All eyes leaped to the spot on the table where the bag had rested at the light's extinguishing.

"Which one of you has stolen that bag?" There was a vicious menace in Kurtz's voice.

Matches were now striking feverishly, and in the feeble, fitful flickerings faces were showing grim and passionate.

"You can't pull that sort of stuff, Kurtz." There was a deadly coldness in Harry Goss's voice. "That's too crude. You staged this to give you a chance to grab that bag. Come on, now—produce it, and produce it quick!"

"No man can accuse me of being a double-crosser!" snarled Kurtz, and started for Goss.

In an instant the room was alive with black, struggling figures, as the bandits sprang to immediate choice of sides in the dispute. Enraged at the disappearance of the loot, they flung themselves upon each other in a frenzy of passionate disappointment, scarcely knowing whom they were fighting for, or whom opposite. None dared use a gun. The matches had fallen and gone out, and in the blackness indiscriminate shooting would have struck down friend as well as foe. Besides, shooting would have awakened the rest of the camp; so silently they milled and struggled. The wine of his day's adventures was singing in Jem's veins. A new, daring impulse flashed into his brain.

He grasped his crowbar, shook loose his wrist, and stepped across the door sill. A vaguely defined knob of a head bobbed along that sea of blackness, close before Jem's eyes. Swiftly his arm rose and fell—and the knob submerged into the black depths.

Another floating head, another lift and fall of his terrible weapon—and another ruffian lost all interest in the proceedings. A third and a fourth Jem treated in similar manner. Then he leaped over the bodies at his feet and boldly turned to the three bandits still left, who by now were beginning to waver in their struggling to wonder doubtfully at the sudden succumbing of their fellows.

The sudden dimly defined apparition with the flailing arm that now sprang into being before them struck them motionless with surprise—and before they could recover two of them lay senseless on the floor. The third turned toward the door for terrified flight—stumbled over the piled bodies—and the next instant crumpled upon them in the companionship of obliviousness.

Jem swung his bar around his head in a rapture of glee.

"Come on!" he chortled. "Any more? Trot 'em out! I'll take 'em all!"

He went outside and drew his rope and chain down off the wires. The fuses on the transformer must have blown, as the room remained dark.

Jem whipped out his knife and cut loose the rope. He rolled his senseless victims out into the road and, one by one, tied their hands and feet. There was little likelihood of their returning to consciousness for quite some time; but he was taking no chances. On his trip to the barn he had observed an automobile standing in the road—probably the one in which Goss had come in from Sky City.

He trotted up the road now to where he had seen the car, climbed in and started the engine, throttling it down to as low a note as possible. He drove to the cabin and piled his prey in an indiscriminate heap in the rear. The precious bag he placed on the seat beside him and then started out of camp.

As he passed the bunkhouse a last mischievous suggestion spoke within him. It was a silly bit of braggadocio, and dangerous; some of the off-shift men were undoubtedly asleep in their bunks, and might hear him. Yet he could not resist the temptation to extract the last dramatic thrill out of his achievement.

He hopped out of the car and slipped into the bunkhouse. He went to the telephone and called Judge Lawton, in Sky City. A sleepy voice at the other end of the wire answered.

"I'm coming in to town, judge," Jem announced, "and I'm bringin' a humdinger of a delegation with me. Shine up the bars on your jail and get out th' brass band t' welcome us on th' courthouse steps!"

CHAPTER X.

JEM CALLS IT A DAY.

SWEEPING down the main street of Sky City, Jem jammed his fist joyously upon the signal knob. As he surged up to the curb before the courthouse he added to the barking horn a shrill, triumphant whoop.

On the steps of the courthouse stood a small group of sheepish looking citizens, called out of their beds and urged into assembling by Judge Lawton. Jem could read in each face the feeling of foolishness that filled each spirit, and the lack of faith that they placed in the value of the telephone call the judge had received.

Jem climbed out of the machine. He picked up the bag and held it out to Judge Lawton.

"Here's the pay roll of the Nancy Hanks," he announced. He waved his arm at the rear of the machine, with its load of inanimate freight. "An' there's the highwaymen," he added, "responsible for this job and the others that 've been pulled off around here lately."

The committee of citizens moved stupidly toward the automobile. On top of the pile of limp forms sat Herb Hoskins, whom Jem had retrieved on the way in. The bound youth, the only animate creature in the load, glared at them in vicious rage. With a flourish Jem helped Hoskins from the car.

The grouped men still stared uncomprehendingly at the heap of senseless flesh.

"Harry Goss!" Judge Lawton suddenly exclaimed, as he emerged from his astonishment sufficiently to begin distinguishing individuals. "What in the world—"

These were glorious, golden moments for Jem. He seated himself on the running board of the car and rolled a cigarette. Puffing relishingly, he related his day's adventures, the saga losing nothing in the elaborate detail of his recital.

"Good Lord!" murmured Lawton when Jem had finished. "Good Lord!" And that was all he had speech for.

As for corroboration of the truth of the story, the delivery of the bag was sufficient.

After a few awe-stricken moments of silence, the judge filled in the gaps in the situation with which Jem was unfamiliar.

"An hour or so after you left, this morning," Lawton said, "Goss announced he was going after you to see what you'd done.

"He said he didn't believe you would go to the camp—that you'd probably skip out of the country. He came back later on and announced that that was just the case—that he had gone to the Blue Buttes camp, and you had never shown up. That's why we didn't try to find out what had become of you; we figured you had lost your nerve and were gone for keeps, taking the auto Goss loaned you as an even trade on the horse you were leaving. Goss reported Kurtz claimed Hoskins skipped out last night. So we just dropped the whole affair. When Goss left town again later in the afternoon, nobody paid any attention to it. He's always going in and out."

Jem swaggered to his feet.

"Well," he drawled, "there's your money, and here's your bandits, and here's your dance disturber. Guess I'll call it a day an' turn in."

"Mr. Parsons"—Judge Lawton approached him earnestly—"on behalf of Sky City, I extend to you our sincerest gratitude. And I also extend to you a most earnest invitation to stay in our town and be one of us. With your help we hope to make it once more a proud, decent community."

Jem's eyes gazed off to the dimly looming mountains encircling the town.

"I'm much obliged, judge," he said, "to you an' these other gents. But me—I'm jus' a cow-puncher—jus' a common cow hand. I reckon me an' Suds 'll be pullin' out of here in th' morning. They're expectin' us over in th' Park."

THE END

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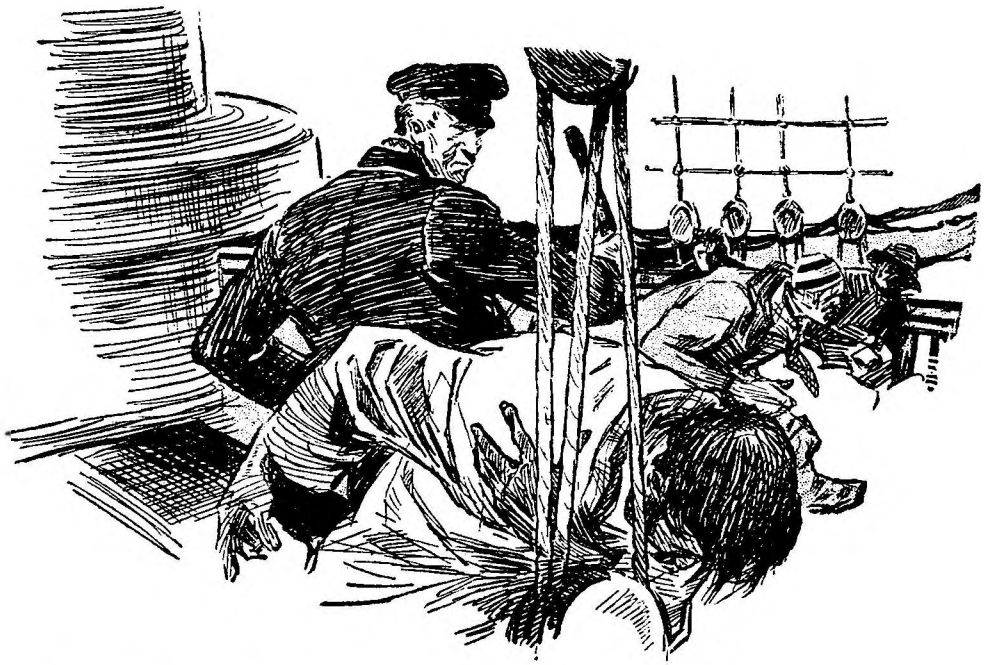
PROMISE

IF I must die, I shall be
The rain that cools your brow,
That I may know I soothe you
As I do now.

Or I shall be the sunlight
That warms and comforts you;
The white star in your darkness
The long night through.

Oh, when I die, I shall be
Your every vital breath.
For I must know you love me
Even in death.

Edith Loomis.



The Roaring Forties.

By ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

IN the days of the clipper ship, in the middle of the last century, Bully Forbes, captain and shipowner, is ruined by the sinking of his ship, the Typhoon, while it is leading the fleet in the annual race with tea from China to London. He is compelled to relinquish ownership of the Valkyrie, which is being designed by Donald MacKay, master shipbuilder, as the fastest vessel in the world, but agrees to sail as her master under the new owners, Nathanael Gertridge and his son, Nat.

In Newburyport, where the ship is building, Mary Williston, niece of MacKay, presents Captain Forbes with a scarlet burgee to fly at his main truck. Mary, who is beloved by Nat Gertridge, is much attracted to the mate of the Valkyrie, Richard Dunbar, of an old New England seafaring family. On the eve of the launching of the ship, postponed on account of an accident, Dunbar, while walking with Mary, discovers that Nat is spying on them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAUNCHING.

THE morn of the long expected launching dawned auspiciously. On account of dramatic circumstances surrounding the new clipper, interest was vastly augmented. Special trains brought hosts of visitors from Boston. In Newburyport business was suspended and the schools were closed in order that everybody might have an opportunity to see the great event.

It was a clear, blue day, with the white caps dancing down the harbor, and the flags beating out against a brave west wind.

All roads led to the MacKay yards and

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 19.

the adjacent water front, where a crowd of many thousands gathered, all struggling for a closer view of the Valkyrie. They beheld the sharpest and loftiest clipper ever built in a New England shipyard. Her long black hull glistened in the morning sunlight, while her yards and masts shone like silver.

"Donald MacKay never did anything so lovely before," exclaimed one with the soul of an artist.

"Aye, and he'll never do anything so lovely again. She's incomparable."

The figurehead was a beautiful full length representation of a young woman, partially clad in gossamer drapery of gold and white, with shapely arm extended, her small foot lightly stepping upon the crest of the waves, her flowing drapery, and her streaming hair completing the noble outline of her bow.

The after body was long and clean, though fuller than the bow, while the stern was semielliptical and ornamented with gilded carved work, though this really added nothing to the graceful, strong, sweeping outline of her hull.

From end to end she looked an out and out clipper. From the main she carried a long scarlet burgee. From the other three spars she flew large United States ensigns, from a staff on the bowsprit the Union Jack.

Mary's heart beat both fast and slow as she drove down with her Uncle Donald to the shipyards. Long before they arrived, she caught a glimpse of her scarlet burgee.

Every one had a remark to make on the loftiness of MacKay's new beauty, whose soaring maintruck queened it over all the water front. A guest in the party of Captain Forbes, alighting from his carriage, gazed upward, then turning to Forbes, he said:

"Hey, captain, you'll have to give the apprentice a biscuit before you send him up to furl your skysail."

At four o'clock the signal was given, and the shores began to fall, to the wild chorus of topmauls, while ten thousand hearts paused.

Twixt life and death Valkyrie shuddered —would misfortune dog her once again? For an instant she canted, ever so slightly, and a hundred gloom birds gasped: "She's tumbling!" But this time, freed from evil rumor, she moved slowly, then gathering way, fairly leaped into the sea, amid smoke and fire from the burning ways.

The Valkyrie was named by Mary Williston, who performed the ceremony by breaking a bottle of soda water over her bow as she began to move along the ways. Formerly, for such christening, they used good old Medford rum. The soda water innovation was in deference to the wishes of Nathanael Gertridge, Sr., and Jr. Both father and son were ardent temperance workers, and seized this opportunity to advertise their wares.

After the launching, when the new clipper rode at her anchors, a select party was taken over the ship on a tour of inspection. Here Richard Dunbar made his début as a lady's man.

"Didn't I tell you she was the loveliest thing afloat?" asked Richard as he watched Mary Williston's eyes dancing with delight.

In order to attract favorable attention of shippers, and to secure the highest rates of freight, it was necessary for a clipper to be handsome, as well as swift. Therefore, in spite of the parsimonious Gertridges, no furnishings had been thought too costly. The inner sides of the bulwarks and rails were painted pure white. The hatch coamings, pin rails, and companions were of Spanish mahogany. The narrow planks of her clear pine deck, with the gratings and ladders, bore a creamlike whiteness. The brass capstan heads, bells, belaying pins, gangway stanchions, binnacle and skylights were of glittering brightness. Throughout she was a triumph of the shipwright's toil.

Mary followed Richard while he explained the mysteries. When at last they had completed their rounds, waxing bold, he offered to escort her to the banquet in the mold loft. To which she replied, airily:

"No, I have company, thank you."

"But I want you to come with me."

There was a compelling note about Richard Dunbar. It was natural for Mary to say no. But her intuition told her that here was some one who could not be denied lightly. She hesitated in a quandary.

"Come on, you can accompany me all right."

"No, I'm really very sorry, I can't. I'm already engaged to go with some one else."

The intense appeal on Richard's face changed in a twinkling.

"Good afternoon," he announced curtly, and to Mary's amazement turned on his heel, and started down the deck. Here was a new type of the male specie. In Mary's experience all others were hard to shake even after the most cruel rebuttal. Here was one who was off at the merest word. But Mary really liked Dunbar; she could not let him go away offended. Catching up with him, she exclaimed:

"I'm awfully sorry that I made another engagement. But won't you come along with me just the same?"

Richard hesitated for a moment.

"Yes, do come."

"Well, as I told you last night, I'm not much of a lady's man, but when I do see some one I like, I don't want to share her with any one else."

"Ah, now I'm afraid you are both a flirt and a blarney."

Mary started off, laughing gayly, and in spite of himself, Richard was swept along in her train.

Long tables had been set in the mold loft. Here all the guests were now assembling for the banquet. With a reciprocity of smiles, Mary swept through the crowd toward the speaker's table, at the far end of the room. There, in the midst of all that happy throng, some one advanced toward them, unsmiling.

Richard felt himself go tense as he recognized the same face that he had seen slinking in the shadow on the previous night.

The newcomer expostulated with Mary in excited tones.

"I was merely going over the ship with Mr. Dunbar. You remember, Nat, you saw him go aloft to unfurl my flag. He is most fascinating. I want you to meet him."

Nat looked unwilling enough, but with him, at least, Mary was accustomed to doing as she pleased. She turned to find Richard, but he had gone.

Later, from a remote corner, Richard seated alone, partook of the feast with scant relish, and then listened restlessly to the various speeches.

The last toast was proposed to the Valkyrie by the Governor of Massachusetts. There was a murmur of suppressed excitement as a young man arose to answer this toast. With a flutter, Richard saw that it was the same questionable person who had taken Mary from him. His speech proved the event of the evening. At its conclusion everybody except Richard Dunbar was cheering lustily. While the crowd was still lifted by its inspiration, the Governor arose, exclaiming:

"Gentlemen, I propose three cheers for our young friend, Nathanael Gertridge, Jr., in the line of a noble sire, and a noble grandsire, the future head of our famous house of N. L. & G. Gertridge."

In the thunders of applause that followed, Richard Dunbar from his humble corner gazed intently on the face of Mary Williston. He saw in the girl's face unmistakable delight and pride.

"Yes, and why wouldn't any girl fall for stuff like that?" he muttered to himself as he slunk off dejectedly into the night.

CHAPTER XII.

DISCHARGED!

THE Valkyrie was introduced to the end of a manila hawser by the tug R. B. Forbes. Without mishap she was towed to Boston, and berthed at the Far East Docks. Because of the way they were kept up in port, the Gertridge fleet were known as the Far East yachts. This eye to smartness was not for love of beauty, but for love of business, as smart ships spell high freights.

It was the custom of N. L. & G. Gertridge to keep their officers aboard while their ships were at home; an old pensioned cook going into the galley and acting as shipkeeper. As a result of this the keenest rivalry was engendered among the various clippers.

None felt a keener zest in this rivalry than Richard Dunbar. As the weeks slipped by, and everything was approaching readiness for sea, his pride was steadily increasing. Often he would be seen coming back to join Valkyrie, after a day's absence, with

the expression on his face of one returning to his heart's desire.

But Richard was not wrapped up in the new clipper alone, as might have been observed by the wistful manner in which he used to run the scarlet burgee up to the main truck each morning.

In his cabin bunk, he would go over the mysterious meeting he had had with Mary Williston. There was something in her eye that, once seen, he could not forget, something that he yearned with all his heart to see again.

Each morning Richard rose to his accustomed round with the hope that that day might bring Mary Williston.

In doubting moments he would tell himself that it was a false hope, that he would never meet her again. Then, sick at such a thought, he would go forth and gaze at her flag flying over all the Far East yachts.

"Yes, I believe she will have to come again to see Valkyrie."

In the night watches below, when Richard could not sleep for dreaming of Mary, he would come on deck and live over again that divine, mysterious night upon the beach at Newburyport. The coming and the going of this one girl had been like a peep into a realm enchanted. Having snatched this most alluring glimpse his heart continued to cry out for its return.

Once, in his feverish longing, he almost decided to go back to Newburyport again. But then his sober second thought restrained him.

"No," he told himself, "it would never do for me to go to her, with so little reason. No, I must wait until she comes to Valkyrie."

Every morning Nat Gertridge, Jr., visited the docks, but he was always studiously aloof in his attitude toward Dunbar. The sight of this complacent, bustling office man was the one dark cloud on Richard's sky. There was something so cocksure, so self-contained, about this young director.

"What can I do against the likes of that?" Richard would ponder at sight of the regal state of the young shipowner. Then from the depths he would look up and catch a glimpse of Mary's flag, and with that flashing glimpse came reassurance.

A week before Valkyrie was due to sail, the postman delivered to the first officer a letter, addressed in a round, girlish hand. Richard did not trust himself to open it on deck. The morning inspection was on at the time the post was delivered, and Nat Gertridge, Jr., was quick to detect the obvious palpitation as Richard Dunbar placed that letter in his breast pocket.

That morning, for the first time, Gertridge condescended to speak.

"I believe that you and I are both friends of Miss Mary Williston?"

"I am merely an acquaintance. I doubt if the young lady would call me a friend."

"Where did you meet her, might I inquire?"

Richard's answer was a look of darkening resentment.

"So you don't choose to tell me," pursued Gertridge, suavely.

"No."

"Well, I might remind you, that you can ill afford to flaunt me."

"I'll tell you to mind your own business," was the sharp rejoiner.

Dunbar for a few moments was incensed at this unwarranted intervention. But the letter in his breast pocket soon drove all other thoughts clean from his mind.

As soon as the inspection was over, he rushed to his cabin, locked the door, and read breathlessly:

> My dear Mr. Dunbar:
>
> I shall be down to visit the Valkyrie tomorrow afternoon with my uncle, Mr. Donald MacKay. I want to see our new clipper again. And—I hope you won't think me too bold—I also want to see you.
>
> Ever,
>
> Mary Williston.

All the rest of the day Richard moved around in a seventh heaven. Time and again he retired to his cabin, to re-read Mary's letter, and to gaze upon her handwriting. He never knew before that such attraction could dwell in a girlish hand.

That night he dreamed with Mary's letter underneath his pillow. What matter now what Nat Gertridge might have in his favor, since Mary had written; "I want to see you."

On the fateful morn, as Richard dressed,

he wondered if anyone on earth were half so happy as he. His happiness was gathered up in two names, Mary and Valkyrie. For Richard, these two names had blended into one, for now each seemed to be complementary to the other.

It was the custom of Nathanael Gertridge, Sr., and his son Nat, to hold a daily inspection of their ships, while in port. They used to arrive at the docks punctually at nine-thirty each morning. By that time the decks of all the clippers had been washed down, the ropes Flemish coiled, the brass polished, and everything in order for inspection.

Everything had to be in perfect order, for old Gertridge had the eye of a hawk, and nothing escaped him.

Besides looking to smartness of ships, the Gertridges also had an eye for liquor, as both father and son were solid temperance advocates. There was a standing order at the Far East docks, that there should be no wines, or spiritous liquors aboard any of the Gertridge ships in port, at peril of instant dismissal.

Heretofore this order had not been strictly followed. But on this especial morning, with consternation, Dunbar was informed that it was the purpose of the Gertridges to search the cabins, to see if their order had been adhered to.

"Will you give me the key of your quarters," demanded Nat peremptorily.

Without a word, Dunbar handed over his key.

Five minutes later, Nat emerged from the first officer's cabin with two bottles of Jamaica rum.

The Gertridges held a whispered conference for several moments, in which Nathanael, Sr., at first appeared to object. But finally, the younger man carried his point. With an exultant light he came over to Richard Dunbar.

"These are yours, are they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you got anything to say?"

A moment of aching silence followed.

"Come, come, have you anything to say?" pursued the relentless Nat.

"No, sir."

"Very well, your services as first officer of the Valkyrie are dispensed with. You may report immediately at our offices for your discharge."

CHAPTER XIII.

DIRECTORS' FAREWELL.

MARY WILLISTON arrived at the China docks, in company with her Uncle Donald. She was looking lovelier than ever on this bright January afternoon.

Captain Forbes came to meet them at the dock gates. It was a merry party that walked together toward the pier-head. Gazing through the forest-like perspective of shipping, Forbes pointed out the soaring spars of the Valkyrie.

"There she is," he exclaimed. "She's just like you, Miss Mary, because there's nothing else that can compare with her."

"Now, look here, captain," replied the girl, with an affected disdain, "I don't mind what you say about Valkyrie. But don't get extravagant about me, or I'll begin to think that you aren't really old Bully Forbes, after all."

"Why, that would be lovely, my dear."

"What would be lovely?"

"For you to think I was not old Forbes."

"What then would you like me to think you?"

"I would like you to think me one of your own charmed set, instead of a gray-whiskered old shell-back, who when he sees you, laments because he was born a generation too soon."

"I don't understand."

"Ah, my dear, you can't. It's just the rebellion in some of us old codgers, who hate to admit the corroding touch of time, who would sooner be in your sweetheart's set than in your father's set."

"Well, perhaps, even yet, you may be in that set," said Mary, with a whispered tone. "But don't you dare to breath the secret."

"I'll keep the secret," answered Forbes. He expected further confidings, but Mary merely tripped along, gazing toward Valkyrie with expectant light.

She was beginning to be vexed. Where was Richard? Why didn't he come to meet

her? She had written to him to expect her. Why, then, did he leave it to Captain Forbes to do the honors?

Mary had worked up an amazing interest in Valkyrie, but all the time, as she accompanied her Uncle Donald and the skipper about the broad white decks, there dwelt in her heart an unfulfilled desire.

" Perhaps he's on duty, and will come later," she mused.

When they had visited the cabin, with no sight of Richard, Mary's curiosity got the better of her.

" Where's the first officer?" she inquired.

" Here he is," replied the captain. " Mr. Pugsley, allow me to introduce you to my friend Miss Williston."

With consternation, Mary looked into the face of a stolid bluenose bucko, twice the age of the former first officer, about as uninteresting as a grazing ox.

" But, this isn't Richard Dunbar," cried Mary, in alarm.

" No," replied Captain Forbes. " Dunbar was sacked this morning, for gross violation of the standing orders of this company."

In a twinkling, for Mary, all the splendid dash had gone. For a moment, she stood in the cabin, with sinking heart, uncertain and irresolute. But it was not her nature to remain thus. Her uncle was still on deck. Rushing up to him she poured forth her appeal.

Donald MacKay, at first, was amazed at the girl's intensity, then a cloud gathered upon his dour countenance, at which Mary knew that it was useless to go further with an appeal in that direction, for MacKay was a stickler on authority.

" Dunbar must have done something wrong, Mary, else he would not have been punished. I shall certainly do nothing to prevent the effects of wrong-doing.

" I am surprised to see you so concerned about that young adventurer. He is nothing to us, and we can do nothing for him, except to note that wild blood always gets its desert."

Mary felt that these words of her Uncle Donald were cruel, and unjust. With rebellion in her heart, she returned to Forbes, as a last resort.

" You said early this afternoon, Captain Forbes, that you would like to be in my sweetheart's set. Well, I hate to tell secrets, but Richard Dunbar and I might be sweethearts, and now if he is in trouble, I want you to help him."

The affable ladies man of a short time before had metamorphosed into an unbending autocrat.

" I am sorry, Miss Williston, but in cases like this the punishment must stand, since rules cannot be broken."

" What rule did Richard break?"

" He had liquor in his cabin, in defiance to the company's standing orders."

For a moment Mary stared in amazement.

" Do you mean to say, Captain Forbes, that just because the Gertridges are a couple of fanatics, that you're going to stand by, and see a good officer broken?"

Forbes was no temperance crank. But he was a martinet at discipline. He continued to argue for the iron hand, but Mary was not without persuasive power, and, as already stated, the only weak side of Forbes was toward the ladies. Finally, at Mary's pleading, the captain gave in, with apparent reluctance.

" Rules must not be broken. But an officer like Dunbar is worth more than a temperance precept. You can leave it to to me, Miss Mary, to appeal to the full board of directors for his restoration. But I'll tell you frankly, if I ever get the slightest slip out of him again, I'll break him then and there."

On the following day, Captain Forbes went up to town for the directors' farewell. According to the custom, masters of outbound clippers appeared before the full board, for a formal adieu.

Captain Forbes was clad in a beaver hat and frock coat, appearing on this occasion like some prosperous merchant prince. There was a certain preponderance about Forbes; he was not the kind to be turned down lightly.

The board met around a long plush table, in a large room, where maps and charts of the China seas adorned the walls and a vista of Boston harbor opened out from the wide windows.

As the captain came in, the directors

arose, while Nathanael Gertridge, Sr., came forward from the chairman's seat and welcomed him; after which each director shook hands with him in turn. Gertridge, Sr., then escorted him to the seat of the right hand of the chairman, where in free and friendly manner the various directors asked questions, and offered suggestions regarding the coming voyage. The captain was treated with marked deference, since the fortunes of all were to be committed to his keeping.

Before the meeting of the board adjourned for a formal luncheon, the chairman, according to his established precedent, rose, and inquired:

"Is there any special favor that our board can confer upon you, Captain Forbes, on the eve of your departure?"

Rising at his place, Captain Forbes faced these stay-ashore gentlemen fairly.

"Gentlemen of the board, as a last request, I ask for the reinstatement of my deposed first officer, Mr. Richard Dunbar."

The vote of the full board was nine to one for restoration. Nat Gertridge, Jr., was the only vote against.

For the closing minutes of the meeting, the secretary put down, "It is the will of this board, acceding to the personal request of Captain Forbes, that Richard Dunbar be reinstated, forthwith, to his former rating, as first officer aboard our new clipper, the Valkyrie, outbound."

Forbes noted with satisfaction the surly look on Nat Gertridge's face, as the secretary read this closing minute.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

ON the eve of Valkyrie's departure, Mary took Richard out for a sail in her yacht, the Alcala.

It was one of those rare nights, with a crescent moon reflecting a golden pathway adown the shimmering blackness of the harbor.

There was no procrastination, on this occasion, as there had been for Nat Gertridge. In the shade of the lilacs, Mary awaited. As Richard's hand was on the gate, she burst upon him, a breathless apparition of a sailor lass, causing even this bold visitor to catch his breath.

"My word, but you startled me!" he exclaimed, with feigned alarm.

"Too bad you heart's so weak," laughed Mary.

In the moonlight, Richard searched for and found again that baffling light in Mary's eyes which he had first seen at their meeting on the beach, which had remained like a remembrance of enchantment.

All the way down to the waterfront, Mary clung tightly to him, in an attitude of of delicious helplessness. The warm pressure of her hand, and her confident dependence, caused emotions too deep for words. One thought was uppermost with Richard; for him there could be no higher mission than to guard and protect this wonderful girl. There was such absolute confidence in the way she leaned upon him that he muttered half aloud:

"A man would be less than a man if he betrayed such trust."

"What do you mean?" inquired the girl.

"I can't say exactly, but just for a fellow to know that some one like you is depending on him is enough to make him pick up his heels, and hold up his head.

"I suppose we're most of us a bad lot, Mary, that go to sea. We follow the wildest life of the world, and play on the red, as the saying goes. But to-night, when I feel as though you trusted me, it puts me on my mettle."

They had come to the yacht squadron float, an attendant fetched the dingy, and Richard, like a man in a trance, was spirited out to the Alcala. Aboard the yacht he was still entranced, while Mary, the helpless one of the dark streets, was suddenly transformed into a capable young skipper, who ordered her companion to cast off moorings, unstop the sails, and haul away on halyards.

At last, when the Alcala was ghosting along, with a clean full and by, after shecting home the jib, Richard came aft, to gaze with ever increasing wonder at the slight girlish figure, who handled the big yacht with a touch of the divine.

"My word, I never saw such steering,"

he exclaimed with open mouthed amazement, "and you a girl."

Mary remembered the night on the beach, when she was floundering. To-night he held the reins once more. To-night Richard was the one who was lost, and baffled. He had begun to talk on the way to the squadron float. But now, all talk was clean gone from him. He was merely the obedient deckhand, dumbly carrying out the various commands of his fair skipper.

The situation seemed to have gotten too far for the baffled Richard. A few moments before Mary was leaning on his arm, more helpless than any girl, now she was sailing a soaring yacht, more masterful than any boy. A girl like that was far beyond mere sailors, he told himself, and then, as though she read his thoughts, having once established herself as queen, Mary invited Richard to sit beside her in the stern sheets.

At the thrill of contact, all the proud aloofness seemed to go out of Mary with a gasp.

"You take the tiller, Richard," she sighed, as she nestled up against him, and in a twinkling, she was merely a little girl once more. Richard's reticence was hard to conquer.

"You've got me guessing, to-night, Miss Mary."

"No, just Mary." This time the word was a command, to be obeyed.

"All right, Mary."

"Well, why have I got you guessing?"

"Because, one minute it seems to me as though we were just a little boy and little girl, and in the next minute you seem so far above me, that I don't feel right, even in the same boat with you."

In Mary's eyes, Richard saw the glow of pure admiring love, which Nat Gertridge had once detected there, as a light beyond his kindling.

"Well, you're quite too good for me," sighed the impulsive Mary. "Indeed, I think you're simply splendid."

The utter incomprehensibility on Richard's face caused Mary to pause before going into further rhapsodies.

"What am I?" he exclaimed aghast.

"You're what I'd love to be, a brave man, sailing all over the seas. It's terrible to be a girl who can't go further than the harbor."

"I don't like to hear you talk like that."

"Why?"

"Because, if you were a boy, I couldn't come to see you." At this startling divulgence, Mary promptly recanted.

"Well, I'm glad I'm a girl then. And will you always come to see me?"

"If you'll allow me. And even if you won't, after to-night, I believe I'll still have to come, no matter what you say."

Richard's eyes were flashing with the old dangerous fire, that fire that Mary loved to see.

"You know, when we girls meet the boys we like, we don't mind so much, even if they do come, when we tell them to go."

"But why don't you mind?"

The dangerous dancing light was searching in Mary Williston's blue eyes, but those eyes remained deeps unfathomable, where all thoughts were drowned. After searching in vain for an answer in her baffling eyes, Richard inquired again.

"Why don't you mind?"

With a sudden softening, Mary answered: "I suppose, it's because I love you."

Richard had been making a hopeless mess of steering. Just at this crucial moment, a gust of wind caused the great mainsail to gibe, but Mary was there in time to ward off mishap.

When they were safe on the opposite tack, Richard handed over the tiller to her who steered by divine right, while his arm released from duty, was free at last to clasp her to him.

"Do you really think you should do that?" inquired Mary.

"I've stopped thinking," answered Richard, while the girl snuggled to him with a sigh.

"I'm not too bold, am I, Mary?

"Sometimes we like them bold," she whispered.

The remainder of that voyage was in a realm beyond mere words. All too quickly the evening's cruise was ended. There was almost a sob in Mary's voice as she lingered fondly by the gate, at parting.

"It was so wonderful. Now it's so hard

to go. But you'll write to me, won't you Richard?" The brave eyes looking up were struggling against tears.

Richard, too happy for words, promised to write from every port.

"I'll send you some Canton silk from China, Mary."

"No, bring it to me, Richard."

"I will."

CHAPTER XV.

"FIT TO GO FOREIGN."

VALKYRIE sailed on a Sunday—Bully Forbes' lucky day. On his second voyage in the Marco Polo, Forbes left Liverpool on a Sunday, sighted the Cape on a Sunday, crossed the line on a Sunday, recrossed the line homeward bound on a Sunday, and arrived back in Liverpool on a Sunday. After this he always took good care to stick by his lucky day.

By two wonderful voyages in the Marco Polo, and a still more wonderful one in the Typhoon, Forbes had rushed to the head of his profession. The sporting bloods had regretted it deeply when this prime seaman came ashore. His slap-dash chancing won the heart of every gambler. Now that he was coming back to sea, the sporting bloods rejoiced.

Early Sunday morning Forbes drove down from the Parker House, in an open victoria, to join his ship. All along the way crowds stopped to cheer him.

If one had gone into any rum shop along Atlantic Avenue that morning and inquired: "Who's the most famous man in the world?" beyond a peradventure, from the bartender down, everybody would have shouted:

"Bully Forbes!"

As the captain drove by Patch-Eye Curtain's boarding-house, that worthy stood on the steps announcing proudly that he had once sailed with Forbes.

"Why didn't yez stick wid him?"

"Not'in' doin', I don't mind a trip on the sea, but a whole bloody voyage under water was too much for me."

"Did he carry sail?"

"Carry sail!" Faith, an' it's me what's seen him, wid his sheets padlocked, drivin' like some cut cat out of hell, wid every man aboard paralyzed, and him a marchin' up and down in his shirt tail at the break of the poop, wid a pair of pistols levelled for the guy what dared to make a move to shorten sail.

"Goin' down the Roarin' Forties we dived at the Cape, and by the shiverin' cripes, we didn't come up again to blow till we was off o' Leeuwin."

Patch-Eye Curtain's lurid sketch sent a host of open-mouthed admirers down to swell the crowd around the docks.

There were only two words in Boston on that Sabbath morning, at least for those who did not go to church. These words were: "Forbes." "Valkyrie."

Several days previous, at a shipowners' dinner, Captain Forbes had given out wine-tinted promises of what he intended to do with Donald MacKay's latest crack.

With any other captain this might have been put down as braggadocio, but with Forbes it was looked upon as already accomplished, for as one backer put it, "What he promises, he'll do."

About noon the Valkyrie was hauled through the pier heads, with the boast, "This will be the fastest ship in the world," flying from her signal halyards.

"That kind of Yankee boasting is too much for me," said a hostile critic with contempt. "He'd better wait until he does it, before he starts to blow his horn."

"All right, I'll bet you one hundred dollars, three to one, that he makes good," chimed in a Boston sport. But the bet was not accepted.

For two hours the Valkyrie remained in the stream, where she took on her crew, and received a few tons of gunpowder. The waters around her were alive with boats. To add to the zest of the occasion, two famous oarsmen from the Charles River were there in their racing skiffs, to show off their paces.

This was an anxious time for Richard Dunbar, as every detail of getting the ship to sea was in his hands.

Most of the crew were delivered aboard in advanced stages of hilarious intoxication.

Patch-Eye Curtain, Shanghai Jessup, and

Baldy Brown, all did their part, as crimps in the furnishing of that crew.

Captain Forbes, watching one boat load of inebriates being lifted aboard in buntlines, remarked to his first officer:

"Looks as if young Gertridge is giving us the sweepings of hell."

"They're a tough gang, all right, sir."

"Don't give a damn how tough they are, as long as they are sailors."

The crew came aboard in various disguises. One appeared reeling down the deck in an old stove pipe hat, and swallowtails. Feeling his dignity, he started for the captain's cabin, but was straightway collared by the bosun.

"Here, ye gentleman's son in disguise, forecastle for ye, me hearty."

A bunch of damsels from Hanover Street came out with their sweethearts. They had stripped them of everything except the duds they stood in, and like blood-suckers, they hung on in hopes of still more pickings from poor Jack.

Every kind of head dress, from blackball cap to beaver; every kind of suit, from swallowtail to dungaree was represented in that motley throng. As the crew mustered on the forecastle head, a layman might have been tempted to inquire:

"Is this a masquerade ball?"

But for the trained eye, no clothes that were ever invented could disguise these men, their bronzed, weather-beaten faces, and sun-baked tattooed arms, with every swing of their bodies, betrayed them as sailor-men. What kind of sailor-men they they were, was still a question.

Richard Dunbar was sizing up each man, while they in turn, were taking their gauge of him. Most of them, at first glance, decided that this slight built, fair-haired young man was easy.

Mr. Pugsley, the second mate, a bluenose bucko, was recognized instantaneously. Whenever, and wherever an unresponsive cord was struck, Mr. Bucko Pugsley was there to hit first, and to hit hard. As fast with his feet as with his fists, he used both with unerring precision.

Mr. Pugsley had nothing but contempt for the polite, soft-spoken first officer, who was half his age, and who, as he put it, "Didn't have guts enough to rustle the bounce out of a soldier."

A half a dozen "gents" from Patch-Eye Curtain's boarding house came aboard in a bellicose mood. They all camped on the main hatch, and refused to budge, while their leader, one of Satan's angels from some deep sea hell, announced, loud-mouthed, that he would "cut the bloody tripes out of the first guy that started to give 'em any guff."

In a berserker rage, Pugsley rushed the main hatch. All gave before him, except the loud-mouth.

Pugsley was just about to pulverize him, when there came the flash of a deadly weapon.

"None 'o yer bulldozin' here!" growled the bad man. One step nearer and I'll split yer bloody skull."

Advancing threateningly, he pushed back a peak-cap, and there across his ugly brow, Pugsley beheld a most revolting scar, as though some one had branded him with a butcher's cleaver. This hideous disfigurement was partly obliterated by a great spread-eagle tattooed across his entire forehead.

Pugsley had heard of that hideous brand before, belonging to one Rip Kelly, a notorious leader of a dockside murder gang.

"D'ye know me?"

"Yes."

"All right, stand fast."

Pugsley stood fast. This was indeed an embarrassing predicament for the beginning of a voyage. For one agonizing moment that deck seemed about as healthy as a cage of tigers breaking from the leash. A half a score of new arrivals, already black and blue from Pugsley's boots urged Kelly on.

No one knew what happened next, it came so softly, and so quickly. Richard Dunbar, stepping suavely along the main hatch, snatched the weapon and tossed it deftly into the sea.

"Now then, my men, just go below where you belong."

The order was given in the soft voice of courtesy, but it carried with it the feel of iron in velvet.

He, who had brooked Pugsley's bull of

Bashan roarings went off as meekly as a lamb.

Pugsley was relieved to see that the captain was occupied with the pilot on the quarter, and thus escaped the sight of his discomfiture.

It was now nearly high water, and the tide would soon be running ebb. At a signal from the captain, the first officer took charge on the top-gallant forecastle head, while the second mate and bo's'un worked the main deck. The flood tide began to slacken and as the Valkyrie swung to the wind, the order was passed along from aft to weigh anchor.

With a clear, melodious voice Richard Dunbar sang out:

"All hands, man the windlass."

To the tramp, tramp of sailor's feet, the chanteyman led off.

"We're outward bound, we're outward bound,
"Heave, bully boys, heave, and pawl,
"Oh, pull that anchor up and down.
"Hurrah, we're outward bound! Hurrah, we're outward bound!"

The chanteyman rolled on, till Dunbar sang out to the captain.

"Anchor's apeak, sir."

"Very good, mister, loose sails, fore and aft."

So the canvas was set, topsails, topgallantsails, royals, and skysails, flat as boards. The inner and outer jibs were run up, and the sheets hauled to windward. The main and after yards were braced sharp to the wind, and the new clipper, began to look like some great white pinioned sea-bird, fluttering before her flight.

The anchor was hove up to a sounding chantey. As the ship gathered way, in the slack water, the ensign dipped, and the Valkyrie had started on her maiden voyage, followed by the cheers of a patriotic multitude.

For the first time with sadness, Richard Dunbar beheld blue water increasing between himself and the shore.

Heretofore, he was never happier than when outward bound. Now he was divided between the love of a ship, and the love of a girl.

At the moment of parting there came for Richard a dark cloud upon what had been a clear sky. At the last minute, just as the ensign was dipped, Mary Williston appeared on the dock holding Nat Gertridge's arm. At this sight, Richard wanted to jump ashore, to take her from him.

"What might Gertridge do while he was gone?"

Standing there, on the zesty topgallant forecastle head, there came to Richard Dunbar a sudden rush of doubts and fears, as he watched the girl whom he loved, waving adieu with one hand, while with the other she clung to the man whom he hated.

CHAPTER XVI.

PACKET RATS.

AT sight of Nat Gertridge standing in proprietary manner beside the girl he loved, Dunbar felt the tiger slumbering within him suddenly aroused and raging. Thanks to his distracted state, the first officer's tasks were accomplished with no little bungling, to the added advantage of his rival.

Captain Forbes, on the poop, glowered upon this flagrant inattention.

"Starting in bad," he muttered. "Looks as though Pugsley's best man after all."

In the second mate's mind there was no doubt as to who was the best man. Pugsley, a bluenose bucko, reprehended everything that savored of the upper class. His greatest boast was that he came to the cabin through the hawse-pipe. He was as hard as his iron Nova Scotian coast, as pitiless, and as cruel. In every way he was ideally qualified as a Western ocean manhandler.

When Dunbar came down from the forecastle head, Pugsley watched him with sinister eye. The trim figure, the erect head, the small blond mustache, the crisp hair closely cropped, the smartness of turnout, every detail of the crack officer was there, to be hated at sight by the less favored second mate.

In a word, Richard Dunbar was an officer and a gentleman, who represented the playing field of Harvard transplanted to the Seven Seas. Mr. Bucko Pugsley, was a graduate of the scuppers, who still stunk of the scuppers, and gloried in that

fact. Oil and water would not mix, neither would such a first and second officer.

As Dunbar passed by, he gave a polite salutation. Pugsley's answer was contemptuous silence.

Two hours after dropping her pilot, the Valkyrie was thirty miles east of Boston Light.

Captain Forbes, "sweetening her up," was divided in his mind. The new clipper from the moment her anchor was catted surpassed the fondest hopes, while the crew, provided by Nat Gertridge, Jr., turned out to be a collection of the most desperate characters ever shipped out of the Port of Boston. Most of them were Liverpool Irish packet rats, who came to sea in order to escape more strenuous labor, breaking rock ashore.

They knew no law, save their own lust, no master save their own passion. With their thick-set, hairy bodies, and their coarse snarling voices they represented the veritable cream of hell. Before Cape Ann was down astern, these Liverpool packet rats, by that fraternity which exists among rogues, had banded themselves together in a secret gang, under that most evil ruffian, Rip Kelly, with whom Pugsley purposely made his peace from the start.

The only American sailor was a Down-Easter, Tug Westcott, who true to the Down East tradition, arrived aboard with a decent kit.

Rip Kelly's entire outfit, at the start, was a red silk stocking worn about his hairy neck as a parting gift from his lady love. In a few hours after putting to sea, as forecastle bully, Kelly had begun to help himself. What he liked he took.

In the second dog watch, Tug Westcott, according to sailor custom was enjoying a pipe on the fore hatch, when Rip Kelly annexed his pannikin.

Others might accept this kind of thing meekly, not so the able Down-Easter. As soon as he discovered his loss he demanded its return.

"Aw, garn!" snarled Kelly, with a menacing note.

Unterrified, Tug Westcott bore down upon him, and before the packet rat could catch his balance, he sent him sprawling across the deck Without pausing, he jumped high to smash in his ribs. While he was in mid-air, with breathless suddenness Kelly whipped out his knife, and as Tug Westcott descended, ripped him up with a negro twist trick, bringing him sprawling in a limp and helpless mass.

For several moments the Down-Easter's foot beat a tattoo of death upon the deck, while Kelly stood over him, knife in hand. With the signs of horror among certain of the watch-mates, Kelly announced, "I'll croak the first guy what blabs a word."

At midnight, when the first officer's watch came on, it was black, and foreboding, with a light snow squall blotting out the stars. The Valkyrie was ramping along like some huge black-winged spectre.

As Richard Dunbar came up the weather ladder, he encountered Pugsley going down.

"Good night," he said.

Pugsley's answer was a surly growl.

Dunbar was generally of a light-hearted disposition, but to-night he came out to take over his watch with a mingling of despondency, and dread. The second officer's jealous salutation cut him to the quick.

In the muster aft, one man was missing. Dunbar read his name again.

"Westcott!" A long pause.

"Where is he?"

"Sick," answered Rip Kelly.

"All right, I'll go down and look after him later. Now, then, get on to the end of that lee fore brace."

Several of the packet rats hesitated between obedience and rebellion, whispering in stealthy manner.

With a voice to be obeyed, Dunbar again whipped out his order.

"Lee fore brace, there!"

"And when I say move, by God, you move!" This last was for the benefit of Rip Kelly, who remained unimpressed, and started to slouch with exaggerating indifference.

"Do you understand orders?"

"Aw, garn! Don't give me none o' yer bossin', yer mother's darlin', or I'll carve the chicken gizzard out o' ye!"

In a flash Dunbar had him by the nape of the neck, and with a whirling cartwheel sent him crashing across the deck, to bring

up with a sickening thud against a bollard. Even that preternatural tough was jarred into insensibility. At their leader's fall the packet rats rushed in to disembowel the officer. The first was landed neatly on the chin and knocked limp.

The rest of the watch, roused by this unwelcome medicine, came on snarling, and snapping, but they stopped when Dunbar faced them unperturbed.

Rip Kelly, who had revived, roused himself on his elbow to urge on his gang.

"Kill 'im! Kill 'im!" he admonished.

In the next instant Dunbar waded through the threatening crowd to close with the ringleader.

"Get on the end of that lee fore brace."

"I carn't move," whined Kelly.

With a swift lunge, Dunbar snatched his wrist, twisting it until his arm was nigh broken.

"Will you move now? Will you?"

Kelly gave in, and slunk off to the appointed job, the rest of the watch tailing on behind. After an hour's sweating up," to usher in the four hours on deck, Dunbar had his crew panting from exertion, but silent, and sullen. There was something uncanny about a watch hauling without the sound of a chantey, or without the long timing cry of the foremost man.

"Come on, strike up a halyard grind, there," called out Dunbar. But he found to his dismay that while he might drive them to their work, he could not drive them to their chanteys. A watch working in darkness, and in utter silence, was disconcerting to an officer. It meant that there was no sign by which he could tell whether or not he had control.

From the weather side Mr. Dunbar gave his crisp, sharp orders to haul, and belay. He was alone, surrounded by an outraged gang of cutthroats, lusting to be at him, one single man against a dozen.

With none to detect foul play, his position was precarious. In the thick gloom of that squally night, in spite of himself, Dunbar grew apprehensive. There was an increasing feeling that his watch was out of hand. Again and again he tried to come to grips with them, only to meet the same baffling stubbornness.

While standing by the wheelsman, Dunbar heard a suspicious scuffling in the lee waist. Jumping down the weather ladder, he was hastening forward, when he stumbled over a mysterious object sprawling across the deck. Bending over to examine it, he felt a sudden sharp pain, as a huge piece of holystone crashed into his back, and bounded off into the scuppers. With a panting gasp, he staggered, and collapsed across the dead body of an unknown seaman.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIVE MINUTES FOR A MUTINY.

FOR several minutes Dunbar lay in a dazed condition while all about him the deck seemed to creep with stealthy figures.

Finally Rip Kelly stole up and, peering closely, announced:

"He's dead to the world. Now, then, let's dump the other guy."

As they were lifting the object, across which he had fallen, Dunbar, opening his eyes, beheld with horror, the body of Tug Westcott, suspended for a moment across the lee bulwarks, then dropped with a sinking splash into the sea.

Dunbar could not withhold a cry of consternation. Hearing that cry, Rip Kelly stood forth a moment irresolute, a murderer caught red handed. But only for a moment did he hesitate. He had killed one. Now it was nothing to wipe out the evidence, and polish off another. With this thought, Kelly whipped out his ever present knife, and started for his accuser.

With the desperation of a man who fights for life, Dunbar seized an iron capstan bar, and despite his weakened condition, swung it with a mighty threat. At this unexpected resistance, the packet rat hesitated. Covering himself warily, Dunbar began to beat a retreat aft, followed by the menacing gang.

Having gained the quarterdeck, the threatened officer prepared for a final stand, while Rip Kelly, in vain, urged his gangsters to rush in and overwhelm him. None caring to brave that swinging bar of iron, Kelly himself crept forward.

Fast weakening from the effect of the blow which he had received in the back, Dunbar made one last, ineffective swing, and missed. In the next instant Kelly landed on his neck and clinched. In that instant the fierce breath and the villainous eyes of the packet rat seemed to burn themselves into Dunbar's very soul. Filled with an almost superhuman terror he let out a piercing shriek that sounded above the ill-intentioned night like the cry of a lost soul.

At that piercing note of alarm, Captain Forbes and the second mate came bursting up the companion to find the first officer beset on every hand.

With his back to the port rail, just abaft the mizzen rigging, he was defending himself against a horde, armed with knives and blackjacks. The arrival of aid was not a second too soon.

This was open mutiny. One glance sufficed to reveal that desperate measures were required.

Without an instant's hesitation Forbes pulled out a heavy brass belaying pin, and using this with both hands, he dealt a terrific blow on the back of the head of each would-be assassin, laying them out right and left. Two were dropped dead in their tracks.

Together the first mate and captain drove the rabble off the break of the poop. Bucko Pugsley, in his element, hurled them bodily into the waist, pitching them head foremost, like so many sacks of potatoes.

With the poop clear, Captain Forbes stood at the break, exclaiming:

"This is mutiny on the high seas. With such a crew of cutthroats and murderers, by rights I should take you back to face the gallows. But it's not the style of Bully Forbes to come about, once he's put to sea.

"I've started on this voyage, and by the living God, I'm going to finish it, in spite of all the packet rats this side of hell!

"You have refused to obey your officer, and turned upon him. Well, we'll just see who's master. Now, you can get aloft, all hands, with sandstone and canvas, and polish the yards!"

Every man in the crew stood aghast at the brazen effrontery of this order. To polish the yards was a teasing job at best. A job fit only for fine weather and summer seas. But to go aloft in a bitter, freezing night on the western ocean, half clad, with the snow squalls whistling about their ears, and the big clipper jumping into the seas up to her knight heads, this was indeed the deepest indignity that any captain could offer to his crew.

The packet rats gave no reply either by word or motion, but huddled together in the waist, outraged and surly.

"Come on now, lay out on the yards there!"

A pause followed, in which Rip Kelly, getting back his insolence, shouted with derision.

"Are you going to obey?"

"Aw, ye carn't fool us that way."

"Are you going to obey?" the captain inquired again in a voice vibrant with decision.

"No, we ain't. Not for you, nor anything like ye, ye bloody stiff!"

"All right, I'll give you just five minutes," said Forbes with the tone of one who pronounced a death sentence.

Taking out his watch the captain paced up and down at the break of the poop, counting off the minutes.

"Five minutes!"

"Four!"

"Three!"

"Two!"

"One!"

"Time's up! Are you going to obey?"

"No!" shouted Rip Kelly.

Without another word, Forbes whipped out his derringer, and dropped the foul-mouthed Kelly in his tracks.

"Now, then, who's going to die next?"

Covering the rest of the crew with his gun, the captain started to advance upon them, but they were already flying for the ratlines in mortal terror.

Vaulting off the break of the poop, Forbes pursued the panic-stricken mob, cracking pates right and left with the heavy butt of his gun.

With a speed and alacrity undreamed of in all their former movements, the packet rats lay out on the yards, while Pugsley and the bosun followed them with sandstone and canvas.

Captain Forbes kept them there hour after hour through that cold and biting night. At first they thought only of the indignity, but as the time dragged on and the all pervasive cold began to search their vitals, they forgot everything except existence.

Long before the morning every man aloft was nigh frozen, but the ruthless Forbes still kept them there, enduring the tortures of the damned.

Now and again one or another screamed out in agony, but the captain's only answer was to take occasional pot shots at the restive spirits, as a reminder of the man master still there with unsleeping vigilance upon the poop.

At last, when the cold had almost paralyzed them, at the utmost limit of endurance, Forbes gave the order that released them. So numbed were they that more than one had to be assisted down the shrouds. The assistance came from Richard Dunbar, whose sense of humanity mastered every other feeling.

"I'd see them frozen stiff before I'd do a tap to help them," observed Forbes.

"Same here," echoed Bucko Pugsley. But Richard Dunbar was made of different stuff.

When the packet rats at last crawled miserably into their bunks in the forecastle, even the most refractory had decided who was master aboard Valkyrie.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ARISTOCRAT OF THE SEA.

CAPTAIN FORBES, afloat, was very different from Captain Forbes ashore. The minute he stepped upon his deck planks, he seemed to shed his every weakness.

He was the Lawgiver, who dwelt on a Sinai of his own, his poop. Up and down the weather side he walked, aloof, inscrutable as God Almighty. He held communion with no one but himself, pacing up and down, up and down, with sleepless and unending vigilance.

A born racing skipper, he kept his ship driving night and day. From the instant they broke out the anchor, his heart beat for one purpose, for one purpose only, to establish a record for Valkyrie.

At any hour he might appear on his endless stamping up and down, watching the winds, with an impetuous fling to his head, seizing every lull and slant to drive his tall, white-pinioned clipper across the swooping seas.

Before they were clear of Boston Light, he had all hands gaping at the way he piled on canvas.

On the third day out, with the wind north north-east, with strong breezes and frequent snow squalls, the Valkyrie logged three hundred and twenty eight miles. A marvellous run.

In reply to the second mate's congratulations, Forbes made the laconic reply, "Wait till she's limbered up."

To handle a gang of packet rats required frequent and heavy doses of belaying-pin soup. Pugsley, always ready to smash or break, kept his wild men in a degree of subjection. But in the first officer's watch, it was often a toss-up which should be master.

Try as they might, Dunbar for once could not get a grip of his men. Inefficiency was apparent in his watch at every turn. He had always had the name of being smart as paint in whipping a new crew into shape. But now it seemed as though some one were always throwing a monkey-wrench in the machinery.

Bill Pugsley, outraged by the loss of his temporary position as first officer, never lost an opportunity to rub it into the captain about the apparent lapses of his rival.

The reports of the spying Pugsley made it appear as though Dunbar could not handle his men. With Bully Forbes, this was one unpardonable sin.

Suffering continually from his back, where he had been injured by the holystone, balked by a strange defiance from his men, hated by the second mate, and regarded with distrustful eye by his skipper, the lot of the first officer became almost unbearable. His usually carefree face took on a worried aspect. With the captain's displeasure increasing he began to awaken

to the realization of some deadly hidden foe.

Why was it that no chantey-man ever lifted a merry voice in his watch?

Why were his packet sailors, usually splendid men aloft, so slow at making, or shortening sail?

Who was forever destroying the morale among his men?

These were the vexing questions with which Richard Dunbar was continually harassed. He was not of a suspicious nature. But the fear began to grow upon him of some hidden hand working against him.

When the winds blew strong, Bully Forbes's heart beat high. But the fifth day out brought light airs, with idle rolling, the gear creaking, and the hull groaning—a vile sound, for a skipper who yearned for the wind music in his shrouds.

To run into such vexing calms on this maiden voyage was indeed exasperating. With all that he had at stake, the strain upon the skipper was terrific. At home in a hurricane, Forbes was beside himself in a calm. He walked up and down the weather poop, as imperturbable as ever. The only sign of his exasperation was that his iron hand fell more heavily upon his crew.

The Valkyrie steered like a top. But the restless skipper seemed to watch her every minute of the night or day. Light airs only made him that much more exacting.

He had one of those compasses on the binnacle, the bottom of which being out, showed in the cabin just how the ship was heading at any moment. Under the compass, on the transom, Forbes used to lay himself down while he pretended to sleep. It was commonly believed aboard that he really never slept.

Let the Valkyrie deviate a quarter of a point off her course, or while on the wind, let the royals lift, and the heavy hand was felt immediately.

On the afternoon of the seventh day, with the calm continuing, the man at the wheel let his mind wander for an instant. In that instant, the clipper fell off a half a point.

The wheelsman, Paradise Cronin, was picking her way up again when the gorilla head of Bully Forbes rose from the companion, and turned slowly to regard the man at the wheel.

Paradise Cronin felt his heart thump against his ear drums as he confronted the pale light of that merciless eye. In a sudden panic he let his vessel flop her royals.

"Might I inquire if you are a quartermaster, or if you are a passenger?" said Forbes with acrid tones.

"Please sir, I think the mizzen royal 's braced up too tight to steer by."

"And so, you're there to talk back to your betters, are you?" remarked Forbes suavely, at the same time moving over toward the offender with disconcerting speed.

At this fell approach, the packet rat dropped the wheel, and crouched for a defiant spring. But in the same instant, Forbes smashed him with a heaver, and jumping on his prostrate body, grabbed the wheel, and put the vessel back upon her course.

"Send me a man who can steer, Mr. Dunbar," he sang out testily. "You're watch seem to be conspicuous, sir, for their inefficiency."

A second Irish packet sailor came aft with laggard step.

"There was a man in the Bible sick of the palsy. There's a man on this clipper who's going to be dead with the palsy if you don't hustle!"

With a hand that trembled more than any of the palsied, the relief took over the wheel, the old man stepping back to watch his exhibition.

For one agonizing minute he held the Valkyrie upon her course, then yawed a full point to leeward. Before he had time to recover his wheel, the heaver had cracked against another skull. Spurning his prostrate body with a disgusted kick, Forbes again took the wheel, exclaiming;

"Truly, Mr. Dunbar, yours is a rare assortment!"

The third man, warned by the fate of his predecessors, came aft at the double. But even before he relieved the wheel, Forbes laid him cold.

"That's for dirty hands on the quarter-

deck. I'll have nothing but clean hands at the wheel of this clean clipper.

"Now, Mr. Dunbar, will I have to ask you to take this trick yourself, or can you scour the forecastle with a fine tooth comb, and find me just one real sailor?"

As a last resort, the first officer sent John Hall, V. C., a colored man-o'-warsman.

Cool and courteous in manner, but deadly and dangerous, Forbes remained, waiting like a fell avenger for the merest slip that might afford him yet one more horrible example.

But the colored seaman, with a perfect *sang froid,* took his place, and pulled a spoke down, to let the ship luff to his taste. There was a careless lilt about him, and Forbes unloosed his heaver with preparatory gesture.

Undismayed, and with the touch of an artist, John Hall watched the slatting royals, and felt the wind blowing against his cheek.

"Keep her full and by!" warned the skipper.

"Full and by, sir," came back the cheery answer.

Hall let the wheel run, breaking it with his flattened hand, as the ship pulled at her helm, and took back a couple of spokes, whereat Forbes replaced his heaver, and looked at the first officer with a bitter and accusing glance.

Dunbar knew that he had appeared in a bad light before his skipper.

Just at that embarrassing moment, Mr. Pugsley came up the companion. Seeing the captain, he crossed over to the lee side, and stood within hearing distance while Forbes continued his sarcastic flings.

With the calms continuing, Bully Forbes must have a scapegoat. Every circumstance seemed to qualify the first officer for this unenviable position.

"I've just had about enough of your faint hand, and faint heart, Mr. Dunbar. If you are to remain first officer aboard this clipper, will you kindly wake up and get a grip on your men."

With this humiliating remark, the captain bowed disdainfully and went below.

Paradise Cronin, who had been lying stark, just then let out a groan. With three of his watch prostrate on his hands, Richard Dunbar's first thought was to their welfare.

Yelling through the cabin skylight, he ordered the steward to fetch him some hot whiskey to revive them. Whereat, Forbes reappeared.

"Look at here, Mr. Dunbar, you can pitch them over the side with a sack of coal at their heels before I'll dish out hot whiskey for such trash. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Dunbar fighting against that instinct which always caused him to think of his men first.

At this moment, Mr. Bucko Pugsley got himself in solid with the skipper by kicking the three prostrate sailors off the break of the poop onto the deck.

"That's where that trash belongs," he grunted.

Captain Forbes went below and Pugsley, guessing his temper, seized the opportune occasion to join him in the cabin.

"Well, Pugsley, just what's the matter with that first officer?"

"No good, sir."

"Yes, but what's the matter with him?"

"Too much treacle and molasses, sir."

"I believe you're right," said Forbes with a sudden decisiveness in his voice, and he went up again on the poop.

Just at the moment Richard Dunbar was tacking ship.

During the process of tacking, the laggard unresponsiveness of the crew was only equalled by the sluggishness of the clipper as she wallowed almost becalmed.

Enraged beyond words at the slowness of his vessel in stays, the captain broke his first officer then and there.

"Mr. Pugsley," he said curtly, "from now on you'll take over as first officer. Mr. Dunbar, you'll go back to second."

"What?" exclaimed Richard, unspeakable pain showing in his face.

"Yes, you go back to second. May be hard on you, but can't be helped. Right now, I'd ride over my dead brother's carcass, if he stood between me and a record for Valkyrie."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Come-Back

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

ALMOST the first item on which Judge Rutherford Van Blount's eye fell that morning, as he opened his paper at breakfast, was this:

"SPIKE" DUGGAN PAROLED

Yegg Doing Twenty Years
Released after Eight

Boston, Mass., Feb. 10.—On recommendation of the Parole Board, Jeremiah H. Duggan was yesterday released from custody at Charlestown State Prison. Duggan, formerly known as "Spike," was sentenced in 1912 to twenty years, for complicity in the post office break at East Deering, in which Postmaster John H. Ainsworth was killed. Duggan has continually protested his innocence, claiming he was the victim of mistaken identity. The case attracted considerable attention at the time.

Duggan has always been a model prisoner, and the Parole Board has been interested in his case for some months. His two companions in the break, Nazro and Gilligan, were both electrocuted in 1913. The State set up the claim that Duggan was "outside man" or watchman while the others blew the safe, and that—

The judge did not finish the item. Instead, he let the paper fall, and for a moment sat all astare. He made a strange dry noise in his throat that caused Mrs. Van Blount to glance up from her grapefruit.

"What is it, dear?"

"Nothing, nothing! I—I got some juice down the wrong way, that's all."

With critical curiosity his excellent and still rather comely wife regarded him. The fact that his grapefruit stood as yet untouched in its tall-stemmed dish gave his statement an apocryphal quality.

"Something in the paper you don't like, dear?"

"Not at all, my love. Why, whatever gave you that idea, I'd like to know?"

"You look rather odd. A bit pale. Not sick, are you?"

"Sick? Nonsense!" His hand shook a little as he folded the paper and carefully thrust it into his pocket. Even though Mrs. Van Blount had never so much as heard the name of Spike Duggan, the judge by no means intended she should get hold of that paper. "Certainly I'm not sick! It's nothing, nothing. Just a slight headache. Never felt better in my life."

"Humph!"

"By the way, my dear, I see Senator Beroth has come out in favor of the bonus. Now, the way *I* look at that question is just this—"

And with unnecessary and rather hasty verbiage he launched into an exposition of his views on the bonus—a subject wherein Mrs. Van Blount took not the slightest interest.

The judge's worthy spouse regarded him with that mild curiosity which middle-age substitutes for almost all real emotions.

"Rutherford's bothered about something, that's certain," she thought; but whether a bad turn of the market, the death of some old classmate at Harvard Law School, or a judicial appointment he did not approve, she knew not. Nor, to speak truth, did she much care. All she felt positive of was that his clouded brow and faded color had nothing whatever to do with the bonus. And presently she fell to thinking about a bargain sale that day at Schellenburg's, and forgot her husband's discomposure most completely.

Thus breakfast, deftly served by Marie—who had originally been plain Mary—came to a silent end. Soon thereafter, with the perfunctory peck that suffices long-time matrimony for a good-by kiss, the judge departed for his office.

Mrs. Van Blount never thought of the incident again.

The judge, however, as he walked down town was thinking of nothing else.

A very unhealthy fear now had hold of the judge's soul-strings and was most insistently twitching them. His state of mind stood far aloof from that mild contentment which should have sprung from circumstances as well found as his.

Retired from the bench these five years past, removed out to the northern New York State city of Waterburg—far from somewhat distressful memories of his criminal-bench experiences in Massachusetts—and with the finest law practice in Jefferson County, what more could a somewhat corpulent legal gentleman desire? The more so as political bees had lately been buzzing round his ear, and he might ere long bear the title of Senator Van Blount?

Odd that a man of such parts and substance should let so trivial a newspaper item thus vitally agitate him!

And yet—

As the judge with complete dignity descended Washburn Avenue, officeward, his eyes betrayed a very thriving trouble. They no longer looked out through their round-rimmed shell glasses with their accustomed aplomb; nor were they at all beholding the snowy breadth of the thoroughfare, the arching of leafless elms, the glossy motor cars speeding down town with a clatter of chains on mudguards.

The judge owned a motor car of extraordinary gloss, but he always walked to his office. Increasing embonpoint demanded it. Just now, however, he was considering far other matters than embonpoint, which the poor call fat. He was considering life's own self; he was considering death. More especially, death.

Death! No very pleasant topic for a prosperous, plumb and politically-favored legal light of fifty-six.

Death. Yes, he had dealt it out with a liberal enough hand, during his career as district attorney of Suffolk County, Massachusetts. Never had there been a prosecuting officer so implacable, a devotee of capital punishment and of long terms, so ardent. He had worked against the parole system, had written articles for law magazines and the public prints, pointing out the folly of all this modern reform movement. A convinced Lombrosian, he had held fixedly to the "criminal type" theory, and had denied that delinquents ever turn new leaves.

He had become known as a hanging

judge—and later, as an electrocuting judge, when science had refined man's inhumanity to man. Judge Jeffreys, of good old English butchering fame, would have found in him a boon companion; and like Jeffreys, no doubt, he had done all in a spirit of sincerity, a profound belief that only by ruthless extirpation of weeds could good grain grow.

"Better ten guilty men escape than one innocent man suffer," he had amended to the exact reverse. Such had been his principles; and he had lived up to them—and now—

Now Spike Duggan had been paroled!

II.

THE scene before Judge Van Blount's troubled eyes as he walked down town that morning was very far away from Waterburg, New York. It lay in a drab courtroom of the huge gray building in Pemberton Square, Boston, where unceasingly the mills of the gods grind human lives indifferently to powder.

A drab day, too, that had been; one of those foggy March days that make Bostonians—even Bostonians—sometimes wonder if the climate of heaven may not after all be preferable to that of the old Bay State. A drab day, indeed; though toward its close slashed with the vivid crimson of a hate that kills.

How the judge remembered it all—the long-drawn battle over which he had presided on the bench; battle between District Attorney Duhamel and "Spike" Duggan's counsel, one Foley. He recalled the sullen, hard-jawed defendant, crouching in his chair at bay; the charge to the jury; the long wait for a verdict—as if all had been but yesterday. Eight years had been swept aside, and now the past came crowding, swarming in about the judge.

He recollected especially his charge to the jury; how he had practically instructed them to bring in a verdict of guilty; how he had wished he might see that fellow Duggan kicking at a rope's end. Serve such carrion right!

He remembered how Duggan's pistol had been handed about by the jurymen, a pistol with six notches filed in the butt. Duggan had never denied it was his gun; but most vehemently he had declared himself elsewhere than at East Deering the night of the hold-up. At that the judge had smiled. He had kept the gun, too, as a kind of souvenir of the case; had it even now, somewhere.

Very clearly he recalled how he had been awakened in his chambers at a pallid hour of early morning—half past two, or some such matter. The bailiff had announced that the jury had reached a verdict. Wearily, Judge Van Blount had got into his black robe and mounted the bench. Duggan had been led in, surly and shambling—an unshaven, repellent figure.

"Gentlemen of the jury"—and the clerk coughed slightly—"have you agreed on a verdict?"

Hazeltine, the foreman, nodded as he stood up.

"We have, your honor!" Van Blount remembered that Hazeltine had addressed him instead of the clerk.

"Prisoner at the bar," the clerk commanded, "stand up and look upon the jurors."

Spike Duggan, prodded by Foley, got up in a kind of daze, muttering:

"I tell you, I never! 'Twas another guy. Sure, I've pulled lots o' rough stuff in my day, but I never was in on that Deerin' break. I was to hell an' gone over in Rhode Island that night, an'—"

"Silence!" commanded the clerk, rapping. "Gentlemen, what is your verdict?"

"Your honor," answered Hazeltine, still addressing the judge, "we find the defendant guilty as charged in the indictment."

"Remanded for sentence, March 7," said the judge.

Then Duggan was made to sit down, still protesting, not yet quite understanding. The judge thanked the jury, gathered up his papers, and departed. And court officers led Duggan—dazed, inarticulate—away to a dank cell.

That had been eight years ago, and still it dwelt most vividly in the judge's memory. Now, far away from that scene, there walking down Washburn Avenue, he set teeth on lip and shook his head.

" This is bad, damned bad," he growled. " What in the world they ever paroled that ruffian for is beyond *me!*" Fear stood out in the judge's eye—as well it might. For now he was remembering March 7, when he had imposed the penalty of the law on this Spike.

The court room again. Duggan was up with a batch of six others, for sentence on various convictions. Again Judge Van Blount heard the clerk calling, " Jeremiah H. Duggan!" Again he was peering through his glasses at that sinister figure.

" Duggan, have you nothing to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon you?"

" Sure!"

" Eh, what's that?" Hundreds of times the judge had mouthed that formula without ever getting more than a shake of the head, a whispered " No," in reply. But now Duggan's " Sure!" rang out with confident alacrity. Startled, the judge peered at this temerarious villain who dared take seriously the conventions of the law.

" Sure, y'r honor, I got somethin' to say, if I can say it just to you, an' not to all these here other guys, too."

" To me, confidentially?"

" Yeah, that's the word. Confidential."

" Well, Duggan," smiled the judge, rather as a cat smiles at a caught mouse the while he toys with it—" well, this is a bit irregular; but—step to the bench."

Duggan shambled to the bench and laid a hand on the greasy Bible there.

" Judge, y'r honor," he began in a tone so low that none but Van Blount could hear—" judge, are you gonna send me acrost? A guy what never done it, 't all?"

The judge smiled even more, in a way both patronizing and superior—the kind of smile that breeds more hatred than a blow. "My man, I must do my duty. The jury convicted you, according to due process of law." How unctuous was the judge's tone, orotund, well measured. " And now I must sentence you."

" Must, eh? Judge, y'r honor, ain't there no hope fer me?"

" Not unless new evidence has been introduced; and your counsel has made no move for a writ of error, a stay of—"

" Yes, but Judge—I never done—"

" Come, come, Duggan!" Now the judge's tone grew sharper. " I cannot argue with you! If you have nothing to offer in the way of—"

" I only got my word, same as all along!"

Van Blount impatiently motioned him away.

" Get back to the rail, there, Duggan! Enough of this, now!"

" Wait a minute, judge!" hardly more than whispered the yegg. " You see where my hand is? On that Bible? Well, I'm under oath now. With meself—see?" The criminal's voice was one never to be forgotten. In it snarled the jungle tiger, hissed the cobra, chattered the rattlesnake. A voice from the abyss it was, from the nether slimes of peril.

" You listen to *me*, now! I ain't makin' no grand stand play, nor shoutin'. But I'm tellin' you! If you send me up, I'll be out some day. I'll be a model pris'ner, an' get a lot of ' copper.' An' when I get out o' stir, you're gonna get out o' the world! That's level, judge! I'll get you right, if it takes me all the rest o' my life an' I go to the chair for it! I'll live long enough to smoke one cigarette over your carcass—an' after that, what the hell do *I* care? That's all. Now, go ahead an' send me across. An'—*you* know!"

The judge, purpling with indignation, snapped fat fingers for a bailiff.

" Remove this man!" he ordered. And when Duggan, all meekness, had been led back to the other miscreants: " It is now by this court ordered, and the sentence of the court is, that you be imprisoned at hard labor in the penitentiary of the State of Massachusetts, at Charlestown, for the term of twenty years."

The judge, still swollen with rage, glared down at his enemy. Very unjudicial, indeed, he looked, in that moment of triumph. He added:

" I regret, Duggan, that I am unable to impose a greater penalty. It would be for the good of society. But I have given you the maximum. Next prisoner!"

" Thanks, judge!" laughed Duggan. Laughed, yes; though in his eyes smoldered

brands of hate that nothing short of death, it seemed, could quench. "Thanks. *You* know!"

And—

Judge Van Blount, there walking down Washburn Avenue, started. He blinked about him, as if waking from an nightmare.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Here I am, away down town, and never even knew it. Well, well—I mustn't go day dreaming like this, obfuscating my brains with foolish fancies."

And, pulling himself together, he turned into the red brick building that housed his rather elaborate offices.

Elsewhere, at this same moment, Spike Duggan was thinking of the judge as earnestly as the judge was thinking of him. Dame Fate meantime—always past mistress in the art of surprises—was preparing one of her oddest little jests.

III.

ALL the morning the judge remained busy with his routine. In the press of business, the deferential attentions of his underlings, he found spiritual bulwarks against the menace he now felt implacably approaching.

Though, after all, was there any menace?

"I must face this thing sensibly," he pondered in a minute's leisure—for ever the Duggan affair remained at the back of his brain, ready to advance on any occasion. "What, on analysis, is there to alarm me? Only a very weak willed man would bother himself about the vaporings of a low type criminal like that."

He tried to convince himself that he had nothing to disturb him, but made only a sorry hand of it. For the very fact that Duggan had seemed a low type really gave the threat its spur. With a higher type of man, one might reason; point out that no turpitude attaches to a judge because he pronounces sentence; that a judge is no more responsible for that than is an executioner for pulling the fatal electric switch or adjusting the noose. Are not both judge and executioner only impersonal cogs in the vast wheels of justice forever macerating lives to shreds that bleed?

Well and good; but who could ever make a man like Duggan understand that? To such fellows, without trades or occupations, undisciplined and jungle-bred, a judge is always a vindictive personal force with powers to loose or bind. Inerrantly, hate flares against the judge. Thus by the code of the world's Duggans, a judge may be—ought to be—punished in his own body.

"Very defective reasoning," said Van Blount to himself. "Extremely faulty logic." But that did little to assure him. Bullets never deflect because of faulty logic. Against the seared-in words, "I'll live long enough to smoke one cigarette over your carcass—an' after that, what the hell do *I* care?" what availed rules of dialectic processes of reasoning?

"The whole trouble arises from that idiotic parole board," perpended the judge. He was bitterly opposed to the parole system in general; and in this case specifically so. Already he had written three or four letters to the board about the Duggan case; had exerted himself to bilk any parole for the man. He had even gone so far as to make a statement that Duggan had threatened his life, if released; but Duggan, questioned, had vehemently denied it, and there had been no witnesses. None had overheard the threat. Good care Duggan had taken of *that!* So the judge's letters had been overborne by Duggan's exemplary conduct and by the fact that all the evidence against him had been purely circumstantial. And now—

"Now," realized the judge, with a little crawling of the spine, which was well embedded in adipose, "now the wolf's loose again. And I—damn it, *I've* got to look out for myself!"

Even there in those warm, easy and secure offices, opulent of much business, of prestige and power, he felt a sudden lack of all protection. He was suddenly like a man stripped naked to the winter's gale. Safe-buttressed against all legal attack, he remained vulnerable to the illegal, the outlaw. He experienced rather an appalling sensation, as if, all at once, those solid walls had turned transparent, those heavy doors had crumbled, all barriers become no more than so much flimsiness. His house,

he realized, would prove no better; and as for the street—why, the street was little less than open invitation for ambush and murder!

The judge sat there, rapt in a kind of blood-sweating torment, with the most uncomfortable of sick-sinking depressions at the pit of his ample stomach. In a way of speaking, he was for the first time experiencing sensations parallel to those he had inflicted on scores—aye, hundreds—of human beings whom he had sentenced to the cell, the chair. Now *he* was sentenced. This point of view, however, did not occur to him. Life to him had always been a shield with but an obverse. That its reverse might suddenly be flashed upon him had lain far beyond all ambits of his imagination.

"Damn it!" he growled. "I thought I was safe for twenty years. And now only eight have passed, and Duggan's at large. If he makes good his threat—and he certainly looked like a man who meant trouble—that will be cheating me out of at least twelve years. Twelve years is a long time to be dead, when you might be alive!" He shivered a little, and looked about at all his shelves of leather-bound law-books, which now seemed to mock him. "Twelve years! That would make me sixty-eight. A ripe enough age. But fifty-six—no, no! Hang it all—that's too young to die—altogether too young!"

As he pondered his income, wife, home, motor car, his country club, bank account and political outlook, he realized how very young indeed fifty-six really is.

"Duggan!" he growled, a flame of hate consuming him—of hate that blended into shuddering fear. "Damn Duggan!"

And for a while, slumped down far in his luxuriously padded swivel chair, he sat there at his desk, all other business forgotten save the very greatest of any—the business of how, being alive and well, to remain so.

IV.

Now, Judge Rutherford Van Blount was no more a coward, at heart, than you or I or the average civilized man to whom the taking of life—save in approved ways, like the electric chair or the battlefield—is a thing horrific, foreign, as much outside his orbit as the moons of Mars. Hard pressed enough, he would fight, even as you and I. And fight was what he at last determined on.

Leaving his office late that afternoon, he dropped in at Porter & Gordon's hardware store and bought a box of .38 cartridges to fit the very murderous looking gun that had been taken from Duggan eight years before. This gun still reposed among a number of the judge's souvenirs.

"So many burglaries lately, you know," he remarked in a casual way to the clerk. "It's well to have a little home protection, eh?"

"You're right, judge," the clerk assented as he wrapped up the box and snapped a rubber band around it. "Now, only the other day, out at Green River—"

Judge Van Blount, however, departed without listening to the details of the Green River thieves who had robbed Maplewold Farm of more than two hundred choice Plymouth Rocks.

Very discreetly the judge said nothing whatever to Mrs. Van Blount about his purchase. Why, after all, should he unnecessarily alarm an estimable lady for whom he still entertained a reasonable regard?

Arriving home—and all the way the cartridges sagged as heavily in his pocket as memories of Duggan did in his mind—he put the cartridges in the drawer of his desk in what he called his den; a room half library, half office, where while maintaining an illusion of being relaxed and at home, he did much of his hardest work. At dinner Mrs. Van Blount found him unusually abstracted. But abstraction was no very unusual quality in the judge. A word or two—"Big case coming on, my dear. And then, too, some political complications," adequately set the good wife's mind at rest.

Mrs. Van Blount went out that evening to a meeting of the Uplift League, whereof she was secretary, leaving the judge alone. On the same principle that we employ in continually worrying at a sore tooth to see how sore it is, the judge hunted up that

morning's paper and reread the item about Duggan. Reread it, in fact, several times.

"Hmmm!" he grunted, and scratched his head in a manner less dignified than human, as he sat there rather too fat and red in the wattles, beside his den desk, in the enormous easy chair that had so well molded itself to his contours. For the first time he was fully realizing just how comfortable that chair really was, like the house, the profession of law, the whole world—how amazingly disagreeable it would be to say good-by forever to all these things and to fare forth into either oblivion or else some sphere where he might find many a man he had already dispatched thither.

"*Brrr!*" shuddered the judge, and flung the paper away. Then he went upstairs, rummaged a bit and found Duggan's pistol; that very one that had been "frisked" from the yegg, and that the judge had kept as a memento, all this long time. He fetched it down to his library, and there with some curiosity—albeit nervously—examined it.

Not in many a soft year had the judge fired a gun of any kind, or witnessed violence. Super-civilized he was, like millions more; lax of fiber, flabby of nerve. Overfeeding and too much easy-chair had made of him a creature fundamentally unsound, beginning inwardly to rot.

Now this heavy, rather blunt weapon of destruction filled him with something like awed repulsion. How crude a thing, and yet how perfect! Never had Van Blount seen life taken, yet this gun had taken lives; many, perhaps. As the judge handled it, turned the chamber, examined the mechanism, he experienced a certain shrinking. Yes, of a surety this man was as soft of courage as he was hard of pity. Ruthless toward a poor debtor, implacable in collections, glorying in convictions and in rough-shod riding down of society's unfortunates, his soul quivered in presence of an instrument which, breaking through all webs of law, dealt direct and summary justice.

None the less he now carefully loaded the gun, wondering as he did so how many human lives it had snuffed out. The butt was heavily scored with six deep marks, cut or filed into the hard rubber—records of kills, surely?

"Lord, but that's an ugly affair!" thought the judge. "I positively hate to touch it. Still, under the circumstances—"

He pretended to take quick aim at various objects—the door, the window, a bookcase, a chair. He practiced bringing the gun up, or jerking it down, to cover different marks, flexing the sinews of what little imagination he possessed, rehearsing for contingencies.

"I fancy I could shoot pretty quick and straight," he flattered himself, "if put to it." This comforted him. He shoved the loaded gun far back in his desk-drawer, where Mrs. Van Blount or Marie would be unlikely to find it. "If worse comes to worst, I imagine I could give a good account of myself!" The thought was accompanied by something like a mental swagger. "I'd like to see a ruffian of that type get the better of me!" Which, by the way, was exactly what the judge did *not* want to see—

And now he relaxed, to read his current *Law Review*. But his attention wandered. Every sound distracted him. The growl of a motor along the avenue, the whistling of a boy, even the jarring-to of a door somewhere at the back of the house, set him on edge. With reins thrown over the neck of imagination, he could almost believe the motor was bearing an assassin to attack him; the whistle a signal; the door closing behind Duggan. A fine prickle of sweat pearled the judge's lofty, super-intellectual brow.

"Nonsense!" he impatiently reassured himself. "He was paroled only yesterday. How could he get here as soon as this—even if he knew where to find me? This is sheer folly!" And for a while he settled himself to read, with a vast effort; but ever and ever, across the printed page, ominous words kept forming:

"I'll get you right, if it takes me all the rest o' my life, an' I go to the chair for it!"

That evening in his peaceful den was a long one and a hard, for Judge Van Blount.

V.

HARD and long, too, were other days and nights that followed; for a blind terror came

to dwell at the eminent jurist's elbow. He wanted so to live! So keen was his fear of death! And what more soul-destroying force, what killing power more implacable exists than fear?

"I have destroyed my hundreds," boasted Plague, in the old fable.

"And I," Fear vaunted, "have slain my thousands!"

At the judge's heart now, night and day, sat an incubus that never closed its pale, cold eyes. Never did the judge feel certain, when he got up in the morning, whether that night he should rest again in his snug bed or sleep the long sleep. Never he knew, when he started for his office or set out again for home, whether from some doorway or window the assassin's bullet might not crumple him.

He came to entertain an exaggerated, almost a grotesque aversion to all things reminding him of death. A cemetery, a funeral procession, even an undertaker's establishment or advertisement in the papers, caused him to shudder. Dark imaginings and formless broodings poisoned his mind. His work suffered; and for the first time, he lost an obviously simple law case. People began to wonder.

No longer of an evening did he dare go abroad. To walk the familiar streets of Waterburg after dark—streets till now full of amity and respectful greeting—became for him a thing of torment. He gave up such of his clubs as he could; and to others, always rode in his car. His rubicund joviality, assumed for business purposes, fell off, and the Senatorial bee slacked its buzzing. "After all, perhaps," the powers began to whisper, "the judge isn't the man we want. He seems to be breaking up a bit, eh?"

He eliminated the theater, calls, entertainments, by alleging rheumatism. His excellent wife duly sympathized, thinking:

"Dear me, Rutherford's really beginning to get old, isn't he? Odd, how suddenly it's come on. I never noticed it till just this spring." And she sighed, not so much through pity for him as because she realized that if her husband was getting old, she could not long delay that process herself.

Thus the judge declined. His frank, expansive manner chilled; his smile lost its magnetism; no longer did his hand-clasp seem compact of cordial sincerity. He came to have a way of peeping round corners of buildings before turning them, of suddenly starting at any sudden noise, of standing with his back to walls.

An unhealthy state of mind for an unusually well-to-do man of fifty-six!

The judge realized, himself, it was unhealthy and that it was becoming progressively worse. He undertook to draw his courage about him by having a private interview with Matthew McDermott, Waterburg chief of police. Just what passed in the way of conversation and inducement, who could say? But thereafter, the patrolman on the post including the judge's house kept a special eye out for nocturnal strangers. In case of any disturbance there, he was to enter at once, unlimbered for action.

Moreover, the judge saw his physician, Dr. Wesley Potter.

"Too much worry about business and politics, for one thing," said Potter. "Overwork. You need more exercise, and you'd better give up finishing that book you're writing—the one about the fixity of criminal types, you know. And—now you're here, let's see what your blood pressure is, and so on."

The blood pressure and so on caused Dr. Potter to look grave.

"Hmmm!" he grunted.

"Bad, eh?"

"Too high, certainly. And—do you mind the truth, judge? Can you stand it?"

"I always have." The judge tried to smile, but made a sorry mess of it. "What's the matter with me, now?"

"Well, judge, the stethoscope rarely lies, and—"

"Heart trouble, you mean?"

"Not that, exactly. More like an aortal aneurysm."

"Aneurysm? You mean enlargement of the aorta?"

"I should say so," the doctor admitted. "But you may go years with it—if it doesn't get worse."

The judge made an odd, dry sound.

"But if it does?"

"Now, now, you musn't worry, judge!" And Potter raised a suave hand. "It's just worry that's the worst thing in the world for you. It increases the blood pressure, you see, and if that pressure gets too high —overwork, worry, a sudden shock or anything of that sort—"

"The aneurysm may burst? Is that what you mean?"

"Well—"

"Damn it, man! Speak *out!*"

The doctor spoke out; and Judge Van Blount rode home with the fear of God gnawing at his soul. In his ears were droning all sorts of cautions about diet, exercise, let-up in work, cessation of worry, Heaven knows what. But through them all rang words as of destiny:

"And if it bursts, of course you understand the results are fatal, judge. Positively and immediately fatal."

That night was a night of hell for him.

VI.

ALL the way along the line, hell was enfolding Judge Van Blount. Infinite times he lived and relived the bursting of that aneurysm. He made heroic efforts not to worry, for every hour of worry was another hammer-blow on his coffin; but with the specter of Duggan lurking in tenebrous backgrounds, ever his fears kept more terribly recurring. Obsessions gripped him.

Over and over again he visualized the scene, the hypothetical moment when Duggan should reappear. That scene presented itself in various guises; but always the central figure was a dark, crouching, sinister creature. Infinite times he saw the hand that had rested on the greasy Bible; yet now that hand held a gun—with notches on the butt.

Despite the fact that the notched gun lay in his own desk, the judge always saw it in Duggan's hand, aimed at his rotten breast; and always he could see the trigger-finger tightening, tightening—

"*I'm* going to get out of here," the judge decided, and began talking California to his wife. Yes, he would retire. At his time of life, was it not wise? They had money enough, and to spare. The law practice? Oh, he could sell that at a splendid figure. The Senatorship? Well, really, my dear, that seemed a little strenuous. A good long rest, California, orange-groves, roses and all that sort of thing. Don't you think, my love?

Gradually she thought so, too, and the judge began making plans. Yes, as soon as possible, he would retire. It got bruited about, and men shook their heads.

"Breaking up, the old man is," they whispered. "Odd, how he's gone to pieces of late. Seemed solid as a rock, but you never can tell. These 'solid as Gibraltar' fellows—"

The judge, meantime, had taken to carrying a gun and to having another in his desk at the office. That made three. And what was a little matter like the Sullivan law, a trifle like law-breaking, when his life was at stake? The drag of the gun in his pocket fortified, reassured him.

Meanwhile, events were shaping.

VII.

A WARM, and moonlight, night that was, of mid-May, three months from the time when Judge Van Blount had read the Duggan item; not the kind of night a man would choose to die in. Springtide is no time to die. Autumn and winter more gracefully yield themselves to death; but in the season of life renascent, who does not cling to "this little ball of mud we call the earth?"

Even fear shrinks to more modest dimensions, on such balmy tides of spring. And the judge was almost forgetting to be afraid. Not that he had abandoned his idea of retirement. No; his aneurysm, his blood pressure demanded that. And his practice had been sold. Arrangements were almost complete. In another week or so, the Van Blounts would depart. The judge felt glad his last days at Waterburg had really been pleasant, been almost devoid of fear.

After all—so many weeks having passed since Duggan had been paroled—what was there to be afraid of?

"The vagaries of a moron like that!"

said the judge to himself, more than half angry that he had allowed himself to be stampeded. "A low-grade defective like that, infirm of purpose as they all are! After all, I've been rather absurd."

The judge paused in his writing, to let memory for a moment have sway. All alone in his house the judge was—alone, save for Marie—and more than an hour he had been busy on the last chapter of his book: "The Fixation of the Criminal Type."

Dr. Potter had strongly warned him against finishing that book, but the judge had been set on it. Before going away, he had determined to get the manuscript into the publisher's hands. The paragraph he had just written, which had recalled Duggan to his mind, the judge thought rather well done. Now he reread a few sentences:

> Thus, summing up all data and considering the available evidence, our conclusion seems irrefragable, viz: that certain criminal types do exist, that they tend to perpetuate themselves, that the individuals comprising those types practically never emerge therefrom, and that suppression and elimination are the only socially safe technique in dealing with the problem. "Once a criminal, always a criminal" is a good, sound rule of thumb; and were this principle more generally adopted, with the abandonment of the mischievous parole and honor systems, and with the application of more stringent penalties for dereliction, society would soon rid itself of its greatest pest and parasite, the criminal.

The judge nodded with satisfaction as he finished reading.

"Very well put, I must say," he approved, "even if I did write it myself."

Now in a better mood than he had felt for some time, he was willing to admit to himself that he might have played a braver rôle in this Duggan matter. Perhaps the knowledge of that patrolman having received instructions to keep somewhat a special eye on his house helped revive the judge's spirits.

"I ought not to have let fears of that malefactor get the better of me," pondered the judge, sitting there at his desk under the drench of green-shaded incandescent light. Contemplatively he stabbed with his pen at the blotter. "I've known a good many officials to be threatened by desperate crooks, but only very rarely does one of the crooks make good his threat."

The judge turned his cigar in his mouth, and blew slow smoke.

"Criminals are often vindictive enough when entering prison," he said to himself, "but a few months behind bars usually take all that spirit out of them. A year or two of prison discipline breaks the worst. There is hardly a desperado who by the end of five years isn't meek and lowly—though no less criminal at heart. And eight years—pshaw! —what man could hold his nerve all that time to kill?

"And then, too," the judge pondered, "so many things are liable to happen to such fellows. Low grade types like that are always getting killed by jumping freight trains or trespassing on railways. And again, Duggan has probably been rearrested already somewhere. *He* couldn't keep free very long. I imagine by now he's either dead or in jail. And—"

A sudden, sharp trilling of the front door bell prickled the judge's nerves, just at this moment when he had convinced himself he ought not to have retired and planned on California. Never, these days, could that bell ring without startling him. Safe as he seemed there at his desk, with all the shades drawn so that he could not be seen either from the avenue or from the porch that skirted two of the library windows, he tensed a little at the sound.

He stopped drawing at his extremely fine cigar, and leaned back away from his manuscript, turning his chair toward the door that led from the front hall into the library. A vagrant blue wisp of smoke from the cigar-end mounted on the well-lighted, comfortable air of this home the judge was soon to leave forever.

"Who the deuce is *that* now?" thought the judge, laying down his pen.

Tat-tat-tat clicked Marie's trim heels along the hardwood floor of the spacious front hall. The outer door swung open with the ghost of a creak. Judge Van Blount listened; and as he listened, his pulses slightly accelerated. For a man with aneurysm, high blood pressure and—as Dr. Potter had very recently discovered—ar-

terio-sclerosis as well, even so slight an acceleration should be avoided.

Now the judge heard the rumble of a man's voice at the door, a few words from Marie, blurred and indistinguishable. And *tat-tat-tat* sounded the heels again after muffled reverberation of the closing door.

"Some one to see you, sir."

"Who is it, Marie? What's the matter?"

The girl—pretty as only they grow in County Clare—shook her head.

"He wouldn't give his name, sir. Said it didn't matter."

"Hmmm! What kind of a man?"

The judge's somewhat flabby right hand tightened on the chair-arm. He cast a fleeting glance at the desk-drawer where lay the gun.

"Oh—kind of a nice lookin' man, sir. He's dressed up real good."

"What does he want? Did he say?"

"No, sir, he wouldn't. Just said he only wanted to see you a minute. Said a minute or two 'd be enough. Sure, it must be some kind o' private business. He said you'd know him all right."

With jangled nerves Judge Van Blount half rose from his chair, paling a little. Then he sank back, with that same kind of gulp he had made when he had read the item about Duggan's parole.

"Tell him to go away!" he bade huskily. "I—I'm not at home for callers—for business, here. Haven't I told you not to admit strangers?"

"Sure, *I* didn't admit him. He come right in, before I could stop him!"

"Well, tell him to go away. Tell him to call—to-morrow—at my office."

The judge was sweating now; sweating and shivering.

"I did, sir, like you told me always to. But he said, no, he didn't have the time. Couldn't wait till to-morrow, sir. Said he was goin' to see you to-night—an' I guess, sir, he *is*, too. Sure, such a way he's got with him.

The judge advanced a quivering hand, and dragged his 'phone toward him. Terror glinted from his eyes, out through the round, shell-rimmed glasses. Those eyes, once implacable, were now those of a hunted creature.

He was just going to unhook the receiver and call:

"*Emergency! Police headquarters!*—" when the girl uttered a little gasp.

She stepped back, out of the way.

There in the library door appeared a man. A neatly-dressed man he was, clean too; one who rather gave the impression of a well-to-do mechanic.

Marie glanced up approvingly at him. "A nice lookin' man, sure!" was her thought. "An' what a way he's got with him!"

She and the judge both had impressions of a fresh shave, clean linen, a good tie; of eyes that looked straight out. But the judge saw more than Marie. He saw that the man held both hands thrust into the pockets of his square-cut coat. And now, as the man stood there, he heaved his shoulders with a slight swagger. Pride sat on his face, and happiness.

"Good evenin', judge, y'r honor!" he exclaimed. "Well, I'm here. It's me—Duggan!"

Judge Van Blount's jaw gaped. His cigar fell to the rug, unheeded. All the color drained out of his somewhat shrunken cheek, as tides from Fundy. His trembling hand left the 'phone. As he sagged a little backward, he raised that hand, repelling.

"No, no! Go away!" he quavered; and added a lie: "I've—I've called the police!"

Duggan laughed easily.

"'Scuse me, judge, but I don't believe it. I never heard a word out o' you, since I come into this house. Not a word 'bout the bulls. Nothin' but how you couldn't see me. But you *are* seein' me, ain't you? An' the cops—now, what 'd you be wantin' them for?"

He stood there still in the doorway, large of shoulder and half-quizzical, looking at the altered figure before and beneath the level of his eyes. The last time he had seen that figure, he had been obliged to look up at it; and it had been a very different figure, too, black-robed, pompous, florid. Not a quivering, clay-faced wretch with fear-pale eyes.

"*You* don't want no cops now, judge! I told you I'd come back, didn't I? Well, I have. Some come-back! Now—"

"Go—go away!" the judge croaked, making absurd and futile gestures. His eyes goggled at Duggan's right pocket, which hid a hand.

That hand seemed about to withdraw itself.

The judge made hardly two gestures of jerking open the desk, snatching the gun.

"Here! What the hell?" shouted Duggan, crouching as a bullet whopped the door-jamb. Splinters leaped.

Again the .38 belched. The glass of a bookcase beside the door exploded to hurled shards. One gashed Duggan's cheek. Acrid powder-stench fogged the air.

Judge Van Blount tried again, but could not even pull the trigger. He wheezed oddly, with writhen lips gone blue. His eyes resembled a cod's. Nothing is more unpleasant than a cod's eyes looking at you from a man's face, especially when that face grows visibly dusky-purple. Marie shrieked and ran.

The gun slid from relaxing fingers. It clashed to the hardwood floor beyond the run. The judge clutched at the desk, but could not hold it. Already he was journeying far.

His flabby muscles slackened. He crumpled forward like an empty gunnysack, lunged out of his chair and clawed the rug up.

But that clawing lasted only a second.

"What the hell?" repeated Duggan. "*What* the hell?"

Then his eyes focused on the gun, on the six notches gashed in the butt.

He plunged for it, snatched it to him.

"My old gun! Tryin' to croak me with my old gun!"

The crash of a kicked-in window whirled him around.

Glass flew. The shade jerked, ran up with a whack. In the long French window giving on the porch, a patrolman was covering Duggan.

"Stick 'em up, there! Up!"

Duggan dropped his gun and reached for the ceiling.

"Got *you*, all right!" exulted the officer. Holding Duggan, he kicked out more glass, burst into the library. The police gun never wavered as the patrolman strode over the dead judge, stooped, picked up the notched revolver. He slid it into his pocket and grabbed the 'phone.

As he put in a hurry call for the wagon, Duggan—hands still high—laughed heartily.

"You poor fish!" he mocked.

"Joke, eh?" demanded the officer, and slammed the receiver back. It's on you, though!"

Blood was crawling down Duggan's cheek as he retorted:

"No, on you. Ain't a scratch on *him*—an' look a' me bleed! An' the girl seen him tryin' to gat me—twice!"

"That's a good one!"

"It'll wash. You'll see."

"Cut it!"

"Oh, all right. But *I* should worry! Only thing as bothers me is I can't thank —him."

"What?"

"For my come-back. I *told* him I'd come back, an' I have. 'Twas him as made a model pris'ner out o' me—an' so they learned me a trade. I'm an A-One electrician, now. Some come-back, I'll say. I just blew in to thank him. But now—"

Duggan's eyes rested on the body of the man who had sought to be his enemy, but who—unwitting instrument of Fate—had proved his truest friend. And in those eyes, now steady with purposes of honesty and effort, smoldered sad brands of an immeasurable regret.

A Crown for Sale

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF THE QUEEN OF FLORANIA

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITTLE GRAND DUCHESS.

I FELT myself growing stiff with fright. Was it possible that King Peter was going to recognize me? Was this the beginning—his puzzled look, his talk of reminding him of somebody?

I answered him in French, making fun of him out of sheer nervousness. I told him all English girls spoke alike—much more so than the French. As we fell to speaking again in that tongue, the puzzled look passed from his face.

I invited him into the house. Tea was served. I was awkward and tongue-tied again, and he reverted to his usual manner, so bored under its outward politeness.

The others came back, the Princess de Chanterelle with Bunch and some young people I had asked to come to dinner informally and dance afterwards. I had had no idea that the king would be there. The princess had not expected him until the following day. I saw her eyes light up feverishly at the sight of him. I ought really to have been sorry for her—that hungry, excited look of uncontrollable joy. But I hated her for it. I felt that though King Peter had more self control than she, still he would give her back that look when they were alone.

I was forced to mention the evening's entertainment. The king said he would be delighted to be present and asked me to send him back in a car to the villa to change. The princess, of course, accompanied him. The girls and young men, who lived in Mentone, were already dressed for the evening.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 12.

I left them to amuse themselves and Bunch and I went to change.

She smiled at me quizzically as we stopped in front of my rooms.

"What about the dancing to-night, Liz?" she asked.

"I've a bad headache," I answered promptly. "Bunch, it's true. Oh, I *do* bore him so!"

"But Betty Fane didn't!" she said unscrewing her eyes and looking suddenly grave. "It positively amazes me that he doesn't know you."

So it did me, When I thought of how he had held me in his arms and kissed me under the trees in Hyde Park, how his voice had rung so passionately miserable in my ears. How could he not know that I was Betty Fane, the girl he said he loved, the girl he whispered to in that wonderful voice that made her forget everything else on earth?

I was awfully fussy over my dressing. I looked very pale, really ill. My maid had laid out the frock I had chosen, a dead white *peau de soie*, the skirt full and rather long, and stiffly bunched out on the hips. It had deep bertha of silver lace and a flounce of silver lace round the hem.

I never wore anything but pearls in those days and generally only one string. But that night the fancy seized me—I couldn't say why, it was a mad fancy—to wear that deep dog collar of blue-black sapphires that had given me such a strange sinister feeling when I examined it on my twenty-first birthday. It went with my engagement ring. As it was fastened round my neck, I seemed to hear those first sweeping dragging bars of the "Sable Night" waltz. I told my maid to fetch another larger and longer row of pearls besides my usual one. She scrutinized me with her sparkling black eyes.

"*Milady est ravissante ce soir!*" she exclaimed. "*Quel chic! Quelle originalité!*"

I saw the king's eyes rest on me with astonishment, as he arrived. Decidedly, there was a gleam of interest in his blue eyes. I felt myself flushing with shame. I had dressed myself up like a doll to attract his gaze.

"Dear Elizabeth," tinkled Laline de Chanterelle, "how wonderful you look! Is there a reception at the palace by any chance?"

How I loathed her ass-like tongue. She gave her question such a perfectly natural tone. The Prince of Monaco was in residence, and there *might* have been a reception. But she knew perfectly well that there was not. I felt ashamed and humiliated. I had over dressed myself. It was vulgar parading in those pearls and sapphires, worth a fortune before these other girls so simply dressed. The princess wore her favorite flesh pink *crepe de chine* with a gold, heavily-fringed sash, and golden slippers sewn with old paste, so that her feet looked like Cinderella's at the ball. She wore a lot of rubies too, but then her jewels seemed part of her, and she was a married woman.

From the very outset I was uncomfortable. Nothing could have given me back my poise that night. King Peter paid me his very first compliment as I went in to dinner with him.

"You look like an Infanta of Spain, by Valesquez," he said. "So black and white and gray—and your lips so red."

I flushed crimson and gave him such a stupid look that he laughed a little at my embarrassment.

"Wasn't that in the bargain, *milady?*" he whispered mischievously. "Not a single pretty speech!"

Oh, how my heart was bursting! What could I say? I knew he was only playing with me. He had no feeling for me—for Elizabeth Cleveland, who was to be his queen. He still thought me dull and heavy. Only—just for once I had dressed myself richly and put on costly jewels—most unsuitable to my age and position. In fact, I had forced his attention by a trick.

I was soon to find out for how little it counted.

After dinner the musicians arrived. The women went upstairs to titivate. The men were still in the dining room when I came down. I ran into the ballroom and spoke to the leader of the orchestra.

"I do not want you to play the 'Sable Night' waltz," I told him. I had heard it at every restaurant in Monte Carlo—

the hit of the whole of Europe it was that year. In France they called it "*Nuit noire.*"

I'm sure the man thought me crazy. He even protested.

"But milady, it is so much the fashion."

"I know," I said. "But I do not like it." I might have been King Peter himself the way I spoke.

The poor man looked piteous, but could say nothing. And this was Raoul, the leader of the most famous orchestra in France!

That night I felt I could not bear it.

As I went back, I passed through a big, airy loggia, marble-walled and floored and set about with palms and flowering trees. Though it was heated, the early March evenings were none too warm, and there were heavy white velvet curtains, drawn between the marble pillars to keep out drafts.

The smoking room was on one side, and from the door of it I heard footsteps and voices. They were the voices of King Peter and Lord Maurice Angell.

I was just running on, when I heard a name that made me stand still. The men could not see me. I was inside the curtains and they were outside, walking slowly round toward the ballroom.

"You know that little dancing partner of yours, sir, at the Flower Garden Club," Lord Maurice was saying in his deep, drawling voice. "Miss Fane—wasn't that her name? The one who was there such a short time."

I held my breath.

"Yes," said King Peter curtly. "Well?"

"Gad, what a dancer that was!" Lord Maurice went on. He was on very easy terms with the king. "I remember the two of you one night, dancing the 'Sable Night.' And a queer little thing, wasn't she? Almost a grotesque type—and yet devilishly attractive! What I was going to say was that I tried to get her to do some exhibition dances at Laline's fête. You know, you had to leave just before, sir."

"Yes," came Peter's voice again, sharp and staccato, not a bit encouraging.

"I thought I'd fixed it up," Lord Maurice went on in the dense, unheeding way of his kind, so utterly sure of himself. "The woman at the club was awfully keen. Laline was paying enormously. Jaime De Vasco was to be her partner. And, then, if you please, the little creature threw it up and her job as well. Sent a telegram—cool as you please! And nothing more was heard of her. I know that because I took the trouble to inquire."

"Why did you take that trouble, Maury?" asked the king.

"Oh, well, she caught my eye, you know. She must turn up again. Such a dancer as that. Shouldn't wonder if she'd got a job down here. Their other girl, Miss Honesty, went to Cairo. These girls pick up no end of money, I know."

There was a short pause. Then the king said:—"Miss Fane was a very good dancer. So was Miss Honesty."

That closed the conversation. Such a tone! He might have been saying—"Thus far and no farther!" Like King Canute to the waves. I could feel that Lord Maurice was abashed. They walked off together.

As for me, I leaned up against one of the pillars, and caught at the curtains and clenched my hand on it in a sort of rapture. Then King Peter still thought of Betty Fane. She had a place in his heart. He would not discuss her, even with his friend.

Of course, I disgusted him again about the dancing.

He asked me and I said my head ached too much. Honestly, I couldn't have risked it. Wooden though I seemed to be, I couldn't make myself wooden enough for that.

Know I looked ill. That was some comfort.

But I saw the gleam of interest that my appearance had aroused fade out of his eyes, as he went on to Laline de Chantere-lle.

Toward the end of the evening there was a demand for the "Sable Night" waltz. Somebody came over to me and asked me to tell the musicians to play it.

I shrugged my shoulders and said I was tired of it.

The king was near me at the time. I saw his face grow cold as he looked at me.

"You don't like the 'Sable Night'?" he asked me.

"I think it dreadfully overdone," I replied.

He was silent a moment. How little he knew that I felt what he was feeling—those breathless, mad, unforgettable moments!

Then he said, with a little cold laugh:

"I agree with you; it's horribly overdone."

And it seemed to me that I saw sheer dislike in his blue eyes.

Just before they left, the princess came to my side, as we left the supper room. She linked her arm in mine.

"My dear, how has he kept so long from Mme. Delsarte?" she whispered. "You won't have a chance to see him for a day or two now."

The fact was I did not.

I had charming notes from him each day, saying that he had, unfortunately, state business to attend to, and Baron Leomar and he had a private meeting with a certain very powerful statesman of another realm at Cannes, where the latter was staying. It was more convenient, from every point of view, to hold the meeting there.

There might or might not have been such a meeting, but I visualized Fay Delsarte's villa near Nice, and I raged in impotent fury and wallowed in jealous misery. *That* was what he had come to the Riviera for. Not to see me; not to see Laline, even, although she had a far greater hold over him than ever I would have. At least, he had loved her, if he did not love her now. They had memories; they were intimate. There was nothing between him and me. I laughed at myself when I realized how simple I had been. I had just thought of the princess as my only rival. I had never imagined that calm-browed, still-eyed woman who held him, mind and heart and soul, from whom he might flit in his lighter moments to sip at other flowers, but to whom he would always return.

No, Laline de Chanterelle was a fellow victim. I could have almost felt sorry for her but that I knew she hated me.

On the third morning, I received a note from the king, asking me to drive over to Nice with him to lunch with a relation of his, the very aged Grand Duchess of Ferrara.

He wrote in his facetious way, I remember, that the "old girl" was very exclusive. He believed she was about a hundred, and she had outlived all her relatives and never saw a soul but her ancient ladies-in-waiting and still more ancient dogs. But she wanted to see me.

We drove up behind Nice to an imposing château. All the while I was wondering, wondering where Mme. Delsarte's villa was. I knew it was above the coast—the princess had said vaguely between Monte Carlo and Nice.

King Peter drove himself in an open car and I sat beside him. Once I saw him look up to the hills on our right, and a half smile came and went in a flash over his face, and I felt it must be somewhere up there.

The old grand duchess was wonderful, very small and all white, hair, face, clothes, ermine wrap, pearls galore, and her tiny, exquisite hands blazing with diamonds. Her eyes were still as blue as the sea beneath her windows. She remembered my father as a boy, and said very nice things about him.

She was terribly frank. She had me alone with her for a little while after the meal.

"I hope you are not angry with me, my dear," she said. "It was I who suggested you to Leomar as Peter's bride. Do you think you have made a good bargain?" She chuckled as if she were consumedly amused.

I was mortified, but there was something so genuine about her that I could not take her words amiss.

"I was not obliged to consent, ma'am." I answered trying to be very calm.

"Of course not. That you did shows me that you have character. But I don't think a throne would tempt you. So there must be something else. Peter has lots of good in him. I have watched him from a child. He's a young rascal, of course, but then we women like rascals, don't we? Take a word from an old woman, child. Bear with him. Remember what his life

has been—no father or mother, a crowd of courtiers and sycophants. Spoiled, utterly spoiled by people whose lives are made and unmade by his smile or his frown. His father a first class villain, who left the boy a pauper. A nice position—a pauper on a throne!" And again she gave her wicked, chuckling laugh.

As I left, she stood on tiptoes and pecked at my cheek. I have not forgotten her lips to this day, so dry and old, like a bird's beak.

"I see signs," she said, "that my match-making will be a success!"

What signs she saw I did not know. King Peter had treated her in a humorous chaffing way that she obviously liked. To me he behaved just as usual. Surely the old lady must have noticed the constraint between us.

On the way back I thought about her words concerning King Peter. It must be very galling to have to marry a woman for her money. I tried to put myself in his place. No wonder our relations were so strained.

The grinding of the brakes nearly jolted me out of my seat. With horror I saw that we had run over a child—a little boy, lying on the ground just by one of the front mud guards. A woman with a baby in her arms was standing by, shrieking.

Quick as thought King Peter was out of the car. I scrambled after him. He picked up the boy, and dropping on one knee, propped him up. The mother continued to shriek. She was in such a state that I took the baby from her, afraid she would drop it. The boy had not really been hurt, only dazed by the shock. The wheel had not touched him. He crumpled up his brown face and began to howl. The mother clasped him in her arms, and they howled together. The baby that I held began to cry, too, adding its shrill pipe to the concert.

I had always loved babies, and it was a sweet brown mite, with such huge black eyes. I soothed it as best I could. I had quite forgotten King Peter in the excitement when I looked across suddenly and found his eyes fixed on me with such a queer gaze, a bit comic and yet so gentle and with a sort of inner sympathy. I found myself flushing, and looked hurriedly away.

The hubbub subsided. The woman realized at last that her child was uninjured. The little chap stopped crying, the king having proved to him that he was quite whole by gently pummelling him all over and then lifting him up and putting him into the car, when he gripped the steering wheel and laughed with delight. The woman took the baby from me. She was now all smiles, too, and so beautiful in her relief. They were of the poor peasant class, Italians from over the frontier. She wore a shawl over her head and the boy's feet were bare.

King Peter had his back to me. I saw that he was searching in his pocket. When he turned he was as red as a turkey cock, and all the humor and sympathy had gone out of his face. He was just an angry autocrat in a hole.

"I say," he said, "I wanted to give this woman something, but I haven't a *sou* on me. So stupid of me."

I bent my head over my bag and pulled out a hundred franc note. I didn't look at him as I handed it over.

The woman was overjoyed and showered blessings on us as we departed.

The flush was still on the king's face. His brows were drawn together in a sullen line. He raced along the road at breakneck speed.

I sat as far away from him as I could, feeling perfectly horrible. It occurred to me that perhaps he was sometimes short of actual money. It was a condition I couldn't even imagine. I felt suddenly wretchedly mean. Why hadn't I insisted on at once settling a certain sum on him, instead of merely paying that one debt and redeeming the jewels? The lawyers were squabbling over these settlements. It was sordid, and I hated myself. What did money matter?

My heart went out to him in a great rush. If only he had turned to me at that moment in sympathy, I should have burst out with the truth—that I loved him to distraction and that I was Betty Fane, of the Flower Garden Club.

But, as it happened, he did speak at that moment with a stiffness that froze my heart.

"I am very much obliged for your loan. It shall be returned to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

A QUARREL AND A VENTURE.

THE hundred francs were returned that night with a short note from the king saying that he would have to be away for a few days.

Life went on as usual, all the hollow gayety, the constant, restless passing from one amusement to another. Nothing in that world seemed stable and worth while to me but Bunch, who could be as gay as anybody, but who had her own resources as well, her books and her work and the charming and witty correspondence that she kept up with her regiment of friends in all parts of the world.

King Peter came back, and the Princess de Chanterelle at once took the opportunity to get a *tête-à-tête* with me.

"I'm sure he's been with Mme. Delsarte," she said in that confidential way that I simply loathed, because I knew she had not my interests at heart in the least. "He pretended he was going to Paris, but I know for a fact that he lunched at her villa yesterday. I simply *have* to tell you, Elizabeth. I think it's carrying it a bit too far. I put myself in your place."

"I daresay you mean it kindly," I answered, "but I wish you wouldn't talk about the king to me."

She opened her eyes in pretended amazement.

"I *can't* understand you. If it were I, I would much rather know than be made a complete fool of. I would *thank* anybody for telling me. One knows these things are done, of course, but under one's very eyes—it is disgusting!"

And in her fretful words I recognized her own heart fever. She was insanely jealous of Mme. Delsarte herself. She knew she had no cause to be jealous of me. But she wanted to make me unhappy, all the same. She hated me for being even the official bride of the king.

I wired to my lawyers to hurry up the settlements, and, if they could not, to place a certain sum of money at the disposal of King Peter at once. I told them to do it in the way they thought best, but it must be done immediately.

That afternoon, for the first time, I saw King Peter and Fay Delsarte together. They were driving in a closed car. Her white, luminous beauty was startling. He was leaning to her and talking in a most animated way. He did not even see me.

The next day I had a dinner party. There were several important people invited. Almost at the last moment the king excused himself in writing.

"Depend upon it she sent for him," whispered Laline de Chanterelle to me.

I raged silently. The next day there was a luncheon at the De Chanterelles. King Peter had not returned. Laline informed me that she knew for a fact he had been with Mme. Delsarte. Her brother had taken an American girl to see the strange, desolate rock village of Eze, and on one of the lonely mountain paths that led from her villa he had met the king and Mme. Delsarte in country clothes, looking as if they had been for a long walk.

King Peter called on me about six o'clock that same afternoon. I was alone—Bunch had had a touch of fever and was keeping her room.

"I much regret having seen so little of you these last few days," he began. "I have been very busy with matters relating to my country."

"So I understand," I replied. I was wrought up to a pitch of excitement. I had been nursing my indignation in secret. It was consuming me.

He must have caught my meaning, for he looked at me in almost disdainful offense.

"There are matters that have to be attended to," he said.

"No doubt," I retorted.

"I am afraid I have in some way displeased you," he said very quietly.

"Oh, no," I answered as airily as I could. "In what way could you do that?"

"I should be very sorry to do so."

"Why? Have you not constantly reminded me that there is nothing personal about our bargain? Purely business!"

I emphasized on the word business.

His face went white. His blue eyes were like a thunderstorm.

"I am aware, *milady*, that I am already under financial obligations to you—such as I can never repay, if you repent of your bargain."

"It is hardly for you to suggest that!" I flashed. I was half out of my mind.

He jumped to his feet and walked stormily to the window and out on to the balcony.

When he came back his face was set in lines of the most cynical politeness.

"You will not tell me in what way I have displeased you?" he asked.

His manner infuriated me. My temper was absolutely out of hand. I was shaking like a leaf.

"I do not like to be made a fool of," I said. The words rushed out in spite of my will. "I agree that ours is a business contract. But I will not suffer you to parade other women under my nose."

The polished French language made it sound so bitter, so acrimonious. And, spoken by a woman to a man, it was impossibly vulgar. At least, that was what the king's face conveyed to me.

"So that is it!" he said, and his smile made me more furious than ever. There was a touch of tolerance in it, as if he must perforce take account of my curious prejudices. "Who has been telling you things about me?"

"It is not necessary for anybody to tell me," I retorted. "I have eyes."

"You also have a very bad temper," he put in. "If you were calm, I do not think you would say such things."

His quietness, his slightly amused smile robbed me of every shred of self-control.

"You mean you thought I hadn't enough spirit," I raged. "You looked upon me as a dull, boring, wooden girl who happened to have enough money to set you on your feet again. I was to be a queen and that was supposed to be enough for me. A good bargain! To you I am just a handicap—a heavy one, an uninteresting lump, who can't even *dance!*"

I was suddenly overcome by my feelings. Breaking into bitter tears, I dashed out onto the balcony.

In the room behind me there was silence. I fought savagely with my emotion, and went back.

The room was empty. The king had gone.

I dined in my own rooms that night, all alone. At least, I had dinner served. I could hardly touch a mouthful. I cried half through the night. In the morning I was a wreck, and it was not until noon that I dared show myself to Bunch.

I found the Princess de Chanterelle with her. I was sure she looked at me very curiously. Had King Peter told her what had passed between us? The very thought froze me.

I did not mention the king. Neither did she until just before she was going, when she said lightly:

"His indefatigable majesty is going to the big public ball at the *Jetée Promenade* at Nice to-night. So my brother tells me. The king hasn't confided his intention to me."

"Are you going?" I asked.

"Oh, dear, no! It isn't the kind of dance for us, my dear Elizabeth. Perhaps you haven't heard of them. They are very free and easy. The whole town turns out. I don't think the king would care for our company at all. It's the kind of thing he adores—Bohemian and rather rowdy. I suppose it's only natural. And nobody has the least idea who he is."

She gave me a knowing look, as if implying that, of course, I should have to get used to these little idiosyncrasies of my royal spouse.

All the rest of the day I was restless. I had no special engagement and saw nobody. Bunch was still keeping her rooms. I heard nothing from King Peter.

Toward evening all my restlessness and misery crystallized into one longing so intense that it was not to be subdued.

To go to the ball at the *Jetée Promenade* at Nice. To be Betty Fane once more. To dance with King Peter. To hear the voice that never spoke to Elizabeth Cleveland. To meet him on equal terms again—young man and girl, loving life and laughter and music—and each other. Oh, wonderful

dream! "Impossible dream!" whispered reason and caution and convention. "No, not impossible!" cried love. All that was done with, I knew. The game had been played. It had been played too well. It had gone too far.

But my heart would have none of that. It could begin again. Impossible! What was impossible?

My father's photograph stood on my writing table. Round the frame ran a band of gold on which was engraved our family motto in Latin.

Sit mi praeter opes propositus labor.

My father had been fond of roughly translating it according to his own mind: "To achieve the best, strive for the impossible."

Was that what I was doing? Striving for the impossible? Could I never have both—a throne and love? But I didn't want the throne. I wanted love. But I could not have the king without the throne.

I made up my mind. I found out in the paper that the ball at the *Jetée Promenade* began at nine. The king would certainly not go until later. I looked up the trains and found a suitable one. I had a purpose in going by train instead of in a car. I ordered the car to take me to the station at nine, and said that I should not want to be met, as I would return in a friend's car.

I played with my food. Then I went to my bedroom and put on the little black dress of Betty Fane and the close fitting hat, and covered myself with a voluminous satin cloak. I took the precious wig out of its box, and with all the make-up necessary, I put it into one of those large shiny leather handbags that were so fashionable at the time.

I then went and told Bunch what I was going to do.

She was horrified, but saw that it was useless to protest.

"But, Liz, when will you get home—how?" she asked.

"I shall take a taxi from Nice," I answered. "Don't you see that will be quite simple? The driver won't see me in the dark.

"But how will you make yourself up?"

"In an empty carriage on the train. You know how empty those trains are. I must take the risk."

Bunch looked very grave.

"Liz, dear," she said, "something has happened between you and the king."

"Yes, we had a dreadful quarrel."

"Has this mad idea something to do with it?"

"Yes, Bunch. I simply must see him again—as Betty Fane. If I don't, I shall throw the whole thing up."

Bunch said nothing more.

Everything turned out to perfection. I found a whole compartment of the train empty. I had plenty of time.

At the station at Nice, Betty Fane stepped out of the train, hailed a taxi and was driven to the *Jetée Promenade*. The big glass building was brilliantly illuminated, so that from a distance it looked as if a great splash of starshine had fallen onto the sea.

There was a long line of cars drawn up outside the entrance. Crowds were pouring in.

I got out and walked. The distant sound of the music made my feet itch. I was filled with a nameless excitement. I was in touch with real life again, the only real life I had ever known.

And then a man coming in the opposite direction almost bumped into me, and as he apologized, he exclaimed:

"Why, if it isn't little Miss Fane! Of all the lucky meetings!"

I looked up, and, to my dismay, saw the tall form and handsome, lazy face of Lord Maurice Angell.

CHAPTER X.

CARNIVAL MADNESS.

WHAT a dreadful thing to happen! Here was a test with a vengeance. With Lord Maurice I naturally always spoke English. Was he going to recognize me? It had never occurred to me that I might meet him at the ball.

"Let me book up as many dances as possible, Miss Fane," he went on, "because another friend of yours is going to be here."

His meaning was unmistakable. His beautiful satiny gold brown eyes smiled at me. While I collected my wits I was very panicky. Lord Maurice was so slow in all his ways, looks and words that it gave me the feeling he must take in more than people who were quicker and more alert. And I had seen so much of him lately. I realized that he had never spoken to Miss Fane in his life, and that gave me courage. But I didn't dare disown that identity. The type into which I had transformed myself was too peculiar. The dull gold hair, the dark skin, my own black eyebrows and red lips.

Lord Maurice himself had referred to it in speaking to the king about me—"almost a grotesque type," he had called Betty Fane.

"I'm afraid I don't exactly remember who I am speaking to," I said in a slightly stilted and mincing accent and raising my voice to a slightly higher key, and trusting to luck that I didn't meet the king and Lord Maurice together.

"My name is Maurice Angell," he answered promptly, and he regarded me with undoubted interest. "I don't think we've actually met, but I saw you once or twice at the Flower Garden Club in London, and I tried to get you to dance at a *fête* at my sister's, the Princess de Chanterelle."

"Oh, yes!" I said. "I was so sorry I couldn't. I--I rather broke down just then"

"I trust you are perfectly recovered now."

"Oh, yes, thank you."

"Might I ask—are you here—professionally?"

"No," I answered, "not here. I am staying in the neighborhood for a few days. I came to the ball because I heard that De Vosca and Maria Solera will be here. It's so good for one to watch these great people."

"I'll wager you won't do much watching," he said. "And as to the 'great people,' personally I think you could give the Solera a mile start and then beat her at the post. And as to looks, I dashed well know which filly I'd put my money on!"

This was accompanied by a languishing look from his splendid eyes. I didn't know whether I was more disgusted or amused. It was an experience to hear this lazy, handsome, spendthrift Guardsman talk to a girl he didn't know, belonging to a different walk in life.

We were making our way into the fairy-like building.

Lord Maurice made as if to pay for my ticket, but I would not allow him to. My one idea was to get rid of him and to lose myself in the crowd. I was perfectly certain that if we stayed long enough together he would find me out.

I quickly said that I must go and take my things off.

"Do get in a dance or two with me before your friend comes," he said urgently.

"I don't quite understand," I answered, my heart beating like a drum.

"Have you forgotten your partner of the Flower Garden Club?"

"Oh, no—certainly not. That gentleman danced divinely."

"I understand you were informed who he was?"

"Yes," I said.

"Did you know he was here?"

"I had heard that he was staying not far away."

"He is coming here to-night, I happen to know. He will want to dance with you, I'm sure."

"I shall be honored."

"Of course, you will not give his *incognito* away to anybody?"

"Most certainly not. I know nobody here, anyhow."

"I suppose you have a good engagement at the moment? Are you at Cannes, or Mentone, or San Remo? I know you're not at Monte Carlo, because I should have seen you."

"I'm going back to England almost immediately," I answered. "I haven't made any definite plans yet."

"Wise girl!" he said. His familiarity was not especially offensive, but it made me realize more than ever how difficult the the paths of the Betty Fanes of the world must be, and how warily they must tread them.

"You know how not to make yourself

cheap, I say," he added. "If our friend doesn't turn up and collar you, you must come and have a slap-up supper with me at the Maison Lamieux. That 'll show you a bit of life."

I at last got rid of him and went to the cloak room. I spent more than a quarter of an hour there, pretending to fuss with my hair and face. I hoped I might miss Lord Maurice in the crowd when I got to the ballroom.

As a matter of fact, I did. He had not waited for me, for which I was devoutly thankful. And almost the first person I saw was King Peter. He came toward me, shouldering his way through the crowd. His face was alight; his blue eyes sparkled and danced. The band had just struck up, and in his autocratic way he put his arm round me without a word, and we whirled off.

"I never thought this could happen again, Betty," he said. "I tried to tell myself I was forgetting you. What an idiot! As if one could—any man. Betty, say you're glad to see me."

I don't suppose I needed to. As our eyes met he held me a little closer, and there was the sound of sudden anguish in his voice.

"Oh, Betty, Betty, this is going to hurt! It's heaven—holding you in my arms, looking into your lovely eyes, hearing your sweet voice. And then—we shall have to go back to the world. Oh, Betty, your poor Peter has missed you so!"

"Poor Peter!" I echoed. A dream atmosphere seemed to infold me. I truly seemed to become Betty Fane, the little dancing instructress who, by the irony of fate, had fallen in love with a king. We danced and danced and danced. We were completely lost in the crowd. I had never been in one of those vast public ballrooms, where the dancers were numbered by the thousand. There was fever in the scented air; the lights glittered like myriads of diamonds; the women's dresses made a kaleidoscope.

Presently, paper streamers of brilliant reds and greens and blues and confetti in every imaginable color began to be thrown about; the men were served with grotesque noses and mustaches, and the women with paper caps and fans and little whisks. Shrill whistles were blown; there was a carnival madness about.

I wondered what his ministers would think if they saw the King of Florania with a paper fez on his head and a brilliant orange colored mustache, throwing himself with all the abandonment of a schoolboy into these revels, sharing their rowdy fun with half the *bourgeoisie* of Nice and a good few people not nearly as respectable. Peter was quite transformed. It was as if he said: "For a night let us be children! Let us play! Let us think of nothing but fun! Let us forget there is such a thing as school!"

I think I was almost delirious with happiness—joy of being alone with him among that huge crowd. I know I laughed, I sang, I shouted. My feet seemed hardly to touch the floor. They grew wings on that night, did my feet. And so did my heart grow wings.

I forgot everything, even the shadow of the pale, calm beauty of Fay Delsarte. Certainly she had no place in that crowd; one could not have imagined her there. But I—I felt that I belonged there; that I was part and parcel of that wild life; that it was the only place where I wanted to be.

During a brief interval I mentioned having seen Lord Maurice.

"Yes," said Peter royally. "I sent him about his business. I didn't want him knocking about. He'd have wanted to dance with you. He told me you were here. Maury is a good sort, but I can't share you with any one, my Betty girl."

Then came the first bars of the "Nuit Noire" waltz. The great throng, with one accord, swung into the rhythm. They danced it quite as rapturously as in England, only they did not sing the refrain. The great orchestra made the music throb and laugh and shiver with more passion perhaps than the English musicians. It was almost painful, the wail of its sadness, the ring of its gayety—the madness of both.

I was hardly conscious of my feet—of anything around me. When it was over, the tears were streaming down my face.

" Betty," whispered Peter tenderly, lovingly, despairingly, " that can never happen again."

I was so distraught that I laughed aloud, almost in hysteria. I thought of myself, in my own ballroom, forbidding Raoul's orchestra to play the " Nuit Noire " waltz. I thought of the king's cold look of distaste as he agreed with me that it was overdone.

" Betty, it's too much for you," Peter whispered. " Come out of this stuffy room. We'll go and sit by the sea."

We went out of the ballroom. I had no notion of the time, but knew it must be getting late. I had made up my mind not to stay long after midnight. As we walked across the big vestibule, the air coming from outside struck chill. The king told me to go and get my cloak, and I obeyed him. He waited for me, and we went out onto the great terrace of the restaurant, where crowds were sitting. It was not really cold, and dancing never overheated me, as it does some people. An orange moon hung low over the sea. The air was full of the faint fragrance of the oleanders that stood about in tubs.

Peter found a table in a corner, shaded by plants, with the marble parapet of the terrace on one side. He sat with his back to the crowd, very close to me, and he took my hands and bent and covered them with kisses.

My heart stood still. I tried to take my hands away.

" Don't! Don't! Let me," he whispered. " I've been starving for this!"

So as not to betray myself I had to be willfully artificial.

" But you mustn't!" I said. " I—I have no place in your life."

" You have the only place in my life!" he retorted.

It sounded like a groan.

" No, no. You are engaged to a great lady."

" A great lady—yes!" He gave a bitter laugh.

With what a mixture of misery and joy I heard it!

" But you are engaged to her. You are going to marry her," I persisted.

" I can only think of you, my Betty."

" And I must think of her. Is she not a great lady?"

" Yes, yes, of course," he said. His voice was testy now. " But don't talk about her. Betty, her life is laid in an altogether different sphere—"

" From mine?" I interrupted.

" Yes, of course. Her world is a different one. It is my world. She could never come to a place like this and enjoy herself. Men can do it, but women can't. She is always just what she is."

" Is she not nice?"

" Of course she is nice—awfully nice. She will never do anything wrong. She will be always correct and in the picture. But, as far as I am concerned, she might be made—of wood. Oh, Betty, it is wrong of me to say that! Your sweet eyes tell me it is wrong. She is everything she ought to be. And she will be a queen.

" Betty, don't you see, she is not the woman for me? She might be an angel, but she isn't the woman for me. She is heavy and awkward and she has too much money, and she can't dance! Oh, but that's wrong of me again! I am taking her money, Betty. Think—what degradation! What will you think of me now? I am selling myself; I have to. Kings have to marry for such ugly reasons. I think throughout history they have had to. Is it any wonder that it is the women kings have loved ' on the side ' who have left their stamp in the world?"

I sat silent; all the inner fiery hopelessness was eating me up.

" But, Betty," he went on, and his voice was like a warm and healing breath, " you are not a girl any man could love ' on the side.' It couldn't be done. You are everything or nothing. If only I wasn't a king, Betty! I would be any other man if I could—one of these musicians here—and I could marry you, and we would have a little home. Think of it, Betty! Our little home!"

My heart sang. How I wanted to burst out with the truth! But I couldn't. There was something that could not be overcome. He spoke of Elizabeth Cleveland as belonging to his world. She was what he expected her to be—his queen. He asked nothing

more. If he found out I was Elizabeth Cleveland and Betty Fane, he would never forgive me. His bride must not come to such places, laugh and dance and shout and wear paper caps and sit with him in the moonlight, sipping iced drinks. No—he would never forgive her. His heart might forgive, but his pride never would.

I was caught in a trap.

"But I am not a musician," said Peter disconsolately.

In my overwrought state I laughed again. It sounded so ridiculous—the King of Florania deploring the fact that he was not a musician in the orchestra at the *Jetée Promenade.*

Peter laughed, too.

"You are right, Betty. We must be gay about it. We can't help ourselves. We have had to-night. That's what I love about you so—you are so merry; you take things just as they come. I suppose it's because you are free. Oh, Betty, how I wish I had your freedom! All the magic in the world in your little feet—free to pick and choose and go where you like! Why, if I had to earn your living, I couldn't do a thing—except perhaps drive a car."

"I think," I answered demurely, "you might join me as a dancing partner, Peter!"

"What a glorious idea! Then you could never dance with anybody else."

After a short period of silence he asked suddenly:

"Betty, have you ever had a lover?"

"No," I answered simply.

Another silence, and then another question:

"Betty, how would you like to go to Florania?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Of course, it could be managed. We have some dancing clubs in my capital. Oh, Betty, how wonderful it would be if you had a little flat on the big shady boulevard by the side of the Central Canal, and a job at the Osteria Club, or better still at the Pavilion Vert outside the city. I could come there from time to time. But we could meet at other times—"

He broke off, and his eyes flamed into mine out of the softly lighted gloom. His voice was harsh. "Betty, what do you say?"

He leaned nearer and gripped my hands. He leaned nearer still and I felt his breath on my face and then his lips burning my throat.

I gave a choked cry. He drew back. His voice came gently, laden with bitter regret.

"No, Betty, it wouldn't do. It's a dream—that's all. I couldn't have you so near me. It would drive me mad. All or nothing with you, my sweetheart."

"Peter," I whispered, "you are very dear."

"I am a sentimental idiot," he retorted. "And a fool! I actually thought I was forgetting you."

"You will!"

"Never, Betty, never. Listen—where are you staying?"

"Quite close."

"Alone?"

"No; with friends."

He looked at his watch.

"I shall have to be going soon. Can I see you home?"

"No, thank you. I shall be quite all right."

"I haven't long over here. I shall have to go back to my country. We must have one day before I go—one whole long day together, Betty. You can't say no. I will drive you up into the mountains. We will go into Italy, and have lunch at a little wayside albergo, and wander about. Now which day?"

I was disturbed. I had never been with him except in artificial light, and the night darkness outside. How could I risk a whole day in his company in the strong Riviera sunshine?

I tried to make some excuses, but he pleaded and argued and finally commanded. And I wanted to go so much.

We arranged it. On Friday—that was two days hence—I was to meet him up by the observatory on the Corniche Road.

"I don't want anybody to see you," he explained. "I expect you're quite well known in your way. I don't want people to say that I am taking you about. The world

is so disgusting. They could never understand a love like ours, my Betty girl."

My heart was going like the engine of a racing car. His thoughtfulness made me want to cry. How utterly different he was from the cynical young man I had quarrelled with only yesterday! And with that memory came back the image of Fay Delsarte, and I was miserable again.

But I must have that one day. No one should rob me of that. The long wonderful day alone with Peter in the mountains.

I made up my mind to wire again to my lawyers about the settlements—to increase the sum to double as much as had been suggested. I felt I had dealt so meanly by him. Everything I had I wanted to pour out at his feet.

And I grew cold at the thought that I might lose him when he knew the truth.

We left shortly afterward. There was a car waiting for him. I stepped across the road to the brilliantly lighted square where the taxis were lined up for hire. In my ears sounded the king's last words, passionately whispered: Betty, my only love, good night!"

I gave the driver of the first car on the road the address of my villa. He grumbled at the distance and named an extortionate sum, which I agreed to pay.

I did not know the time, but had a feeling it was fairly late. The moon was high in the heavens, no longer orange-colored, but a brilliant orb of dazzling silver light, illuminating the velvety blue darkness like a giant lamp.

I felt drowsy, and soon after we started my head fell back, and I must have gone to sleep.

I think I dreamt of Peter, and that he was high up on a mountain top and that I was trying to get to him. But it was all ice, hard and slippery and cold, and I couldn't make any headway, and slid back as soon as I tried to take a step. And he was calling me, calling me in a voice of despair, and the moon looked down from the heavens with the calm, white, luminous face of Fay Delsarte.

And then I lost my footing and fell hundreds—thousands of feet. And I was dashed on to some rocks with terrific force, and the whole world was blotted out in inky darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

MY MOST SOLEMN WORD.

"LADY CLEVELAND! It is *you!*" I heard those words coming from a great distance, as I struggled back to consciousness.

And the voice that spoke then was the soft, drawling voice of Lord Maurice Angell, made sharp by amazement and shock.

I stirred and put out my hands to feel what was beneath me. It was the solid earth—the road, in fact—the Corniche Road. I was sitting on the road, propped up against a low wall, and Lord Maurice Angell stood before me with a powerful headlight in his hand by the light of which he was examining my face with eyes of blank surprise.

Quick as thought my hand went to my head. It was bare—and my golden wig was no longer on it. All I felt was my own straight dark hair.

Light burst in on me. There had been an accident. My fall through the darkness in my dream had been the shock of some collision.

I tried to struggle to my feet. In those first moments I did not know whether I was injured or not. Lord Maurice helped me up.

"You are unhurt," he said. "What a relief! You can stand!" And then he gazed at me again in a ludicrous kind of way and ejaculated:— "Lady Cleveland!"

I said nothing, and he murmured: "You are Lady Cleveland, and not Miss Fane."

"How did it happen?" I asked him.

"Your taxi came into collision with the car I was in. It belongs to the Duke of Croyton, who was driving me home. He has gone for a doctor. Your taxi was badly smashed, and I sent the driver back to attend to his own injuries. He was nastily cut about the head. I recognized you at once—as Miss Fane. You were unconscious. It lasted so long I got frightened, and I took off your hat to see if I could find out

if your head was injured, too. Then I saw that you wore a wig and it was all on one side and there was dark hair underneath. I pulled off the wig, still worried about your head—and, of course, I saw who you were."

"No one was here with you?"

"Not a living soul, on my word of honor! The duke had gone for help."

I realized that there was only one thing to do.

"Lord Maurice," I said, "I have used this disguise for purposes of my own. I cannot explain them. You are a gentleman, and I put you on your honor not to let a living soul know what you have found out. Have I your word?"

"Of course, you have it, Lady Cleveland. My most solemn word of honor." His voice was lazily gentle as usual. "And I'm dashed sorry I have found out if it causes you any inconvenience. But may I say the disguise is absolutely marvelous. I should never have known you. To think that I was actually talking to you to-night! I suppose his majesty knows, by the way?"

"The king doesn't know," I answered. "The king must not know."

Lord Maurice whistled.

"He thinks you are really Miss Fane?"

"I have told you, Lord Maurice, I can't explain."

"And Laline?"

"Your sister must not know, Lord Maurice. Nobody—nobody. Please, please, understand that!"

"I do understand," he said. His manner was very sympathetic. "I am quite sure you have the very best of reasons. And the disguise is so wonderful that I can hardly think of anything else. And—" he suddenly burst into laughter, low and infinitely amused. "I see," he said—"how awfully clever you've been—you've never once danced with the king as Lady Cleveland! That little bit about the 'Sable Night' waltz at your place the other day! *Overdone,* you said it was! And you didn't like it! And to-night I was watching you dancing it with the king at the *Jetée Promenade!*"

I felt myself growing red in the darkness, and told him that all this was very painful to me. He apologized humbly. I said I had to get home at once. The Duke of Croyton had not returned. The taxi was smashed up down the road, the driver had gone. I asked Lord Maurice where we were, and what time it was.

And, as luck would have it, it turned out that we were less than a mile from my villa. I determined to walk, and Lord Maurice accompanied me. We did not meet the duke—more luck!

I slipped into the villa by the garden door of which I had the key.

It was nearly two o'clock. I didn't disturb Bunch. I felt stiff and sore all over, but I had had a very lucky escape. I was so tired that I couldn't worry, and I slept like a top.

The next morning I had to make a clean breast of it to Bunch. I was crazily frightened. She was not encouraging.

"I'm sorry it's Maurice Angell," she said. "I somehow don't trust him."

"But, Bunch," I put in, "he's a gentleman. And he's given me his word."

"He's a gentleman all right," she admitted. "We will leave it at that."

She sat with her eyes screwed up for some moments.

"It seems to me you've gone in off the deep end, Liz," she said presently. "You'd better tell the king."

"Bunch, I can't! Nothing will induce me. You don't understand. Darling Bunch, even *you* can't understand!"

"Well, how long is it to go on?"

"I heard last night that the king is going back to Florania very soon."

"Who told you?"

"He did."

"Oh! Well, that will give us breathing time." She looked at me in her straight way.

"Liz, are you in this so that you can't get out of it? Up to your neck?"

"Up to my eyes, Bunch," I answered, with a frivolity I was far from feeling. "Or, rather, over the top of my head."

"There's nothing to be done, then," she admitted. "We must keep an eye on Maurice Angell and his sweet sister—that's all."

I knew, although Bunch did not say so, that Laline was the real danger in her eyes as well as mine.

King Peter sent a note after luncheon to ask if he might call in the afternoon.

I had not seen him as Elizabeth Cleveland since we had had that ugly scene. I felt frightfully nervous, but I was quite determined to control myself. Hadn't he told Betty Fane that I might be made of wood? Well, I'd be wooden enough to suit his description. I put on a white lace frock and a large hat with a floating veil.

Just before the king was due to arrive, the taxi driver from Nice turned up, his head a mass of bandages. I paid him his fare and gave him a handsome present and bundled him off as soon as possible. I thought the butler looked at him rather suspiciously. I was terrified lest through some freak of Fate the king should arrive and question the man in his unconventional way.

This flustered me so that I was shaking with nervousness when the king did arrive. It was another danger that that taxi driver knew where I lived, and could, of course, easily find out who I was. I had already learned that, although virtue and charity and even genius might, money could never be hidden under a bushel.

I saw at once that King Peter was in a mood I had never encountered before. He looked solemn and his voice was stiff. His manner I could only describe as being embarrassed. If I could disguise myself so that he didn't know me by putting on a wig and speaking another language, he certainly could do it without any adjuncts at all. It was impossible to believe that this was the mad, merry boy, the sad, ardent lover of last night. It came to me with a pang of sheer agony that he had played the lover to so many women that he was quite perfect in the part.

We conversed as usual, in French. After one or two very perfunctory conversations in English, he had evidently come to the conclusion that French was more suitable to our stilted and formal intercourse.

"I am sorry to say that I shall have to leave for Florania on Sunday," he began. "There are matters that need my attention, and also the spring maneuvers will shortly commence. I shall not be able to return to England until the end of April."

I expressed suitable regret. We were in the garden, sitting in chairs by one of the ponds that was surrounded by a broad band of scarlet salvias, almost painful in their violent red under the deep blue sky. Bunch had come out for a few moments and gone away again, saying she would return with the tea.

The king talked of the weather and his luck at the tables, and then, very hurriedly, said in a voice almost hostile with awkwardness:

"I have heard from my men of business. You have been much too generous to me. These settlements are far in excess of anything I could have expected."

"Please," I interposed, "I would so much rather we didn't talk about it."

"I know," he said. "But I can't help it. My position is—difficult."

"As difficult as mine," I put in calmly. It was hard to keep calm—a gigantic effort. His voice of last night rang in my ears—"I am selling myself."

He got up and walked up and down, stood by the edge of the pool, lit a cigarette, and came back to me.

"Do you repent of your bargain?" he asked. "I behaved abominably the day before yesterday. I ask your forgiveness. It was unpardonable. If you want to call it off, there is still time. It can be done. I—I realize how little you gain, how much you give. I could never live a life that would please you. We should be two figureheads—that's all, forced into intimacy despite ourselves, because it would be expected of us, because it would be our duty. No one realizes it more than I do."

"You mean," I said slowly, "that you would always claim the right to live your own life?"

"I would have to."

"And I?"

"Ah!" He shrugged his shoulders.

I laughed.

"That would be another story."

He looked at me with immense gravity.

"I do not want you to marry me under

false pretences," he said. "I think perhaps you did not quite understand all that it meant. I feel I am taking a mean advantage of you."

Despite everything, his words were sweet to me, and so was his new manner. I could not help feeling that behind this new solicitude for my feelings was his love for Betty Fane.

"What do you say?" he went on.

"I—I don't know," I answered.

"You will have time to think, when I am gone. Think very carefully. I will restore all the money you have—advanced to me. If you wish it, I will arrange everything. A suitable explanation can easily be found. I—I can't help feeling that I am not playing the game, as you say in English."

My heart beat faster and faster.

"Yes," I said, "I will let you know. Of course I would have to be very certain that I couldn't stand the life. Everything is arranged. It would be very awkward for everybody."

"Of course. But you must not let that stand in your way."

I could see that he was relieved, all the same. I supposed the money counted a great deal with him.

"To-morrow," he said, rising as Bunch came over the brilliantly green grass, followed by servants with tea. "I shall, I am afraid, have to be absent all day. The King of Maronia is in Cannes and has asked me to dine quietly with him. There is no party, as he is here for his health which is very feeble."

"Oh, yes," I said. "Then we shall not see you until Sunday. You will lunch here? Unless you could lunch to-morrow? I could not help that seemingly guileless question.

"I am afraid not," he answered hastily. "I fear I must decline. I could see him casting about for an excuse. At last he said very lamely: "The King of Maronia has, in fact, asked me to spend the day."

But I knew better. He was engaged to drive Betty Fane into Italy. They were to spend together the last wonderful day. And, as I poured out the tea, and handed him a cup, I wondered he did not notice how my hand shook. I wondered how it was he did not know by some inner knowledge that it was that hand he had covered with such burning kisses only a few hours ago.

CHAPTER XII.

HOLIDAY!

THAT evening there was a formal dinner at the De Chanterelles. I sat on the prince's right hand; King Peter on the princess's. I was almost afraid of meeting her wonderful eyes, dreading to read in them that her brother had betrayed me. The fact that Bunch was not quite sure of Lord Maurice's trustworthiness filled me with insecurity. She knew the world so well; she was such a good judge of men. The moment the princess knew, the king would know. The thought grew to a panic during dinner. What would be the end?

When we were in the drawing room afterwards—there were five other women present—the princess took me aside.

"Have you heard the King's latest?" she asked, with that affectation of sympathy that made me rage inwardly. "He has brought over that dancing girl from London—do you remember the one who was going to dance at my fête for the hospital and then threw it up at the last minute. Miss Fane—she calls herself. Of course, King Peter used to dance with her all the time in London. He was at the *Jetée Promenade* with her last night."

How I longed to ignore her malevolent gossip, but I couldn't.

"Did your brother tell you?" I asked.

"No. Monty Govan—that funny-eyed, white-haired man who sat opposite you. He is a very old friend, and really a pet. He saw them. He said they were dancing like two wild things. And then they sat out for ages on the terrace in a dark corner. I don't even know whether Maury went to the ball. I thought he was going, but he didn't say anything about it this morning."

So Lord Maurice hadn't given me away. I suddenly remembered Mr. Govan. His face had been puzzling me during dinner.

Of course, he was the elderly, white-haired gentleman I had danced with as Betty Fane at the Flower Garden Club, the one who was so energetic and so lacking in the sense of music and who talked to me so nicely about his daughter in the Paris convent school. I had a momentary panic, but, of course, there was no chance of his recognizing me. It was strange that he had remembered Betty Fane.

Later on there was music. Lord Maurice made his way to my side during an interval. King Peter was talking to the Spanish Ambassador to France. Lord Maurice asked me to come for a stroll in the grounds. Of course I went. I had to hear what he had to say.

"I wanted you to know that it's perfectly all right," he said. "I've fixed everything up. No one will ever hear of that little accident."

"The Duke of Croyton?" I asked.

"I've fixed him up."

"Didn't he know who it was—in the car?"

"No, no. I only told him it was a young lady I knew. He never even had a real look at you. After you had gone in, I waited for him on the road, and when he came along with the doctor, I told them that you were all right and had gone home. They hadn't the faintest suspicion. You needn't worry the least little bit."

"I am—very grateful," I said, with something of an effort.

"Oh, but what nonsense, Lady Cleveland!" he retorted. "As if it wasn't the greatest pleasure to be of the least little bit of use to you."

"You are very kind, Lord Maurice," I murmured.

Really, I felt an awful worm. Bunch must be mistaken. He was behaving awfully well. As I looked at him in the moonlight, his golden-hazel eyes were so candid and kind, and his handsome fair face expressed only chivalrous concern. I was ashamed of my suspicions.

"I only want you to look on me as your friend," he said.

"I am sure," I answered warmly, "you have acted like a very good friend."

"That more than repays anything I could ever do." These words were accompanied by the very frankest of frank smiles, "It's a bargain, isn't it? We are pals."

He held out his hand, and I put mine in it.

"And don't forget what a pal's for," he went on. "It's to help his pal, not to ask questions."

I felt more wormlike than ever. There was no doubting the sincerity of his manner. I felt quite safe and happy again.

I told Bunch that I was sure she was mistaken about Lord Maurice, when I got home. She merely answered that she was glad to hear it and she hoped I was right.

I had told her about the next day and my excursion with King Peter as Betty Fane. I could see that she hated the idea, but she had given up arguing with me, knowing that I was determined.

"If I could only see what good it can do," she said, screwing up her eyes.

"Oh, Bunch, I don't know," I answered, "but to-morrow is the last day—the end. After that Betty Fane disappears off the map."

"And Elizabeth Cleveland?" she asked significantly.

"Oh!" I laughed nervously. "I don't know, Bunch. Perhaps Elizabeth Cleveland will not marry a king after all."

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply.

But I could not explain then that King Peter had practically offered to release me. My whole being was in a state of hopeless confusion. I felt that everything was trembling in the balance; my whole life, my entire world. A breath on one side of the scale or the other—and what would happen? Either a heartbreak, or Paradise.

Our plans were all made. I was going to transform myself into Betty Fane in my own room, with Bunch's aid. This could be done quite early in the morning. Then I would wrap myself up in a big cloak, and we would both slip out of the house into the gardens and down the rocky staircase to our little beach. A few hundred yards away from the villa there was a narrow track up some rocks and across an olive plantation to the road. Bunch would take my cloak back to the house and give out that I had gone to spend the day with

friends. We knew several people with villas along the coast. There would be nothing remarkable about it, except my early start, which could be explained by the taking of a long excursion. I would then catch the nine o'clock train to Nice, which would get me there in plenty of time for my appointment.

All was ready. I had bathed and dressed and was arranging my hair very flat to go under the golden wig, when the door opened and Bunch came in.

She was fully dressed and carried a letter in her hand.

"I brought this myself, Liz," she said. "It may interfere with your plans. I was downstairs when a messenger came with it from a yacht in Monaco Harbor."

She seated herself in a chair while I opened the letter and read it. I cried aloud in vexation.

"Oh, Bunch, how supremely beastly! It's from Prince George of Hillenland, you know. He's on Mr. Van Brittenden's yacht, and they leave at midnight, and he wants to come to see me. Oh, dear, what a positive nuisance! What ever shall I do?"

"You can't very well refuse, Liz," said Bunch in her unruffled way.

"He suggests lunch," I went on, "but that's impossible. Silly old George, what does he want to butt in like this for?" I was peevish about it, I must admit. And nobody ever felt so inhospitable and unfriendly. Prince George was a very old friend. We had played as children together. My father had been an intimate of the royal family. He was as nice a boy as could be, a romp and a tease—something like a brother to me. But I didn't want him to-day. Not to-day of all days in the whole year!

But, as Bunch said, how could I refuse? Bunch said she was afraid I must stay at home. I said nothing would induce me to stay at home. I was going with King Peter if I died for it. I just felt I *must* go. Nothing would have held me back. Children feel like that when they want to do a thing very badly, and people in love feel that way. I don't know if any other people do.

I told Bunch I'd ask George to dinner instead, and she was to send the note to the yacht as soon as I had gone. Eight o'clock dinner. That was it. A splendid idea. That gave him four hours before the yacht sailed. And he was to bring his host with him and anyone else on board. Bunch must read his answer and make all arrangements. I was going. I was going at once. Nothing would keep me from going.

She implored me not to be late home. I told her she needn't worry. King Peter was dining with the King of Maronia, in Cannes, and he would have to get back in good time. I suppose he really had made that engagement although I knew that he was not going to spend the day with his majesty, as he had told me. The King of Maronia was his godfather, I knew. He had sent me a particularly charming letter of congratulation on my engagement.

I scribbled the note to Prince George and then finished my toilet with Bunch's skillful aid. Everything went off perfectly. Nobody saw me go out into the garden. I left everything in Bunch's capable hands, caught my train, and took a taxi from Nice station up to near the observatory, where I got off, paid the man, and watched him drive away with a beating heart, knowing that before many minutes had passed King Peter would arrive.

How King Peter of Florania was entertained at dinner by the King of Maronia and how the Countess Cleveland entertained Prince George of Hillenland at that same repast.

Such might be the fanciful-ironical title, in Boccaccio style, of this chapter of my life.

King Peter's car came swinging round a corner, mounting the hill, pulling up by my side as quietly as a snake slides through the grass.

He sprang down, his blue eyes shining, that happy, schoolboy truant playing look on his face.

"Betty girl," he said, his voice bubbling with laughter and love, "you are an angel to be so punctual! And how lovely you do look."

I flushed, as I always did when he spoke to me in that voice of love.

"How do I look?" I asked, with a sort of nervous giggle.

"Oh, so cool and sweet and small, and a bit tigerish as well," he laughed. "That's your yellow hair and brown face, Betty, and your queer eyes that aren't like any eyes I've ever seen before. But I do love your pale green dress and your little dark green jacket."

I laughed out of sheer happiness that he should notice my clothes. As a matter of fact it was a little Paris arrangement that I had on—almond green georgette, with a lot of tucks to the skirt, and a short coat of olive green cloth with gold buttons, and a little hat of cocks' feathers, all shimmering green and black, hanging down on either side of my face.

Then he seized my hands and danced me round in the middle of the road. Fortunately, there was nobody in sight.

"Holiday—holiday—holiday!" he cried. "Just a day stolen, do you understand, Miss Fane? Stolen! The very nicest thing in the world. I've a very important engagement to-night."

"So have I," I put in demurely.

"Have you, indeed? Oh, dear! Dancing? And where, may I ask?"

"No, it's private," I informed him. "I have to be back by seven. You can drop me in Monte Carlo, Peter."

"Oh, can I? And, pray, why should I drop you anywhere?" His face was overcast. "Why are you talking already about the ending of this day?"

"You began it, didn't you?" I asked.

"I know," he said morosely. "But, then, I am a king."

"And I am a dancing instructress, please, sir."

"And a great deal better at your job than I am, Betty girl."

His voice hurt me—it was so discouraged.

"Do you know that we are standing in the middle of the road, and that we are supposed to be going into Italy?" I asked.

"Of course, Betty girl. Get into the car. I'm a fathead. Only this is our last day together—for the present—and I'm half afraid to begin it. Come along!"

We got into the car. We started off with a leap like a captive deer released from a cart and taking to its heels.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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IMMORTAL JIM

"JIM—the man"—we put that on his stone
That marks that bit of ground
That comes to all of us in turn,
When leavin'—outward bound.
But Jim still lingered round somehow,
No spook like thing to fear;
It's hard explainin' what I mean—
Jim went—but still is here.

It's twenty years since he checked out,
But still we talk of him
As one men all looked up to,
God fearing, all there Jim.
A halo? Naw! 'Twould fret his style.
Immortal? That may be.
I only know Jim lived and died,
But seems around—to me.

Robert Baker.

Blondes and Bleachers

By BEATRICE ASHTON VANDEGRIFT

SID and me had been going together for two months, him begging me every day to cease *working* down to Terrence & Malloy, computing engineers, where I tickle the adding machine, and *play* with a row of wash-tubs in a Brooklyn flat. And I would of, too, being kind of batty over the boy, if it wasn't I was scared of becoming a neglected wife.

Now, being a neglected wife is an awful thing, according to the movies. It really is a crime, ain't it, to think of a cold hearted hubby leaving his poor little snookums alone for eight whole hours while he trifles his time away at the office? Of course, he's earning the dough to keep a roof over her head, food in her stomach and clothes on her back, except when attired in evening wear, but it's funny he can't manage to do it whilst entertaining her on the golf links or accompanying her to the afternoon meeting of the bridge club.

Yes, the men is a pretty inconsiderate lot, and I was going to be sure I wasn't getting no wife neglecter before I kissed my happy bachelor days farewell and Lohengrined up the aisle on Sid's stalwart lunch-lugger.

Then, also, I was afraid that his love for me might wane with the passing days. Only last week I strolled in with Sid to a movie house down the block and seen a film entitled: "The Dying Flame" where a fellow tires of his wife and hunts up another cutie.

" Sid," I says on coming out of the show, " that picture points a wonderful truth, namely, that if a man takes less than ten minutes telling his wife good-by mornings, it shows he don't love her no more. Remember that."

But Sid, being a mere male, didn't know what I was driving at.

Later on that evening in the park, he slipped the tie that blinds—and it sure was some sparkler—on my left hand, and I let it stay there. I let it stay because, as I said, it was a good looking ring, and because I really was fond of the kid. But something told me, " Irene McMahon, go easy. Don't burn all your Brooklyns behind you." So when Sid asked me to name the merry day I coyly replied, " I'm yours, boy, I'm yours—when Spark Plug wins his race."

I didn't hear exactly what he said, but it sounded something like " Darn Spark Plug," putting it mild.

Next morning I breezed into the office late, flashing my twinkler, and it sure caused some commotion.

" Why, Irene!" hollered the girls. " Don't tell us you gone and signed up for matrimony, a vamp like you. So you finally decided you'd be kind to some poor sap and wed him, huh? Oh, boy! Salome taking to light housekeeping! Cleo trundling kid coaches! Joy and oh joy! Are you kidding us, blondie?"

Which goes to give you a little idea of the kind of a jane I am.

But it wasn't till four days after, when the excitement had commenced to tone down, that Wade Murphy, chief draftsman at our office, noticed my bit of glassware.

" What's that, Irene?" he asked, his face slumping like the stock market in July. " Is that an engagement ring?"

" Say, kiddo," I told him sarcastic, " It's about time you woke up. No, that ain't no engagement ring, stupe. It's a nice little piece of ice I'm toting around to keep me cool this hot weather."

He didn't say nothing more, but slid onto his stool and hunched low over the board. Poor cheese! Ain't it awful to be dippy over a jane that ain't dippy over you?

Next Sunday Sid telephoned me to find out if I'd be home that evening.

" And say," he asked me, " why not trot along with me to the game this afternoon?"

" What game?" I repeated, indifferent.

" Yanks versus Athletics," he enthused.

" I ain't interested in baseball," I told him.

" Aw, come along, sweet," he urged. " Even if you don't like it, we can be together, and that's something."

Well, I finally agreed I'd go, being curious to see how Sid would make love to me at a baseball game. So far we'd tried the parlor, the park, the office, the movies and the subway.

So I donned my new honeydew crêpe and picture hat draped with pale blue chiffon and went downstairs to meet my fiancé.

"Hmm, boy! Don't you look good!" he raved. " Now, let's trot along snappy. We don't want to miss the first inning."

He grabbed me by the arm and we started down the street.

" Here's a ' vacant ' coming now, Sid," I told him.

" Who said we was going to take a taxi?"

" We always took a taxi before." I reminded him, cold.

" Sure," he said, pleasant, " but we wasn't engaged then, hon."

I didn't say nothing, but I thought a lot as Sid jammed me into a subway car packed with a gang of rough guys that was evidently heading for the same place we was. I hadn't been in there two minutes before my beautiful new crêpe was looking like something the cat dragged in—and out again. My hat was cocked over on one ear with the chiffon tore in about twenty places. And hot! Say, after that ride I could of sat on the equator and thought it was a crack in the ice.

We finally pulled into the stadium. Then bedlam began.

One chivalrous Walter Raleigh behind me give me a nice little jab on the small of the back in a desperate effort to get out of the car four seconds before I did. Another noble Sir Lancelot shoved me against a cunning Lord Fauntleroy with a three days' beard who instead of politely suggesting that I " just lean on him, grandmother." shook me off like a wet terrier shakes off water, flinging me onto the lap of a hand-

some Romeo in shirt-sleeves and suspenders, whence my considerate fiancé plucked me to hurry me along outside and up several hundred inclines. We at last emerged at the top tier and sat down.

"Well, we got here in time," remarked Sid, satisfied with himself.

"Oh, did we?" I answered, too tired to think of anything snappier to say.

I squinted around at the big circle of seats, full of white shirted johns that looked like rows of pop corn, with the red and blue and yellow of the girls' dresses bobbing up bright against them. Soda boys was going up and down the steps like white ants climbing an ant hill, and they was a big hum of conversation all around, conversation and fanning and heat. Oh, boy! If this was baseball I'd love to attend a coal heaver's picnic in the Big Hot Place.

"But anyhow, Sid," I begin, endeavoring to be agreeable, "anyhow we're out in the nice, fresh air, ain't we?"

Sid was busy with his score card. I waved away a cloud of mixed Lucky Strike, Chesterfield and dock weed smoke that was coming my direction, and smiled, congratulating myself on keeping my temper.

"Oh, Sid!" I whispered soft, after a couple minutes. "I was just thinking it would be cuter to have fumed oak in the sitting room instead of mahogany."

"Yeh?" said Sid, not looking at me but addressing a perfect stranger on the other side of him. "Yeh? Jones going to pitch to-day? I had an idea Hoyt would be on the mound."

I was silent. They is times when it's best. Then a lot of guys begin walking out on the field and Sid left off conversing with his new friend and watched them.

"Sid," I commenced again, resolving to show a little interest in the game for his sake, "is that big tall man a—a Giant?"

"The Yanks is playing to-day," he told me, impatient. "Not the Giants."

"Oh," I returned. "And which ones are the Yanks?"

"The ones in white," he said. "Home team always wears white, visiting team, gray."

"I see," I come back with great intelligence. "Of course a visiting team would wear gray so the dirt won't show till they can get back to the home laundry."

Some rubes sitting behind us began to snicker, and Sid got as red as a radish.

"Don't talk," he ordered, grumpy. "Watch the game."

But everybody was talking and yelling out to the boys on the field like they had knowed them from infancy.

"Meusel old kid," they'd encourage, "watch 'em, boy. Watch 'em coming. Make 'em give yuh what yuh want, kid. Wait for the right one. Now, swat it!"

I couldn't exactly get the drift of what was going on, but the fellow alongside Sid give him a crack on the shoulder and shouted, "My gootness! Two strikes on Meusel. He vill fan himself, all right."

"I should think he would in this weather," I commented.

The two rubes in back of us pulled another hee-haw.

"Little blondie knows all about baseball," they tittered low, but Sid heard them and got redder yet.

"Sid," I said, "are you going to stand for them two guys insulting me like that?"

"Aw, Irene!" he yelped. "Cut it out —honey."

"You don't have to add 'honey,'" I told him. "The way you act nobody'd know I was your fiancée, so you don't have to call me no nice names."

"Now, listen, dear," he commenced, gentle, then rose up in his seat. "A homer! Nope, just fell short of the bleachers." He sat down again.

I put my arm through his. After all, he was a sweet kid.

"Siddie boy," I suggested, "if you don't want to talk about nothing else, why, we'll talk about baseball. Tell me, I want to know why that man that stands back of that man that stands back of the man with the bat should sometimes yell out 'strike' and sometimes 'ball.' Ain't the ball a 'ball' no matter where it goes? It ain't no tomato, is it? And why does he call it a 'strike' when the fellow only hits *at* it? Why, if a lady with a black eye told the judge her husband *struck* her, it wouldn't mean he struck *at* her and *missed*. I certainly can't see no sense in this game."

"Well, for the Lord's sake," growled Sid. "If you can't, somebody else can. Now, shut up. I mean, keep still."

I did shut up. I smoothed down my wilted honeydew crêpe, took off my torn chiffon hat and sat there like a lamb. But sweet daddy! Inside I was hissing.

Here I consent to go with my fiancé to his favorite sport, merely to be with him, and end by getting as much attention as a guy with a sore thumb in a hospital for broken necks. I wade through a subway jam, I brave the terrific heat, I inhale a conglomeration of mixed tobacco smoke that would make a hide factory smell like a breath of spring—all to please one man that don't even realize I'm present.

So I remained, silent and alone with my thoughts, while the little white and gray bugs run around the green field, doing something that evidently meant life and death to 'em and the crowd that watched 'em.

After what seemed to me a couple of days, the whole grand stand stood up and let out a sigh. I put on my hat and commenced to wedge through.

"Where are you going?" asked Sid.

"Ain't the game over?" I inquired, weary.

"Naw, it's only the seventh inning."

"Then what are they all standing up for?"

"Oh, I don't know. They always stand up to stretch in the middle of the seventh."

"They do?" I returned, sarcastic. "Why not the sixth or the eighth? Who told them to stand up the seventh?"

"I told you I don't know," answered Sid, irritable. "Everybody does it because—everybody else does."

"What a lot of cattle!" I exclaimed in wonder. "What a lot of dumb oxes!"

The rubes around us delivered me a dirty look and commenced firing back a string of uncomplimentary remarks.

"Do you hear what them yeggs is saying, Sid?" I protested. "Are you going to see a lady insulted, especially your own fiancée, without knocking some of them nasty safe crackers for a row of gas houses?"

"Aw, Irene," he begged. "Here, I'll buy you a soda pop," he exclaimed with sudden inspiration. "Never thought about it before."

"I don't want no soda pop," I snapped. "In fact, I don't expect no attention from you at all. Look, the game's beginning again. Now sit down, deary, and watch it close. You mustn't miss anything, honey boy. And don't talk to me. After all, I'm only your promised bride. Talk to your cunning little new friends sitting all around you—that handsome gentleman that give you the loan of his pencil so polite. Maybe he'll lend you a puff on that high priced cheroot he's smoking right in my face. Or how about your friend there with the lavender shirt? You seemed kind of intimate with him. Oh, no, don't you bother none about *me*. I'm all right. I'm perfectly all right."

"Now, listen, honey," he began, but a sudden roar drowned him out.

"A homer!" he yelled, jumping up with the rest. "A homer! The Babe! Wowie, that ties it! Oh, you kid, Babe! Atta boy!" And he forgot all about me.

Somehow I managed to wade through the home-going crowds without falling in my tracks and finally dropped breathless on the home steps, feeling like the charge of the Light Brigade.

"See you to-night, honey girl," said Sid. "Great game, wasn't it? Glad it didn't end in a tie."

"Yes," I remarked dryly. "And this little game of love right here ain't going to end in no tie, either."

A lump choked in my throat, but I swallowed it down and went on with my customary poise.

"Maybe I don't know much about baseball, but I learned enough this afternoon to inform you that you are out, boy. You—are—out! So go chase some other chicken. You're not going to catch *this* foul. I'm going where my curves will be appreciated. Here, take your diamond and let's see you make a home run."

"Irene, what are you driving at?"

"Merely this—that our engagement is coming to a short stop. I'm giving you up, kiddo, and I don't consider I'm *making no sacrifice*, either."

And so he went.

That evening it seemed queer not to be sitting out in the park with him, but, after all, I wasn't sorry I done what I done. Catch *me* being a neglected wife? Well, not on your tin type!

II.

THE next morning when I ambled into the office, minus my sparkler, the girls let out a howl that would make a pack of huskies sound like the voice that breathed o'er Eden.

"Hooray!" they shouted. "The girl is running true to form. Oh, boy! We knew it wouldn't last. Cleo's coming into her own again. Salome's stepping out after a relapse. Say, Rena, who's going to be the next goat?"

"They ain't going to be no next," I informed them, dignified. "I'm through with the josephs. Why, if the Prince of Wales laid the crown of England at my feet I'd tell him to go cut himself a piece of cake. Friends, when you see me pulling this neglected wife stuff it 'll be time to give little Irene McMahon a nice long ride in the cuckoo coupé. See?"

At this moment my pal, Wade Murphy, strolled in from the next room.

"What's all the noise about?" he inquired. Then he noticed me. "What ho, Irene!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Where's that piece of 'ice' you was toting?"

"I don't need no ice to keep cool with," I returned, biting, "now that I am employing the cold shoulder."

"On who?" he hollered.

"On my erstwhile fiancé."

"Oh, boy!" he shouted. "Oh, boy!" and rushed back into his office.

That evening he invited me out to a show. Of course, I didn't go, seeing I had just declared my independence of man; but as the week crawled by it seemed so sort of lonesome without that poor sap Sid, that I finally told Wade I would take in a movie with him.

After that I was real nice to the boy in public, hoping somebody would see us and tell Sid that *I* wasn't no heartbroken mary grieving for him in the solitude of my attic room. Nope, I flashed around with this good looking Murphy kid wherever I thought somebody I knew would see me, and it must have worked, because a week after I first begin going out with Wade, Sid called me up.

"Honey," he commenced, humble, but I cut him short.

"Say, listen, bozo," I said, frigid—"who told you you could get back in the game? I didn't hand you out no rain check, did I, eh?"

"Maybe not," he returned, slow, "but I just want you to know, girly, that I still think you're the muskrat's marcel, and if ever—"

"Good-by," I cooed.

The next Sunday Wade asked me to go to the Polo Grounds with him.

"Gosh, are you a baseball fan, also?" I exclaimed, incredulous.

"Sure I am," he enthused. "I'd rather see a home run than eat."

"Ah, ha!" I chortled. "Oh, ho—this is good!"

And I had to sit down, I was so weak.

"What's the matter?" he asked, puzzled. "Don't you like baseball? I thought you used to go with Sid."

"Sure," I tittered. "Sure, I love baseball. Just like I love Paris green on my hot tamales, splinters in my club sandwich and horseshoes in my peach pie."

"Well, ain't you going with me, then?" he said, disappointed.

I commenced heehawing afresh, and then sobered down. Here this guy was beginning to get serious with me, already asked me to wed him, and though I wasn't thinking of doing it no more than I was thinking of entering a cross continent tricycle race, still—you never can tell. All right, I'd put *him* to the supreme test.

"Wade, my boy," I smiled, "I've decided I would just love to go to the game with you this afternoon. But sit tight a minute, will you, while I don my last year's coat of mail and a cast iron bonnet. I'm taking no chances this time."

So we started out, me making a bee line for the elevated two blocks down.

"Hey, where you going?" Wade called, summoning a taxi. "Climb in here."

"Oh, a taxi!" I snickered. "Well, of course, we ain't engaged. That does make a difference."

We finally got to the game and sat down in the second tier.

"Sorry we couldn't get better seats," begins Wade. "Now, what do you want? Ginger ale, soda pop, ice cream cone?"

"My Lord, boy, what do you think you are doing? Taking kid sister to the circus?"

"Well, you look young enough to be my kid sister," he blarneyed. "Say, listen—"

The fellow next to him give him a poke. "Who's on the mound?" he asked.

"Don't know," returned Wade, uninterested, then resumed: "Say, listen—when you going to be *my* kid?"

"When Spark Plug— Look, Wade, the game's beginning."

"Is it? When did you say you'd marry me, sweetness?"

"Gosh, fellow!" I marveled. "I thought you told me you was a baseball fan—that you'd rather see a home run than eat?"

"I am; but to-day's different. I got you here. What do I care about the game?"

I sat back, mildly thrilled. Some devotion, huh? I had the hunch that Wade wouldn't be no wife neglecter. During the first inning I done my best to turn his attention to the field, with about as much success as I'd have interesting Old Black Joe in a freckle remover. Several times the rubes around us would attempt to engage him in conversation.

"Frisch's up," they'd inform him. "Think he's good for a single?"

"How do I know?" he'd snap. Then he would edge over nearer me. "Think *we're* good for a double?" he'd smile.

By the middle of the third inning this high pressure lovemaking was beginning to tell on me. Though I swore I was off the johns, and though I couldn't imagine myself making plans with another fellow like I'd made them with Sid—all about the little home we was going to have, and everything—still it was downright flattering to be able to vamp a guy away from the sport he'd admitted he'd rather view than eat.

And I'm telling you now, if you are a man and don't understand the ways of we women, that there ain't nothing so tickles a girl than to feel she's in the spotlight of attention. However, if you want to get the icy mitt from the jane, just invite her along to your favorite sport and when the game's over look around as much as to say: "Oh, sure, you're here, ain't you, Marian? I forgot I brung you with me."

Yep, Wade certainly knew how to please feminine fancy, and I was almost considering letting him make love to me for life, when I spotted a familiar back four rows down from us.

Sid!

There he was, totally wrapped up in the movements of the game, punching his new found friends to the right and left every time the ball went cracking from the bat, and hollering out advice to the boys on the field.

Sid, the same old Sid, taking in his Sunday afternoon baseball like it meant life and death to him.

As I watched him a funny little stab cut through me. His shoulders was so broad and nice. I remembered how proud I had been of them, and how every time I went walking with him I kidded myself I was out strolling with Doug Fairbanks. Then he turned to talk to a john next to him, and I caught a glimpse of that chin I used to think was so masculine. Yep, they was something about the curve of that chin that always got me. So boyish it was, and yet so manly, as the novels word it.

Then Wade noticed him.

"Say, there's a friend of yours!" he smiled, malicious. "Don't I wish he'd turn around! I'd like to see the cute little cold stare you'd hand him. Listen, honey—"

"What?"

"You don't like him no more, do you? From the way you was looking at him for a minute, I thought—"

"Don't worry!" I yelped. "Why, if smiling at that poor yap would save me forever from the Big Bottomless Pit, I'd proceed to pull a face that would make Bull Montana look like an English choir boy."

Just then Sid turned around, his eyes wandering back over the upper seats.

Finally he spotted us.

And I'll never forget the expression in his lamps. Pleading, it was, hurt. As for me, I give him the once-over as if to say, "Now, where have I seen that fellow before?" and snuggled up to Wade.

"What was you saying, deary?" I cooed.

Of a sudden a commotion commenced in the grand stand, and the people in front rose like one man.

"Duck the foul!" somebody shouted.

A white object come zipping up from the home plate. Sid was still looking at me with that awful expression in his eyes when the ball caught him square behind the ears.

He crumpled, and the mob packed around him.

"Sid!" I hollered. "Oh, Sid!" and commenced climbing over the seats, battling my way through.

"Carry him out," they was saying. "Get a car. Where's a doctor?"

They was picking him up when I reached him, Wade yelling something about my making a fool of myself.

"Let me go with him," I begged. "I—I'm his fiancée. Let me take him home."

Somehow we got him through the jam and out to the gates, and in a minute we was speeding down the street. On the way he opened his eyes.

"Sid," I choked, not knowing what else to say.

"Hello, Irene," he smiled. "Where we going?"

"Why, we're making a home run, Siddie boy," I told him. "How's that suit you, huh?"

"Great!" he said, weak but happy.

So we was married, and still are. As for me considering myself a neglected wife on Sundays, when the Giants meet the Phillies or the Yanks meet Chicago, *et cetera*—say, I certainly have learned my lesson.

And I'm never going to make Sid neglect his baseball for me no more. Look what he got in the neck the only time he ever did take his eye off the game to pay me some attention! Nope, as I often tell him—Sid, whether in the bleachers or business, keep your eye on the ball, boy. Keep—your—eye—on the ball.

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THE DAY THAT IS

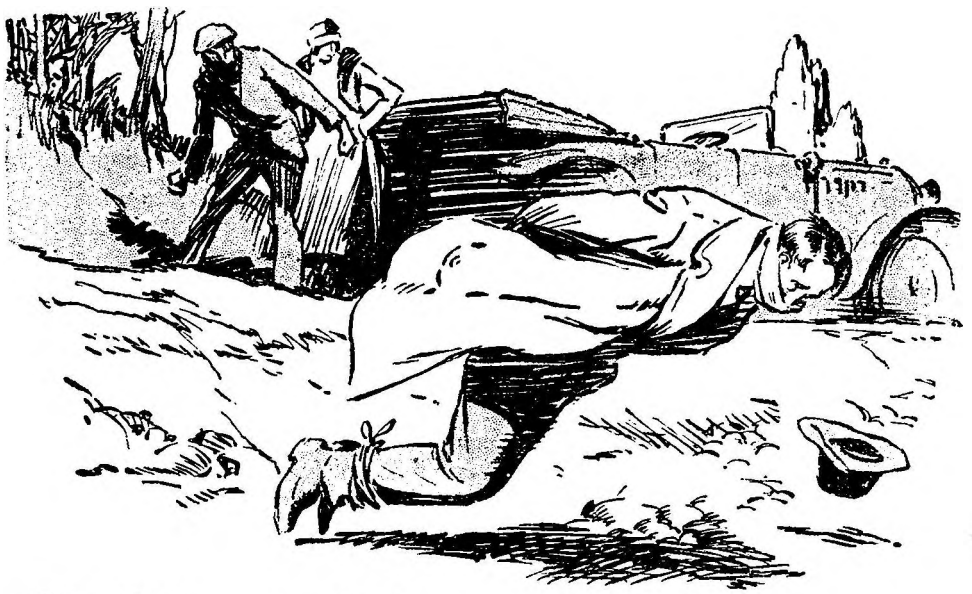
SAY! What's the use of talkin' 'bout the days that used to be?
They're dead an' gone an' can't be lived again by you or me:
But here's a live one—here's to-day, all spic an' span an' new—
Let's see if we can't fill it full of things that's good to do!

Let's keep it clean in thought an' word an' deed, the while we work
At some of them hard jobs we've long allowed ourselves to shirk;
An' while we dig an' delve away, to keep us in the swing
Let's all join in some sunny song an' help each other sing!

I ain't no blame' Caruso, an' as far I can hear
In all the bunch there ain't one voice that's halfway true nor clear;
But, if we sing our loudest an' we're meanin' ev'ry word,
The sound 'll be the cheeriest thing a feller ever heard!

So, grab your pick and shovel, or your hammer or your pen,
An' we'll put in the derndest day of hustle known to men:
For what's the use of talkin' 'bout the days that's out of biz,
When here's a chance to put some dents in this big day that *is!*

Beech Hilton.



The Handwriting on the Wall

By DAVID FOX

Author of "The Man Who Convicted Himself," "The Super-Swing," "The Doom Dealer," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

LUCY INTERVENES.

PHIL HOWE gazed at the mocking red lips of the young woman standing before him in the country lane and he, too, smiled slowly, not a whit abashed that she had guessed the truth.

"So you were wise, after all?" he asked. "Sure, we'll travel together—that is, if you're going my way?"

"I thought M'sieu' was coming mine!" she murmured demurely.

"Whatever you say! Here let me carry that for you." He possessed himself of her handbag, which she relinquished without a murmur, and continued in his irrepressible, bantering tone: "You didn't think I'd stay on after you'd gone, when I'd come from the city expressly to see you? My dear Lucy, I'd follow you to Scranton, if you'd say the word!"

She drew in her breath sharply, but for a moment was silent as they walked together toward the head of the lane. He glanced sidewise at her, but she had bowed her head, her dark lashes sweeping her cheek as she kept her eyes fastened upon the ground. Her profile told him nothing.

At last she sighed plaintively, and the accent was gone from her voice when she spoke.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 29.

"I'm never going back to Scranton, only as far as New York, to find another place where I can hide and earn my living—till I'm recognized, and have to move on again. Isn't it hard that people won't ever let you live things down?"

So she was trying the sob stuff on him! He'd had a flash of her temper the day before and he knew she would give him short shrift now if she had nothing to conceal. On the other hand he had everything to learn if he pretended to fall in with her game and could catch her off her guard.

"Is that what you're doing? Why do you stick to the same line, then, that you pulled when you were working in with the Dobson gang? I should think a manicuring table in a hotel barber shop would suit you better—more like old times. It stands to reason the bulls are going to pull the records on you whenever they spot you in a new lay."

Lucy Regnier bit her lip but her tone was almost saintly in its gentle resignation as she replied:

"No, I'm more used now to pretty surroundings and quiet, and the work of a parlormaid isn't hard. I've been very happy this past year, and if only poor Mr. Monckton hadn't been killed and you come to try to drag me into it! But I suppose I must go on paying and I shouldn't complain."

"What makes you say I came to drag you into it, or give you away?" Phil Howe asked with a beguiling note of sympathy. "I didn't act like it, did I? I could have gone straight to Mrs. Miller or the old man's lawyers, but as it is you've left of your own accord, and a reference from there after holding your position so long ought to be worth having."

"You didn't snitch on me because you wanted to get something out of me!" she accused, with a return of her natural manner.

"Sure I did!" he responded in perfect good humor. "I wanted a line on the other servants and I thought you'd be reasonable and give it to me. We're going to New York, you tell me? Are we walking there, or is a station somewhere down the line?"

They had come to the end of the lane, where it turned into the broad road running parallel with the turnpike and Lucy pointed.

"There's something better — a garage. We can hire a car to take us to the next station on the line. Oh, think of the reporters and police detectives there'll be on the trains because of the funeral to-day! If we could only—"

She paused, and Phil understood. Well, why not? It would mean a prolonged *tête-à-tête*, but if he could convince her that he believed she was running straight she might let something slip.

"Say, why not motor in all the way to the city? We ought to be able to make it in a couple of hours with any kind of a car and I asked you to go for a ride with me, didn't I?" he urged. "How far is this garage?"

"Only just around that turn ahead. That's what I meant to do if I was alone, but maybe they won't have a car." Lucy spoke uncertainly and then flashed him a sad little smile. "Where is our ride to end, Philip? At headquarters?"

"Aw, you know better than that!" Phil exclaimed reproachfully. "Anywhere you want to go, of course, and if they haven't a car they can tell us where we can get one."

But when they came to the small garage and service station, a dingy and rather ramshackle sedan was available and the mechanic lounging about volunteered to take them to the city for a flat rate of twenty-five dollars.

"An open car would have been nicer—" Lucy began doubtfully.

"Still, if this bus can travel, it'll be better than the train," suggested Phil. "Where are we going?"

"To one hundred and forty New Golder's Green Road," she answered. "It's a little street in the Bronx only lately cut through, but if this boy don't know how to find it—"

"I know it, all right," the mechanic volunteered. "My sister lives near."

The arrangement was concluded and they started along the road, the roar of the motor settling into a steady, high-pitched, singing hum that made Phil narrow his eyes. The car was evidently assembled of many heterogeneous parts, but

if he knew its voice, that was a Duplex Special motor and high-geared, at that. What was it doing with a soap-box flivver body and tin wheels?

Lucy wrinkled her nose at the stale, musty odor within and he lowered the windows and then turned to her.

"That's better, eh? Tell me, Lucy, is it on the level? Have you cut out the old game?"

"It wouldn't be any use to try to convince you." She shrugged. "If you know as much as you seem to, you'll remember that the ladies I worked for as maid were all very fond of entertaining and dress—and jewels. Is it likely that I would have stayed for more than a year in the household of only one old gentleman?"

"Well, it isn't up to your former speed," he admitted. "Still it's funny how burglaries always follow in your wake, isn't it? Even now!"

"But not murder!" Lucy twisted her hands together and the horror in her voice was unfeigned. "There was never any rough stuff—"

She halted but Phil Howe nodded quickly.

"I know; not until the time Regner was bumped off, and he started it then."

"It was the end for me!" she cried in sudden passion. "I only—did what I did because of him, and nothing could ever be fastened on me; he saw to that! You can't frame me for what I'm saying now! It's all over long ago and nobody can connect me with this awful thing!"

"I don't want to, but how about the other guy, the one who grabbed you in the grounds last night? Did you recognize him? It was pretty dark."

"Not till he spoke, but the stars were out and it was bright enough for me to see his face. I couldn't mistake that, it was the man I told you about; the one who came three times to see Mr. Monckton."

"Sure, it was!" Phil relaxed a trifle, grinning. "It's lucky for you he didn't happen to spot you last year, for he knew you all right!"

"Is he one of the Shadowers, too?" Lucy turned wide eyes upon him, and he shook his head.

"Nope; he isn't a bull, either."

"Of course not, or Mr. Monckton would never have talked to him about his son. It's all true, what I told you! He did say that his death would some day be laid at his son's door!"

"And why were you listening, if you hadn't some little game of your own to play?" Phil demanded.

"I told you—I was curious." She glanced for a moment out of the window at the hedgerows flying past. "His visits seemed to have such a queer, bad effect on the old gentleman. He knew what was coming to him, some time or other, and that frame-up of a burglary didn't even take in the bulls! Oh, it is wicked to try to connect me with it! His son did it, he must have, and how could I know anything about it just because I—there's an unproven record against me?"

"How could you?" Phil Howe echoed, with no trace of sarcasm. "Even if his son didn't do it, there's nothing to show that the burglar was enough of a top-notcher to travel with what's left of the Dobson gang, or that you've had anything to do with them for two years or so."

"Yet you came after me, you trailed me from Friday on, you knew when I telephoned to Mrs. Wilson from the drugstore, you had her number!"

"'Mrs. Wilson?'"

"Oh, you know very well!" Lucy made an impatient little movement of her hands. "Bronx 6090. She's the friend I'm going to now, at New Golder's Green Road. I've known her since just before I went to work at the Manor. She's a dressmaker, a decent, fine woman and she doesn't know anything about me except that I'm a widow and have had a lot of trouble."

"You went to all the bother of going to the village to phone her instead of just calling her from the Manor; you've got to admit it looked kind of funny under the circumstances." Phil remarked, adding suddenly:

"Say, have you noticed that this lad goes all around the outskirts of every village we pass instead of straight on through? Listen, bo, what's the idea? Why the detours?"

He had stuck his head out of the window and the youth grinned back over his shoulder.

"I'll get you there just as quick, mister, make it up in the open country, but I got plenty of summonses around here and they'd lay for me if I was only hittin' it ten miles an hour!"

"Another case of giving a dog a bad name!" Lucy murmured. "I had to go to the drugstore Friday night for a headache, and I thought I'd call up from there at the same time, because Mrs. Miller is always trying to listen in and it makes it uncomfortable to know there's somebody at your shoulder. I told Mrs. Wilson that I'd get down to see her to-day if I could."

Phil reflected. The traveling man had said he could tell by her voice that she was talking to a 'john,' but he might have been kidding. Still, there was the difference in the last figure of the number; it wasn't what was written on the wall.

"You're sure you didn't call up 6099?" he asked.

Lucy stared at him and then burst into laughter, with an hysterical note in it that she must have been conscious of herself for she choked it back swiftly.

"Of course I am! Didn't I get Mrs. Wilson herself?" she retorted, then sighed again. "When you came yesterday afternoon and I knew you'd been spying on me, I thought you were going to take me down to headquarters and rake up all the past, and I'd be questioned and warned and all, over again! I've been trying so hard to forget and after this last year I hoped I'd be left in peace!"

Their horn sounded twice as she stopped speaking and Phil glanced out but nothing was ahead in the road and their pace was slackened. They were in the open country once more with wide meadows on one side stretching away to a distant orchard, and on the other the spreading golf course of a country club which flaunted its flag and gay awnings far on the top of a hill.

No one appeared on the links and he could make out the lines of but a single touring car drawn up before the club veranda.

"Pretty early in the season for that kind of joint to doll up on Sunday," Phil remarked, and turned again to his companion. "No one's going to bother you, Lucy—"

He halted with his jaw dropped, for he was staring straight into the muzzle of a small pistol as businesslike in appearance as the one he had flourished on the night before and which now reposed ineffectually in his hip pocket. He made an instinctive reach toward it, however, but stopped at the cold menace of the woman's tone.

"None of that!" she cried sharply. "Stick 'em up, and keep 'em up! I'm going to make sure nobody bothers me, least of all a bum amateur dick! Come on, Bert, I've got him covered, and if I have to shoot they'll think it's a punctured tire! Make it snappy!"

The youth, still grinning, had climbed down and opened the door. In a flash he produced a gag and several short lengths of trolley wire.

"Get down on the floor, quick!" he ordered while Phil glanced desperately down the deserted road and calculated his chances of being heard if he lifted his voice. Lucy had belonged to the Dobson gang and she'd stick at nothing now that it was a question of being involved in one murder! He knew the implacable killer's look, and it was in her eyes now. He shrugged and dropped ignominiously to the floor of the car while the young gunman expertly frisked, and then bound and gagged him.

"Car's coming!" Lucy Regnier warned suddenly in a low, tense tone. "Look at your rear wheel, Bert, I'll keep him down below the window!"

The sound of an approaching car was indeed borne nearer and nearer to them as Bert closed the door and bent leisurely over the wheel. That threatening gun was pressing close against Phil's ear now and he was helpless, anyway, with that confounded gag tearing his mouth apart and the wires cutting into his wrists and ankles!

He uttered a strangled oath that was some relief to his feelings as the other car passed and its humming was lost in the distance.

Lucy laughed again.

"Don't waste any time when you get loose trying to locate my friend Mrs.

Wilson!" she advised jeeringly. "There isn't any Golder's Green nearer than London! Roll him out, Bert, and over the ditch through that opening in the hedge. There'll be a golfer or two around in the afternoon to find him, or a course keeper to-morrow. By-by, Philip, don't pick up any strange girls in future!"

Her gibe was lost as he was dragged from the car and bumped into the ditch, from which a hard boot prodded him through the hedge and rolled him to the shade of a tree near a bench on the course. He was lying on his face in the new, tender grass, but he heard the slam of the door and the woman's triumphant laughter above the roar of the motor as the car sped off down the road.

With a violent wrench Phil turned himself over and heaved his body to a sitting posture, straining his eyes wildly for a sign of life about him, but the links were as deserted as the road upon which a little cloud of dust was slowly settling. There was no human habitation in sight on the other side of the road, and the clubhouse was too far away for a cry or gesture to have attracted attention, even had he been able to make one. The gag was an increasing torture and the slightest movement made the wires that bound him grind deeper into his flesh.

But greater than his physical suffering was the humiliation of his predicament. To think that he, one of the slickest yeggs in the country had been kidnaped by two cheap crooks in broad daylight, trussed up and thrown here to await the problematical coming of someone to liberate him! Still, Scranton Lucy had been a full-fledged member of the redoubtable Dobson gang; she wasn't exactly a tyro. There was some salve to his injured vanity in that. And if he was a bum amateur detective as she had called him, he'd show her up yet! The very fact that she had been at such pains to rid herself of him proved her complicity, if not in the actual murder, then in something almost as bad that was going on. He'd get her before he was through!

But how easily he had been trapped! Phil mentally writhed at the thought. He had asked for what was handed to him—begged for it! If the other Shadowers were ever to know of this!

How had she got word to her buddy, the young gangster with the camouflaged car, and planted him so conveniently to steer Phil to? What had Bert done with the garage man? Sent him off down the road somewhere on a towing job, probably, and offered to take charge till he could get back. She was a good actress, that Scranton Lucy. Her hesitation about the closed car and the story of her troubles told afterward to keep him from following the roads too attentively had been well put over considering that he'd ought to have been leery, knowing what she was!

A muffled groan forced its way through the gag. Would nobody ever come along? The sun wasn't even nearly overhead yet, it couldn't be more than ten o'clock, for they'd started pretty early. Phil remembered how narrow and rutted the road had been with no other car upon it since they left the last village except the one which passed while he lay helpless. It was no doubt a back way rarely used and there was no telling when anyone else would travel by, especially on a Sunday when the cars all flocked to the main turnpike.

He'd never seen a golf course before without some cuckoo old guys chasing a ball around on it, but as he remarked to Lucy just before she stuck him up it was early in the season, and it would be like the way his luck seemed to be running now if he died there of starvation!

The pangs of hunger were gnawing at him, making him lightheaded. Phil recalled that he'd had nothing to eat that day, not a morsel of food since the sloppy dinner at the hotel the night before. He'd give something for a cup of that weak, greasy-looking coffee right now! His throat was dry and swelling and his wrists and ankles felt as though those wires were red hot, searing into them! If only—

All at once his heart missed a beat and then started racing again, for a little white sphere had come bounding over the top of a bunker and a young masculine voice reached him, a rather unpleasant voice, cultured but with a nasty, jibing note in it. However, no music could have been sweeter

to Phil's ears and heedless of the anguish it caused him he flung himself flat and started rolling violently toward it.

Two masculine figures loomed into view, with a smaller laden one in tow. All three halted for a moment in stupefaction, then rushed down upon him.

"What's up? Some tramp having a fit?" the young voice queried. "Don't touch him! Let the caddie run back—"

"No! Stay here, boy! Can't you see, Norcross, that the fellow's bound and gagged? Here, my man, just a minute and we'll have you loose—"

The older, drawling tones trailed off into silence and it was as well for the speaker as for Phil himself that the latter was gagged, for the face bending over him was that of Lucian Baynes!

The jewel expert of the Shadowers recognized him at the same moment and before the strange young man in foppishly correct golf attire and the staring caddie an instantaneous message flashed from eye to eye of the two colleagues.

The wire was untwisted from his wrists and the gag snatched from his mouth. Phil sat up weakly, trying to force a grin of reassurance to his distorted lips, but bright spots danced before his eyes and the blood surging suddenly through his arms brought sharp stabs of agony. Then a vacuum flask was presented to his mouth and ice cold coffee trickled in a delicious stream down his parched throat. In a moment speech came.

"Thanks—awfully—friends of mine—" It was a mere croaking whisper with unexpected rasps in it, but he managed to convey to Lucian Baynes that he understood and there was to be no recognition. "Practical joke carried too far, that's all."

Lucian was at work upon his ankles now, but the young man stood superciliously by and the caddie still stared open mouthed.

"You mean you don't want the police notified?" the young man asked incredulously. "This looks rather odd to me, Ballantyne; we'd better not have anything to do with it. He doesn't appear to need any further assistance, and the sooner he's off the grounds the better."

Phil had risen weakly and now he stood rubbing his wrists and wondering how he could manage a word in private with Lucian Baynes. The name "Ballantyne" had illuminated the situation for him as far as his colleague was concerned; Lucian, under the guise he formerly assumed to the prosperous traveling public was evidently doing society for further data on their client and he had called the young snob with him "Norcross."

He must be the Chester Norcross whom Richard Monckton had publicly thrashed, the brother of the girl to whom he had been engaged, and a good job, too, Phil concluded, glowering at him. But how was he to get Lucian aside? The jewel expert solved that problem for him.

"Your friends probably took your money from you, too, didn't they?" he asked, and at Phil's nod he added: "Here, I'll stake you to your ticket back to New York if that's where you want to go, and show you the way to the station. Come along!"

Heedless of young Norcross's further expostulations he led the way to the opening in the hedge and pointed down the road, at the same time taking out his wallet.

"Go to the office as quick as you can!" he exclaimed in a hurried undertone. "No time for explanations now, but something's wrong there and Ethel's gone again! She has left the Shadowers!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

DESERTION UNDER FIRE.

ETHEL JEPSON had spent the forenoon of Saturday in unaccustomed solitude for not a single member of the firm put in an appearance and there was no messages. She was in a fever of impatience and suspense. When at last Cliff Nichols phoned she begged anxiously for news.

"Tell you later; nothing very much, but we're on the right track." The buoyant note in his voice was unmistakable, however. "You know what I tried to get out of our client yesterday; I want you to go down and see him yourself this afternoon. Do you mind? It isn't a very pleasant place."

"Mind?" Ethel caught him up. "I'm dying to go, Mr. Nichols! Will they let me in, though?"

"Yes, I've arranged for that; just give your name and take one of our cards with you," Cliff replied. "Find out if you can the reason why he doesn't like the housekeeper and where she might have ben during the five years before she took that position, and also the exact state of affairs existing between our client and the lady who crossed on the same steamer with him. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. Shall I come straight back here, Mr. Nichols?" she asked eagerly. "I do so want to know what's going on, and there hasn't been any word from a soul!"

"I didn't expect any!" Cliff laughed. "Yes, I'll meet you at the office about four."

Ethel felt no such squeamishness as her superior had done in entering the Tombs, but only a lively interest and curiosity. She greeted Richard Monckton when he appeared with a matter of fact friendliness that robbed the situation of any embarrassment for him. Clifford Nichols had given her a free hand and she meant to make the most of it.

"Mr. Monckton, I suppose you think it's funny, my coming to you," she began without preamble. "You see, I'm a little bit more than just office manager for our firm; I work right along with them on cases and they tell me everything."

"I was told that I might place every confidence in you, Miss Jepson; thank you for coming to me." Richard smiled faintly. "You have some news?"

"Well, I hadn't any instructions to tell you, but we're really on the trail of that burglar. There isn't a doubt but we'll be able to prove very soon that he was there in your house Thursday night even if we can't pick him up right away, though we'll do that, too, later!"

She spoke with serene conviction, and Richard's worn face lighted with heartfelt relief.

"Thank God!" he cried. "I can't tell you what that means to me! But it is certain? You are not saying this simply to reassure me?"

"It is the truth, Mr. Monckton!" Ethel asserted. "I don't think I'm at liberty to tell you any details, but we've traced that number he wrote on the wall, and now you'll just have to be patient, for it's a waiting game."

"I'll wait months, years, if it means a final clearing of my name!" exclaimed Richard. "I hadn't the slightest fear that I could be convicted of such a hideous thing, but the thought of the trial was a living horror! I couldn't even be sure that you people believed me! Why should you when the police didn't, and every one else has deserted me—"

He broke off, but the sudden bitterness in his tone was sharper than that of a man condemned alone by public opinion. Some one on whose faith he depended had failed him and Ethel's sympathetic eyes saw the truth.

"Don't you believe every one's deserted you!" she declared warmly. "Maybe they're keeping away from here because they think you would want them to, but they've been to other places for you! I may be saying more than I should, but I know you won't give me away, and *I* didn't make any promise not to tell you! What if somebody 'd come to *us*, somebody who knew you weren't guilty and wanted to help you any way they could without your knowing?"

Barbara Norcross had not come to help, but to seek reassurance herself. Ethel was well aware of that, but she could not resist giving him that grain of mendacious comfort and the truth had never been of the least importance to her unless it happened to serve her ends.

She felt amply rewarded when their client took both her hands and wrung them heartily, saying with a little quiver in his tones:

"Bless you, Miss Jepson! I know what you mean, but I couldn't be sure; I hardly dared to hope! All the circumstances were against me and why should any one have believed in the face of such a damning chain of evidence!"

As though to conceal his emotion he reached in his pocket for the thin platinum case and took from it a cigarette, rolling it nervously between fingers that shook slightly.

"Everybody ought to have believed you if they've got good common sense," said

Ethel. "I knew right from the start that there wasn't any question of your having anything to do with it and Mr. Nichols never wasted a minute in a different direction than going straight after the man who killed your father, Mr. Monckton. But other things will come up that we've got to answer."

"I appreciate that fact." Richard spoke slowly, tapping with the cigarette on the case as he had done during the interview in the Shadowers' office. "I'd like you to know, Miss Jepson, that I feel very grateful, more than satisfied with the way you have taken hold of the affair, and especially the view which you yourself have taken. A woman's intuition is seldom wrong and it encourages me to believe that others may be brought to feel as you do. You've no idea how it bucks a fellow up!"

"Oh, well, I don't matter," Ethel remarked flatly. "I might be able to help, though, in the things that perhaps you think don't mean anything in the investigation because they don't bear directly on the murder. They count, anyway, and we don't want them sprung on us without a comeback. This Mrs. Miller, for instance. She was playing some sort of a game, we're wise to that, for she don't belong in any housekeeper's position, but she stuck it out a long while—ten years."

Richard glanced down thoughtfully at the cigarette as a few grains of tobacco spilled from its loosened end upon his hand. He made no effort to light it, and the guard by the door, who had been watching unobtrusively for such a move, turned away. At length the client looked up again into his questioner's eyes.

"I told Mr. Nichols her history."

"But not all of it!" Ethel countered. "You said she disappeared for five years after her husband's death before she came to your father. She must have talked a little about those five years. It would be a natural enough question for anybody to ask her where she'd been, especially as she was supposed to be broke."

"I didn't ask her," Richard disclaimed hastily. "I believe she told my father she had traveled almost constantly and I've heard her speak of some place in the West—Laramie, if I remember rightly. She—she always seemed satisfied with her position as mistress of my father's house."

An inkling came to Ethel with his last words, and she said bluntly:

"She'd have been more satisfied to have it permanently, wouldn't she? She'd known what it was to be country poor and then had a few years of society and high living in the city, only to have it swept away. She was still good looking, and pushing and scheming—"

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that!" Richard expostulated.

"I know you wouldn't; that's why I'm saying it for you!" Ethel retorted. "She knew your father was sympathetic about her troubles and so she hung on year after year making herself necessary to him, and counting on his being soft enough to marry her as he got older! You were in her way, and I'll bet she helped on the trouble between you and your father all she could!"

"I have no proof that Mrs. Miller had any designs on my father." Richard smiled again, deprecatingly. "It would be caddish of me to say so; my father would never have dreamed of taking such a step and it is all over now. If he hasn't left her well provided for in view of her long service I shall arrange it. I have never been aware of any open hostility on her part."

That was that! Ethel drew a deep breath. She had judged the young man in her shrewd way at his first coming to the Shadowers and her belief in him was intensified now as her impulsive sympathies were more strongly enlisted. He was crazy about that girl who didn't care enough to have faith in spite of everything; that was patent. But just what understanding, if any, existed between them when the steamer docked three days before? Cliff Nichols wanted to know and Ethel had no intention of failing him if she could help it. It was going to be hard, though, in the face of Richard Monckton's perfectly pleasant but aloof manner.

"Mr. Monckton, you told Mr. Nichols that you weren't engaged to be married, but somebody else seems to think you are—somebody that ought to know," she declared shamelessly. "Of course nothing's

been announced and maybe you don't feel that it's any of our business, but it may be brought out if they actually hold you for trial before we get the goods. Is it true that this other party misunderstood? That you were just—kidding?"

"She acknowledged it?" The cigarette dropped from his fingers and rolled upon the long table before the end of which he sat. "She stood by me even to—to that, in the face of everything? I thought, of course, that she would shrink from it now and I would never have tried to hold her—"

Again he checked himself and a deep red flushed his cheeks. "Tell her not to come here, Miss Jepson! I will not see her again till I can come to her a free man with the stain of this horrible accusation wiped away forever. Tell her—but I am not supposed to know that she has been to you! I can trust you to—to say the right thing. You've given me a new lease of life! Will you come again?"

"If Mr. Nichols will let me." Ethel rose. "Just you remember that we're working for you every minute!"

"I'm certain of that!" Richard shook hands once more with undisguised fervor. "I shall wait as patiently as I can."

Ethel left with her brain on fire. Their client must be cleared, and soon! He was one of the nicest boys she had ever seen. That girl wasn't half good enough for him, but if he wanted her he should have his chance. She burned with impatience to further his cause. When she reached the office of the Shadowers to find Cliff Nichols awaiting her she burst upon him like a small whirlwind.

"What did you find out at 840 West One Hundred and Tenth?" she demanded. "Did you find the family and talk to the little girl? Did she tell you the name of the man who was supposed to call her uncle up that Thursday night and didn't?"

"You mean, have I got the murderer handcuffed in my study now?" Cliff shook his head at her. "Ethel, it isn't going to be as easy as that! I found out from the janitor that only two families have telephones in the house and there's a ten-year-old named 'Bessie' in one of them, on the third floor rear. But I haven't caught a glimpse of her. Our phone call last night must have given them the alarm and they're keeping the child close. It wouldn't do any good to get in their apartment on some pretext; I'll have to watch and try to spot 'Uncle Charlie' and gain his confidence. It's going to take time."

Ethel opened her lips to speak, but evidently changed her mind. Her cheeks were flushed and her breath came fast, yet when at length she spoke it was to say meekly:

"Is that all? That sounds like days and days when every minute counts, and suppose Uncle Charlie doesn't show up for weeks, if he's mixed up in the murder? What'll you do?"

Cliff Nichols shrugged.

"What can we do?" he asked. "That's the only clew we have, and there is no other way to follow it. Did Monckton tell you anything?"

"He just let on without knowing it that a guess or two of mine was correct." Ethel told of their client's unconscious admission of the renewed engagement and of the housekeeper's long-deferred hopes which death had finally shattered.

When she had finished, Cliff nodded.

"I thought so, but I wanted to make sure. You needn't wait, Ethel; just leave a note for any of the boys who might drop in to meet me here to-morrow afternoon."

"You're going back uptown?" There was blank disappointment in her tone. "Isn't there anything maybe I could do there? If I could get in with the kid's mother in some way—"

Cliff shook his head resolutely, ignoring the pleading in her tone.

"Not a chance, Ethel; it's too risky! I'm not afraid you'd make any slip that would give us away, and with your remarkable luck and cleverness, my dear, you might be able to pick up some valuable clews. But there's a killer with his own life to fight for and his friends and accomplices will stick at nothing! We can't afford to take a chance with your safety now! I'll see you to-morrow afternoon, and meanwhile just try to forget all about it."

Forget it? Ethel sat lost in deep and earnest reflection after Cliff had taken his

departure. Forget it, even for a minute, with Richard Monckton's worn, anguished face before her, his pathetically hopeful, brave voice still ringing in her ears? Let twenty-four more hours pass while he waited, and Cliff Nichols watched for a man who would be suspicious of overtures for many a long day to come? Could she close her ears and keep her twitching fingers from meddling with the case, as she had with the others? She pursed her lips and a slow, unmistakable light dawned in her eyes.

The next morning when Lucian dropped into the office he found Rex Powell there before him. His face was very grave, almost stern, and he held two notes in his hand.

"Cliff here?" Lucian Baynes asked. "I haven't succeeded in arranging an introduction to Miss Barbara Norcross, but I've got the next best thing, although it's highly distasteful! My old steamship acquaintance presented me to young Chester Norcross, her brother, at his club last night, and although he is an unmitigated swine, I've accepted his invitation to play a round of golf with him this morning out at the Willowmere Club. I'll let him beat me with just enough trouble to make it interesting. That ought to be good for an invitation to meet his sister. Have you been busy?"

"Very much so, but I've only succeeded in having general rumors corroborated and in discovering that our client's associates and even his friends from university days have unanimously taken the police view of the case." Rex held out one of the notes. "Ethel left this last evening, evidently under instructions from Cliff. He'll be here this afternoon and wants all of us to meet him if we can."

"Ethel left this last night?" Lucian read the slip and frowned. "Isn't she coming here to-day? That's odd; never could keep her out of things before when we had an investigation on!"

"Ethel will not be here," Rex Powell replied slowly as he extended the second sheet of paper. It was not typed but carefully written though under some stress, as the erasures showed. "I am afraid that this time we have really lost our secretary!"

There was a deep note of pain in his voice, but Lucian Baynes did not heed it as he stared at the words beneath his eyes.

DEAR SHADOWERS:

Hope you won't mind, but I'm going away again for a little while. There doesn't seem to be any way I can help you now and you don't need me. Maybe you won't want me to come back, but I will have to take a chance on that. Don't worry about me. I shall be quite all right, and I hope you'll forgive me. Please don't go to Mrs. Gordon. I told her Mr. Powell was sending me away on business for him, but it's really my own. With best wishes for success and good luck,

ETHEL JEPSON.

"So she's had enough of us!" Lucian exclaimed. "That taste of society life has spoiled her for the work here and I can't blame her, but by Jove! how we shall miss her!"

"You think it's that?" Rex asked. "You don't think that perhaps she didn't leave of her own accord? She wasn't coerced?"

"Only by her own desire, old man!" Lucian laid his hand affectionately on his chief's shoulder. "That hits all of us pretty hard, but—remember that toy dog and the fresh corsage bouquets every day? Ethel's only a woman and when it's a question of her work or the man—well, what could you have expected? It isn't like her, somehow, but Ethel has deserted under fire!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GIRL ON THE STAIRS.

CLIFFORD NICHOLS, Rex Powell and Henry Corliss met at two and the varying aspects of the investigation themselves paled into insignificance before the fact of Ethel's evanescence.

Rex was still deeply troubled and Henry openly disconsolate, but Cliff himself accepted the news quietly, with a silence that was almost defensive.

"Lucian thinks Ethel has a—a sentimental affair on her mind," Rex observed. "It is ridiculous, of course, but then he cites the Pekinese, which she admitted was

a gift, and the flowers she wears. I can't believe it possible—that child!"

"You mean she thinks her young man would be disgusted if he found out what kind of work she was doing?" Henry Corliss shook his head dolefully. "That's not Ethel! Maybe she's hurt because Cliff hasn't let her get in on the investigation?"

Cliff Nichols's face was a study at this suggestion but he remarked noncommittally:

"Personally, I don't believe either of you are right, but I really feel that we ought to find her, just to assure ourselves that she isn't doing anything foolish. I don't mean getting engaged; that is her own affair if she is contemplating it, but we can never tell what she is going to do next. Rex, we don't need any more data on Monckton, and Talbot Gordon's widow, who is chaperoning Ethel, knows only that she is the private secretary to Mr. Powell. You read this note first and you see Ethel says she has told her she is going away on business for you. If under another name you could manage to meet Mrs. Gordon and some of the set Ethel is traveling with, through her we may find out where the child is. She might have dropped a hint to some one of them as to her plans. This has nothing to do with our work, of course, but it is still more important."

"It is," Rex Powell commented with a certain grimness. "She has asked us not to go to Mrs. Gordon. That is the one reason why I think it is through that lady we may unearth some clew to her disappearance, for it amounts to that. I—I couldn't work with any degree of concentration till I knew all was well with her."

"All right, then; cut along Rex, and if you ring here and no one answers, come yourself and leave a note." Cliff turned to Henry. "Did you go to Judge Francis and Dr. Kibbe and Waldron Ingram?"

"Yes. I went to the judge first. He's a fine old white-haired fellow of the old school with a pretty keen mind and he got like a shot what I wanted. But when he summoned his valet, that Isaac, I knew I couldn't get any dope from him about the servants at the Manor. Isaac is as old as Noah, and his kinky hair's as white, too, as cotton. He's been with the judge for nearly fifty years and all he could tell me was that the help employed at the Manor all 'treated him fine,' and it seemed like they were all the kind that 'quality folks' would want around them."

Henry paused, clasping his hands about his rotund knees. "The next one I struck was Dr. Kibbe. His chauffeur, Paolo Galli, had the car just outside, and he's a smooth article. I got it from him finally that there is one maid in that household who is mighty attractive and had phone calls and occasional visitors who would bear watching. It may be a case of sour grapes, but I got her name anyway—Lucy Regnier.

"Then I saw Ingram, the president of the Citizens' and Aliens' Bank. He wasn't so easy to handle; didn't want himself or his servants mixed up in the case. However, when I showed him it was a question of us or the police he produced his valet, Hugh Brinsley. Nothing much doing, though, except that Brinsley got from De Puyster Monckton's own valet, old Jim Ricks, that Mr. Monckton was grieving himself to death about his son. For the love of Pete, Cliff, give me a new line! I'm no cross-examiner!"

"All right!" Cliff Nichols bent toward his stout confrere. "This is rather more in your line. The valet you just spoke of, Jim Ricks, had what was described to me as a 'sort of fit' late Friday afternoon at the house where the murder took place and was taken to the hospital. Find out if he's able to talk and get all the little intimate details you can from him about the old gentleman's manner during the past few months. He doesn't like Richard and he's almost fanatically loyal to the memory of the father, but you may get some information that you can look at in an unprejudiced way."

"'Unprejudiced!' Huh!" Henry snorted. "You make me just naturally tired, Cliff! Just because of that handwriting, you're still—Gosh A'mighty! Look at Phil!"

The youngest member of the Shadowers sauntered in with a fair assumption of his old debonair manner, but it was slightly marred by the deep circles under his eyes and the drawn look of pain about the mouth.

"Hello, you too!" Phil Howe sank into a chair, pulling his cuffs down carefully over his wrists. "Where's Rex? I've been in touch with both George and Luce, and I got the office to report here as quick as I could. What happened to Ethel?"

"You've heard, then?" Cliff handed over her note. "We're going to trace her this time, but tell us what happened to you? You look rather as though you'd been through the mill!"

"I'll say I have!" Phil's eyes twinkled. "I'm not the only one! I have a message for you from George about the man Radwick."

Starting with that unexpected meeting in the grounds of the Manor on the previous night, Phil told of Wick's disclosure as to his own identity and that of the maid. Henry sat back with a grunt of half incredulous belief.

"Lucy Regnier! That's the woman Galli talked about—said she'd be worth watching. I never ran into the Dobson gang, guess they didn't operate in the Middle West. Where's the Regnier woman now?"

Phil reddened.

"Well, I suppose if I don't tell you Lucian will!" He gave them an account of his morning's adventure. Henry chuckled with huge enjoyment but Cliff remarked very seriously:

"You must find her again and don't lose her trail day or night! She called up a number beginning with 609—"

"Yes, but when I taxed her with calling 6099, she laughed at me as if she was relieved; it would be a funny coincidence if she hadn't been asking for that number after all, wouldn't it?"

Cliff Nichols discreetly ignored the question, but asked one in his turn.

"Have you any idea how you can pick her up again?"

"Yes, if she's still trailing with what's left of the old gang. I think I know where I can find one or two of them and I'll be in right, for they'll remember a few tricks I turned and accept me as one of them. You can bet I won't rest till I've evened the score with Lucy! Coming, Henry?"

The two had been gone more than an hour when George appeared. He was closely followed by Lucian Baynes, who listened attentively with Cliff to further details of the encounter with Wicks.

"He isn't associated with Lucy, that's clear." George finished. "The meeting was a surprise to both of them, and though she remembered him as the man who called three times last summer, according to Phil, I don't think she knew who he was. Now, if he was employed by Monckton to watch his son he certainly couldn't have been instrumental in bringing him to the verge of ruin. And what did he go sneaking up to the Manor for as soon as he thought he had lost me?"

"I don't know." Cliff shook his head. "He's got a pretty big name and his agency is one of the best. He would have sent one of his operatives to shadow Richard unless there was more important work connected with it than that alone. Perhaps we can get him to tell us. Did he re-appear to-day at the Manor?"

"No. A man answering his description took the early train from the Pocantico Hills station. When I reached the city I called him up at his office. He's there, all right, and I have an appointment to see him in an hour. If he tries to hedge I'll put it to him straight. He couldn't afford to have the press get wind of that nocturnal visit of his." George Roper paused and added reflectively: "What do you suppose Lucy Regnier's game was?"

"I don' think there can be any doubt about that." Cliff smiled slightly. "There were no women in the Monckton family with jewels that would have attracted Lucy's crowd, but many of the house guests last summer and this spring had a lot of valuables, and I know of three robberies in the last month alone among them. Judge Abner Francis lost a rich collection of stickpins, Dr. Kibbe a set of studs and waistcoat buttons worth over five thousand, and Mrs. Waldron Ingram a diamond necklace that has been famous more than two generations.

"Lucy is still in the old game, but playing it safe—none of the thefts took place at the Manor but while the victims were travelling about. Phil is hot on the wom-

an's trail now. I won't be here to-night, George, but leave a report here for me on your conference with Wicks."

George left them and Lucian Baynes rose also.

"I looked in because you wanted me to, old man, but there's nothing more of any importance. I have a new little playmate, about as perfect a young rotter as I've ever met. His name is Chester Norcross and I'm dining to-morrow night with him and his sister. Will I find you here to-morrow if anything turns up in the meantime?"

"I'm not sure," Cliff responded. "I'm off on a little investigation of my own and you couldn't reach me, for I don't know myself where I'm likely to be."

He had told none of his colleagues of the discovery of the right number. He locked the office and started uptown. Leaving the subway at the One Hundred and Tenth Street station he walked westward to Number 840, a modest, old-fashioned brick building set between two more pretentious modern ones on a block that had evidently been given over to cheap flats in the days when bells and mail boxes for each tenant were installed in the vestibules.

Glancing at the row on the left he saw two letters in the third box and took them out. One was addressed to "Charles Curran" and the other to Mrs. Lena Farley. Placing them in his pocket he pressed the bell numbered "four" in the opposite row.

The door clicked and he passed into the dim, narrow hallway and up one flight of the clean but shabbily carpeted stairs. A stout, smiling-faced Irishwoman stood waiting for him in the opened door of the front flat and said cordially:

"Good afternoon to you, Mr. Nixon! Your room's ready for you and here's a key. I put your bag on the bed and a letter's come for you."

"Thanks, I'm sure I'll be very comfortable." Cliff took the letter which he had mailed to himself as corroborative evidence of his identity and passed into the small hallroom, just by the door, that he had engaged that morning. He turned the key in the lock behind him and took out the letters he had abstracted below. The one addressed to "Mrs. Farley" was in an illiterate feminine hand with a blot or two and a smear of dirt where the flap was sealed. He broke it open and read:—

DEER LENA:

Bill and me will be arond Sundy eve. like you asked us. Has Charlie been sick? I seen him yesterdy and I thought he looked awful bad. Tell Bessie I'm bringing her a new dress I maid for the dol Joe give her. No more now.

Your loveing friend,
JEN.

Mrs. Farley would learn that evening that her letter had gone astray Cliff reflected. Would that make her suspicious of espionage? The family in the third floor rear had already taken alarm at the telephone call innocently answered by the child Bessie. Would they look askance at their neighbor's new lodger? It couldn't be helped now for he couldn't reseal the torn envelope and he had learned at least the first names of three of their friends. He moistened the flap of the second letter and then carefully rolled it back with a pencil. It was written in a labored masculine hand.

HELLO, CHARLIE:

Got your number O. K., but Al slipped me the word to lay off it. What's up? I got a hunch I know, and if it's straight we'd both better hop a rattler for the sticks. Meet me late to-night at the old place and give me the dope.
LEFTY.

So the alarm had gone out. "Al" and "Lefty" must be two of the pals whom the little girl said were always calling her uncle. Cliff meant to get a look at "Bill" and "Jen" when they arrived and to follow Charlie later if he went to keep his appointment.

He sealed the letter again and going downstairs dropped it into the box from which he had taken it. Then he went to a little restaurant around the corner for a hasty bite of dinner.

One significant fact had been gleaned from the first letter; Charlie "looked awful bad" the day before, so bad that his friend wondered if he had been ill. There would be small need to wonder if he were worrying about the telephone call and the fear of being drawn into trouble!

The letter from Lefty had been unmistakable. He was suspicious of the truth

but not certain and he was prepared to fly from the city. Clearly neither he, Bill, nor Al had been the one for whose call Charlie had waited vainly on that fateful Thursday night. There was " Joe," too; surely among so many Cliff would be able to obtain a clue to the man who had written that number on the wall!

At a little after eight that evening he heard footsteps on the stairs and a woman's high-pitched, rather coarse laughter. He had left the entrance door of the apartment open an inch or two and now he went to it with his hat in his hand as though prepared to go out again.

The door at the opposite end of the hall opened, too, and he caught a glimpse of a thin, rather careworn looking woman of perhaps thirty, with hollow, deeply circled eyes in a pale, gaunt face, and behind her for an instant a man appeared. He was younger and in shirt sleeves his shoulders loomed very broad, but that was all Cliff could make out, for he stepped back quickly as a dumpy, plump little woman in a flaring feathered hat mounted the stairs in company with a sallow-faced youth in a loud-checked suit and bright, squeaky yellow shoes.

They were greeted by the thin, weary-eyed hostess and the door closed behind them, but not before Cliff heard a pleased little cry in a childish voice—the same clear treble that had replied to him over the 'phone.

He watched but no one else came and a little past midnight the visiting couple departed taking with them the broad-shouldered young man. Could this be indeed Charlie, and was he going to keep that appointment Lefty had made? The letter was gone from the box when Cliff returned after dining, and now he tiptoed from the flat, closing the door noiselessly behind him and followed the trio downstairs.

He had provided himself with cheap, ready-made clothes with the creases partially removed and dust rubbed into the cloth here and there in keeping with the rôle of a shipping clerk which he had adopted for the benefit of his new landlady and now his blue serge suit and rather dilapidated gray felt soft hat were inconspicuous enough to take away much of the distinction of his appearance. His mustache had been clipped, the goatee shaved ruthlessly away and his hair shortened and plastered down. Looking like a down-at-heel but eminently respectable white-collar man of early middle age, he let himself quietly out and walked several yards behind his quarry to the corner.

Here they separated, the couple boarding a surface car and the young man proceeding on alone across town. Cliff trailed him, keeping just behind his solitary figure on the other side of the street. The man went straight down the steeply sloping hill at a swinging, unhurried pace, but at the bottom he turned and it seemed to Cliff that his gait grew uneven and his bearing furtive. Down one street and up another, sometimes completely circling a block, he moved at a constantly increasing pace. It was borne in upon Cliff that he was suspicious of espionage if not actually sure of it, and was trying to throw a possible pursuer off the track.

For more than an hour he dodged about, looking hastily over his shoulder. But if he saw that slim figure loitering aimlessly in his wake he gave no sign of it and at last turned into the side door of an apparently empty saloon. A light shone from it for an instant, however. Cliff hesitated momentarily and then opened the door himself and entered a small room fitted with little round tables, at several of which groups of men were seated drinking and talking together in orderly, low tones. Their sharp faces—one or two with the prison pallor which Cliff recognized, and many with the sallow skins and leaden, contracted eyes of the dope fiend—expressed no hilarity but rather stern business.

The broad-shouldered young man sat down alone, but he was almost instantly joined by a hard-featured man about five years his senior who greeted him with an anxious, questioning air and drew a chair up close.

Cliff took his place alone at a table nearby. The bartender eyed him warily but nodded with a grunt of reassurance when Cliff addressed him confidentially.

"I'm waiting here for Kelly. Know him, don't you? Bring me a small beer and if he comes in the front way tell him Cliff's here, will you?"

"I only know Black Kelly, and he's been and gone, but maybe he'll come back again if he's got a date with you," the bartender answered. "Dark or light?"

"Light." Cliff settled back in his chair and tried to listen to the conversation going on at the next table. Only snatches of it reached his ears. Once the latest comer uttered a sharp, smothered ejaculation and brought his fist down on his knee, clenched convulsively. Then he swore under his breath and added:

"So I hit it! The damn fool, why did he chance it? I tell you, Charlie, it's a good thing they're on the wrong steer, but we'd better make ourselves scarce for awhile!"

"Not a chance, Lefty. You can beat it if you want to, but I've got to stick around. My sister's kid—"

The rest was lost as Charlie lowered his tones cautiously, but at a further murmured remark he was aware that the man called "Lefty" turned with elaborate casualness and stared at him shrewdly. Then there came one word of a phrase which caused Cliff to stiffen in his chair. That word was "Shadowers"!

Lefty rose in a few minutes and went out abruptly. Charlie seemed about to follow as Cliff spilled part of the contents of his glass in the cuspidor beside him and sipped with fastidious repugnance at the remainder. The bartender reëntered followed by a stout, florid-faced man who hurried to Charlie's side and bent over him.

"Here that night—sure you were, you're all right, but he—told me what he said to you. Yeah, all to pieces, and hitting the snow again. Not on your life I couldn't take a chance. Sure I wouldn't go back on him, but I shipped him out to the old woman's—hell of a break, if he don't pull himself together!"

Charlie replied in an indistinguishable undertone and clapping the florid man on his stout shoulder he went out. Cliff finished his beer, paid the bartender, leaving a message for the fictitious "Kelly," and followed. Charlie could not after all have been aware of his interest for he went straight across town to the apartment house again without once looking back.

Cliff loitered in the vestibule for a good ten minutes, then softly opened the door with his key. He had started up the stairs when the sight of a figure crouched just below the topmost step made him pause.

It was that of a woman evidently youthful from her petite slenderness, and dressed in a straight gown of some dark, soft material that made no slightest rustle as she sprang up and started forward after one startled look at him. But Cliff leaped forward and caught her by the arm.

"I thought so!" he exclaimed in a low but stern tone. "I might have known you'd try something like this, Ethel! What are you doing here?"

CHAPTER XX.

BESSIE.

"I HAVE got a room on the next floor with Mrs. Franck," Ethel explained in a whisper as she hung her head. "I know you said you wouldn't let me help you here, Mr. Nichols, but that was only because you were afraid maybe I couldn't take care of myself and they might hurt me. I just couldn't help disobeying you, and you'd told me to pretend to leave, yourself. Oh, please don't send me away! I know I can help you in the one way you couldn't even try. Please!"

Her earnestness was compelling and Cliff found his anger dissipated.

"Well," he responded in a softened tone, "I guess you're safe enough for to-night but go straight back to your room and stay there, do you understand? Don't come out again no matter what you may hear, and meet me at eight o'clock in the morning around the corner in a small restaurant you'll find there. I'll decide meantime what to do with you—we can't talk here! What 'way' do you mean that you can help?"

"Through the little girl—Bessie!" Ethel Jepson declared. "I knew even when we talked to her over the 'phone the other night that she'd be the one to

approach and a woman could get her confidence better than a man. She goes with Mrs. Franck's little boy over to the park to play every morning, and I always could get on with kiddies. It may take a few days, but when once I can gain her confidence I know I can get something from her about that man who was to call up her uncle Thursday night and didn't, even if she was told not to dare to speak of it! I'll meet you in the restaurant tomorrow evening at six instead if you'll let me; Mrs. Franck gives me my breakfast, and by that time I ought to have something to tell you."

Cliff Nichols wavered but finally gave his reluctant consent, and watched while she crept back to the rear apartment on the next floor.

She was right, of course. The child's knowledge of her uncle's affairs and those of his friends might be limited, especially if he were connected with a gang of crooks, but she evidently knew enough to make her dangerous or she would not have been cautioned not to speak. Unknowingly she might give to Ethel a valuable clue.

Cliff shuddered at the thought of their young secretary's possible danger, but he should have known her better than to think she would sit by passively while the mystery remained unsolved. At least he was at hand to protect her in any emergency.

The wide-open saloon he had followed Charlie to was a resort for denizens of the underworld; that was patent. The weak, furtive faces of its patrons were unmistakable, with thievery and every sort of petty crime written all over them, and Charlie was tarred with the same brush. If the thin, hard-worked little woman who had opened the door to her guests was his sister and the mother of the little girl, she was plainly not of a criminal type. But the look of covert apprehension which seemed habitual to her denoted that she knew of her brother's mode of life and feared for him. He was warned and she would be hopelessly reticent; only the child remained.

In the morning he left early as though to go to work, but took up his stand at the nearest entrance to the small park that clung to the bottom of the steep cliff crowned with the huge cathedral. Soon children alone or in groups came straggling in to play and then young mothers appeared with shabby baby carriages and go-carts. Cliff watched and waited patiently. At last a small tow-headed boy approached, accompanied by a gentle faced little girl a few feet taller than he. She was neatly dressed and shining from soap and water, with her brown hair in two thin, decorous little braids looped behind each ear and she lugged a huge doll arrayed in an obviously new and gorgeous gown of bright blue silk.

Cliff recalled the dress which " Jen " had made for the doll "Joe" had given to Bessie. At the same moment Ethel Jepson came strolling along with a book and a small sewing bag. Giving him a glance without the slightest shade of recognition in it, she entered the park and seated herself on a bench near where the two children were playing, somewhat ostentatiously producing a box of chocolates from her bag.

Cliff waited then long enough to see the boy run to her, beckoning to his companion. Then he returned to the house, leaving the apartment door ajar as before.

He explained to the landlady that he felt ill and had decided to lay off for the day, and patiently submitted to being dosed and coddled by the good-natured woman. He sighed with relief when she departed to market, and settled himself for a long vigil.

It was one unproductive of result, for the door of the opposite flat remained closed and no one came to it. If Charlie had not gone out while Cliff was watching the park entrance he must have decided to lay low and his sister with him for there was no sign of either of them all day.

The little girl returned at noon, going out again at three to reappear when the sun got low, but nothing else occurred. At six Cliff left for the restaurant where he found Ethel waiting for him.

" Where have you been since morning?" he demanded. " I've been watching all day and you didn't come back from the park!"

" No, I didn't!" she dimpled. " I thought I hadn't better hang around the house too much especially when there wasn't any use

in it since I couldn't see any more of Bessie. We're getting along nicely and I don't think it 'll take long to find out all she knows."

"What did you learn so far?" Cliff asked when their order had been taken. "She looked like a shy little thing."

"She is, but Johnny Franck knew me, of course, and so she took me on faith. And the candy helped to break the ice. If they're not both sick from it to-morrow, I'm going to show her how to fold and cut a new kind of paper doll. That won't amuse Johnny, and he'll run off and play by himself when he sees there isn't any more candy; so I'll have a better chance to talk to her. I didn't want to ask her too many questions at first, for she's been warned not to talk to strangers, but she'll forget after a while."

Ethel paused to spear an oyster daintily and then went on: "A friend of her mother made that dress for the doll she was carrying, and brought it to her last night. Did you see her?"

Cliff nodded.

"Yes; she came with a man who looked like a typical young tough."

"He's a short-change artist with a carnival!" Ethel laughed. "You would have died at the simple way the kiddie gave it away without dreaming what she was talking about. The doll was given to her by 'Joe,' whoever he is, and she seemed awfully fond of him. I gathered only that he was a pal of her uncle. She mentioned an 'Al,' too, and somebody called 'Lefty.'"

"I've heard of them both, and seen them, too." Cliff told her of the letters he had opened and the snatches of conversation in the saloon, and when he had finished he asked: "Was that all Bessie told you?"

"No. She's staying home from school this week because she's just getting over the mumps; her mother lately sold out a little fancy store she had around on the avenue, and that's why they've had a phone put in the flat. They used to use the one in the store, I guess; it would have been better for her uncle if he's carrying on any crooked business."

Ethel sat back while the soup was substituted for the oyster plates, and then continued:

"I asked her what her mother was going to do now, and she said she didn't know, but she herself was going to be sent away to school next year and only come home for the holidays. She chattered a lot about somebody named 'Annie,' who was 'awful pretty and stylish and crazy about seeing the horses run.' She'd won quite a lot of money on them, too, and Bessie's Uncle Charlie was just wild about her.

"There isn't a more superstitious woman in the world than the one that follows the races, Mr. Nichols, and I got Annie's last name and her address from Bessie, and went around to see her in the afternoon."

Cliff stared.

"What excuse did you make, and what does her being superstitious have to do with it?"

"Everything, for I brought a pretty well soiled pack of cards with me and told her I was a fortune teller that Mrs. Farley had sent to her." Ethel laughed again. "She is a big, frowsy looking blonde, but very pretty, with a lot of small-stoned rings on, and she fell for my game like a baby. I made two dollars, but it was worth it, for I'd looked up the dope sheet in the paper first, and honestly I picked the winner for her to-day! What do you think of that? I shouldn't wonder if you'd see her pretty soon, for I told her a dark young man was mad about her, and that something had happened that was going to get him into a terrible lot of trouble; something connected with a message he'd expected but didn't get, and that he was frightened to death about it right now."

"You didn't go too far?" Cliff asked anxiously. "We don't want to frighten him any more than he is now."

"No. She'll find out, of course, that Bessie's mother never heard of me, but that won't matter as long as she doesn't catch sight of me, and I'll take good care of that!" Ethel exclaimed as she cut the juicy *filet mignon* before her.

"This girl Annie Leonard was scared herself when I told her, but I saw that it didn't surprise her, and she honestly believed I read it in the cards.

"I moved them around a little the way Mr. Roper has showed me at odd times,

and I made the death cards come out right next to the jacks of clubs and hearts, meaning ' Uncle Charlie ' and the man who was to have telephoned to him and didn't, and she gave a little scream.

" She was so white I thought she was going to faint, and then cried: ' He didn't have anything to do with it! Oh, I've been afraid of this! My Gawd, if it all comes out!' Then she remembered herself and stopped, and I told her a few nice things to sort of take the curse off and then quit. She asked me to come again in a few days, but I'd got all I could out of her. She knows about the murder and that Charlie is mixed up in it in some way, but I could not get her to mention the name of the other man.

" Look here, Mr. Nichols, Bessie may tell me something to-morrow in the park that you ought to hear. If you aren't going to be busy, why don't you take a newspaper and hang around, and if you see me talking to her and I should happen to drop my scissors you could pick them up for me and I'd recognize you.

" She might be shy again and shut up like a little clam, but you might suggest taking us for a little ride or something, and I'd get her going again. What do you think of it?"

" I think it's a sensible plan," Cliff approved. " I'll be there early."

He was as good as his word, and apparently deep in the morning's news when the little girl appeared, this time alone. She had a large paper pad instead of the doll, and looked about eagerly before seating herself on the bench opposite, spreading out her small skirts primly and turning out her round little sandaled toes.

Her face was not overintelligent, but very sweet, with calm, steady eyes and a sensitive mouth, and her pensive gaze was fastened on the gate till at last she jumped up with a pleased little cry. Ethel was entering with her workbag on her arm.

" Hello, Mith Jefferthon!" the clear voice piped. " I brought my pad with me! You didn't forget?"

" About the paper dolls?" Ethel laughed with a childish note in her own tones. " No. And I have a big pair of scissors. See them?"

She seated herself beside where the little girl had waited and held up a huge pair of shears in meaning reminder to Cliff Nichols.

" You cut them in a row?" Bessie sat down again, too, and watched absorbedly while Ethel folded and cut, and finally evolved a series of rather acrobatic looking dolls holding each other by the hand. The child was delighted and appeared to be chattering gayly, but her small voice, now that it was no longer raised in excitement, failed to carry to Cliff's ears.

He could could tell by watching her expression and that of Ethel as she put an apparently innocent question or two, that the dolls had ceased to be the subject of the conversation.

At last, to his relief, the scissors suddenly fell ringing on to the pavement. Bessie slipped down politely, but Cliff was before her, and, retrieving the scissors, he presented them, hat in hand. Then he paused in ostensibly pleased surprise.

" Thank you— Why, Mr. Smith!" Ethel exclaimed. " To think of it's being you! This is a gentleman I used to work for, Bessie. He has a toy store all filled with the loveliest things, and maybe he'll show them to you some time. Would you like to sit down with us, Mr. Smith? I wish we had one of your paint boxes to give our dollies nice pink cheeks and blue eyes."

" You shall have one!" Cliff promised as he seated himself. " I'll be glad to send it to your little friend if you'll give me her address."

He turned to the child, who was blushing with embarrassment and joy.

" Why, she lives in the same house I do, but I don't know what apartment. Tell Mr. Smith, Bessie."

The child complied shyly, and Cliff gravely made a note of it. Then Ethel added:

" Bessie's got a big doll, Mr. Smith— nicer almost than any in your store—and it was given to her by her Uncle Joe."

" No; he isn't my uncle," Bessie disclaimed politely. " My uncle's Uncle Charlie, but Joe's a friend of his."

" He must be a friend of yours, too," Cliff remarked with a smile.

" Yeth, thir, he ith!" She lisped as she

had over the telephone, but the impediment became less noticeable as she gained in confidence. "He used to play with me, and my mother laughed because he's so big and has arms like that!"

She stretched her own small arms out to their widest extent, but her serene face clouded as she dropped them to her sides once more. "I'm going to miss him an awful lot."

"Has he gone away?" Cliff made the question as indifferent as he could.

"Uncle Charlie says he's going, and we won't even see him to say good-by!" Her lips trembled slightly. "I haven't seen him in ever so long, but he was coming last week, only he didn't. Oh, I forgot!"

She stopped, flushing still deeper with embarrassment, but Ethel laughed lightly.

"That's funny! Didn't you have a friend when I worked for you named Joe, Mr. Smith? Seems to me I remember his calling you up a lot."

"Yes, of course!" Cliff played up to her lead. "What is your friend's name, Bessie? Maybe it's the same!"

But the child shook her smooth, brown head.

"No, thir. My Joe didn't know anybody that had a toy store. I—I ought to go home; my mamma will be looking for me."

She started to wriggle down off the seat once more, but Cliff had a sudden inspiration.

"I wish I knew a place around here where we could get some nice ice cream cones!" He turned to Ethel. "You'd like one, wouldn't you?"

She nodded, and Bessie cried:

"Oh, I know! I know a place right across the street!"

"Then would you like to run over and get some for all of us?" Cliff placed some coins in her small palm. "Get as many as you can carry."

"My mamma mightn't want me to—for myself, I mean." She hesitated, and then her face cleared. "The doctor let me have some last week, though, when my face was all mumped out. I'll be right back!"

She sped away, and Cliff asked reflectively:

"Do you suppose she will?"

"Of course!" Ethel replied with conviction. "She's an honest little thing, and the ice cream will loosen her tongue. Keep on talking about 'Joe,' and try to make her think you really know him. If she tells her mother about this talk, she won't be allowed to play here any more, of course; so this is our last chance."

Bessie flew back, a large paper bag of cones balanced carefully between her hands. She sighed with enjoyment when Cliff opened it and handed one to her.

"Oh, it's good! Joe used to take me there to buy them!"

Unconsciously she renewed the subject, and Cliff was quick to take advantage of it. "I didn't always have a toy store, and maybe I do know Joe, after all, and your uncle. His name isn't Charlie Curran, is it, Bessie?"

"Oh, yes!" Bessie clapped her hands. "And Joe's is Geiger!"

"That's the fellow! I haven't seen him in a long while," Cliff exclaimed with a hearty assumption of pleasure. "He used to have a lot of jewelry and silver and stuff to sell; that's how I met him; I bought a lot of it. Did you ever know Mrs. Regnier? She's a friend of Joe's and your uncle, too."

"No, sir!" Bessie shook her head again. "But that's my Joe. He has awful pretty things sometimes; he showed them to my mamma and me—rings and bracelets and things?"

"Where is he now, do you know?" Cliff pursued. "I'd like to see him, and maybe I could do some business with him on the side before he goes away. Where did you say he was going?"

"I don't know." The childish voice held a sorry note once more. "I never did know where he lived, but he used to be at Al's a lot. Do you know Al?"

"Yes; he has a café, hasn't he?" Cliff paused, and at her nod went on carefully. "Maybe Charlie will see him?"

"No, he won't. He phoned to Uncle Charlie at Al's one night last week, and Uncle Charlie gave him mamma's new number and asked him to call up home in an hour, but he didn't. Uncle Charlie didn't seem to think very much about it that night,

but he was still waiting up when I went to sleep, and in the morning he was awful worried.

"He took mamma in the kitchen and talked an awful long while, and when they came out they told me I wasn't to say anything about Joe to anybody, not even let on that we knew him or ever expected him to call us up; but of course it's all right when you're a friend of his! If you see him I wish you'd tell him how I miss him!"

"I shall." Cliff dared not glance at Ethel, but he felt rather than heard her quickened, tremulous breathing. He staked everything on a final question. "Do you know where Al's old mother lives? He calls her 'the old woman.'"

"That isn't his mother!" Bessie giggled. "That's his sister. She takes a lot of his friends to board over at her house at Brookfield. If you see Joe, tell him I think he is mean to go away without saying good-by!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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LOVE'S FOUNDATION

'TIS no new theme that I am springing—
'Tis my own girl that I am singing.
(Now were *you* writing this, you'd say
The selfsame thing the selfsame way.)
It isn't who the girl, or where; so
She is *my* girl—*that* makes me care so.

It matters not what folk she's born to,
Nor where I wrote, this very morn, to,
That she might view the words I'd penned her—
Because she's *mine* do I defend her.
She may not seem to you a spry girl,
But by the nine red gods she's *my* girl!

I ask not in what zone or climate
The miss was bred, so she is *my* mate;
Eastern or Western, Northern, Southern—
Nowhere at all is such another'n.
Though breathing balsam, fir or cypress
No other lips match those that *I* press.

Yet should she cease to care so for me,
As sure as fate that girl would bore me!
To you this may appear digression,
But it is merely a confession.
All honest folk, if you will quiz 'em,
Will own that love's half egotism.

Strickland Gillilan.

The Self-Assassination of Angel

By EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN

This is the first of five short stories concerning the rapid, roaring, desert metropolis of Red Bluff. You will meet herein in consecutive weekly issues: (1) a fighting rooster that barred no hold from anybody or anything; (2) a professional footracing horntoad; (3) the municipal polecat; (4) that phenomenon, the deceased mule; and (5) the unromantic non-flopping flapjack. These are veracious tales of the West. Read 'em and weep—tears of joy.—THE EDITOR.

"This is the song of a rooster—
When roosters were eager to fight;
Ere laws got so thick they made us all sick,
But nothin' ain't never just right!"
—*Songs of the Shaky Sixteen.*

MORE years ago than some of us care to remember, two aged prospectors, accompanied by a small mouse-tinted, long-eared burro named "Versus," toiled patiently across the vast expanse of the primeval desert stretching from end to end of the uttermost appendix of southwestern Nevada and extending over the edge into the borders of the lovely and unusual climate of southern California.

The desert still stretches and extends, but it is no longer primeval. Civilization has wrought changes; time has effaced the solitude in spots, and where once was heard only the shrill staccato yelp of the prowling coyote, there now sounds the sputter of radio outfits, the incongruous backfire of automobile trucks, *et cetera*.

The prospectors were "Solemn" Johnson

and "Dirty Shirt" Smith. Footsore and with their shoes full of sand, when the sun plunged that night, like a giant red-hot stove-lid behind the grim outlines of Tombstone Range, the two grizzled denizens of the desert camped beside an insignificant gulch.

At dawn they aroused from their slumbers and when Dirty Shirt cast his eyes toward the dwarf Joshua tree, on which he had draped his wearing apparel the evening before, he saw Versus—their aforementioned burro—steadily chewing on one of his extra socks. With an oath Dirty Shirt sprang from his blankets, stooped over quickly and picked up a small bowlder, his intentions being, in his own words, to:

"Knock that damned fool burro's head off!"

Perhaps the reader will wonder what this has to do with the self-assassination of "Angel." The only reply possible is that under no circumstances was Rome ever built without a foundation.

As Dirty Shirt drew back his arm to hurl the chunk of rock at the not unsuspicious head of Versus, his eye caught a glint as the slanting rays of the morning sun flashed on the lump of retribution he held in his hand. Instantly Dirty Shirt's purpose was arrested. He drew the bowlder close to his face, squinted his brown eyes and peered intently at the stone as he twisted it this way and that to let the sunlight more definitely gleam on its surface.

"My Gawd!" he exclaimed, forgetting that Versus was eating his sock.

The tone in which Dirty Shirt uttered the words caused Solemn Johnson to sit bolt upright on his bed and say:

"My Gawd, what?"

"My Gawd, it's borax!" Dirty Shirt cried.

Closer examination revealed the truth of his conjecture. All that was necessary after that, was for the veteran prospectors to get breakfast, examine the ledge on the brink of the gulch, from which the bowlder had been warped by the incessant sunshine of the ages, stake out their claims, erect the location monuments and recover the sock.

In that way, briefly, the borax mine which afterward made Red Bluff possible and famous was discovered. Its inception was a burro's desire for a taste of wool.

Versus started to eat Dirty Shirt's sock at daybreak, Monday morning; by the following Tuesday the prospector-partners, elated because they had found at last apparently the mother-lode of the total borax supply of the universe, were well on their way to Pinnochle to announce the news to the world.

Saturday, Dirty Shirt and Solemn passed through Sodamint Cañon and emerged at sundown the same evening into the midst of the confusion and bustle of Pinnochle. Sunday morning they gave out the first information of the new borax discovery; Monday at 2 P.M., the Borax Trust made them a flattering offer for the first serialization and book rights, agreed ultimately to bring the borax out on the screen and pay liberal royalties on the dramatic releases.

At 2:15 P.M. the same day, Solemn and Dirty Shirt accepted the contract and received a substantial first payment. Tuesday at dawn they again started for the borax beds.

Seven miles out from Pinnochle, Bob Braden overtook and passed Dirty Shirt and Solemn with the foundation stock of Saloon Number One; that day, while they were at lunch at Hellbroth Oasis, Chuck Roden passed them with the faro layout for Saloon Number Four; during the night they were camped at Arsenic Springs and some one passed them with the dance hall attachment of Saloon Number Two; and from then on, their slumbers were more or less disturbed by the rumble of traffic which appeared to be passing them on the nearby desert.

On the following Monday, Dirty Shirt and Solemn arrived again at the scene of the assault by Versus on Dirty Shirt's sock, and to their astonishment they found the metropolis of Red Bluff, with its two hundred and seven probable human souls, already established and doing a splendid business in all seven saloons, directly across the gulch from the gigantic studio the Borax Trust had erected in the interval.

"That's what I call quick work!" Dirty Shirt remarked, as he prodded Versus with the "get-up" stick and they hurried along

the wide, bustling street of Red Bluff, "I don't think I ever knowed of a metropolis being born quicker before!"

"Well," Solemn grunted, "It's time something was being born 'quick' out on this danged old desert! She's been empty heretofore long enough, I figure!"

Until the two ancient prospectors got the lay of the land, they decided to be a bit careful about investigating the interiors of the various places of iniquity.

"We'll go down to the end of the main artery of commerce and camp," Solemn suggested, "after which we'll just reconnoiter awhile!"

It was a difficult task to get Versus past Saloons Numbers One, Two, Three and Four, from which the pungent odor of fresh beer greeted her nostrils. Evidently it was accomplished, however, and Solemn and Dirty Shirt were successful also in temporarily passing Saloons Numbers Five, Six and Seven, but with an effort.

Midway between the Chinese laundry, Hop Sing, and Saloon Number Four, Dirty Shirt noticed a sign over a slender one-story building closely abutting the edge of the street; the wording was as follows:

Wong Gee's Café — No Checks Cashed

"That looks like it might be a restaurant!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed.

"Darned if it don't!" Solemn ejaculated in reply, "what do you say we find a good place to camp and then come back up here and buy our suppers from the Chink instead of cooking them to-night?"

"It's a blamed good idea!" Dirty Shirt agreed, heartily.

Wong Gee bustled about the interior of the café as the two aged prospectors, having piled their stuff in the vacant space between Saloon Number Seven and the warehouse, returned and stepped into the restaurant. The place was immaculately neat and clean and filled with the inviting atmosphere so welcome and so wholesome to those who have traveled all day without stopping for food or the opportunity to drink.

Scarcely were Solemn and Dirty Shirt seated when Wong Gee glided forward to attend their desires.

"Gimme some ham an' eggs an' fried potatoes!" Solemn commanded; "an' turn the eggs over. Got any eggs?"

"Plenty good eggs, velly flesh!"

"Make mine th' same and—" Dirty Shirt was interrupted by a shrill, trembling crow which echoed through the restaurant.

"What'n hell was that?" he exclaimed.

"Angel," Wong Gee answered, gently; "Him 'Angel.'"

"'Angel?'"

"'Angel,'" Wong Gee repeated tenderly, "Him velly fine, heap champlion fightin' looster! Lickee hell out all loosters in Bla'stow—"

As if to verify the Oriental's words, a slim-built, long legged, extensive necked, black and red, probably half-breed Indian game rooster stalked through the kitchen entrance into the dining room. In the fowl's eye was a pensive melancholia which immediately appealed to the humane impulses of the two simple-souled, tender-hearted old prospectors.

"What's the matter with him?" Dirty Shirt asked. "He looks discouraged or something!"

Angel walked listlessly about among the tables, indifferently pecking at a fly here, carelessly absorbing a cock-roach or a bread crumb there; his straggly two-feathered tail drooped and the almost reptilian head, with the long dagger-like bill, occasionally turned wistfully to one side while a distant, "what-th'-devil's-th' use" expression came into the large jet black eyes with their yellow rims.

"He does act sort of dejected!" Solemn observed.

"Angel, him lonesome." Wong Gee sighed. "Him velly damn lonesome! No chlickens, no fightin' loosters in Led Bluff —Angel, him only sclappin' looster in Led Bluff! Make him too much sickee because no have sclap enough!"

"That's bad," Solemn sympathized, "it's hell for anything to be lonesome like that."

"You ought to get him a wife," Dirty Shirt advised; "maybe if you'd get him a nice good-natured wife or two—"

"No, no!" Wong Gee interrupted quickly and sadly, "Angel no good fo' wife; him old bachelo' looster! Gottee him one—two—wife in Bla'stow, one timee!

" Pletty soon Angel want to sclap—no looster to sclap, so Angel sclap wife— Next day have to make chliken flicassee out of Angel wife! Wife no good fo' Angel; him need plenty looster to sclap!"

That evening, after they had finished their ham and eggs, Solemn and Dirty Shirt wandered nonchalantly into Saloon Number One, looked carefully around, sized things up, and made their immortal announcement:

" We're goin' to get drunk!"

Solemn and Dirty Shirt were faithful to their promise, and during the next six months the matter of Angel more or less slipped their minds.

Meanwhile, Wong Gee's belligerent half-breed Indian game, dragged through disconsolate, fightless days, only occasionally having a round or two with "Blazer," Chuck Roden's white, corkscrew tailed bulldog. But Blazer was relatively immature as a boxing partner for Angel, and the bouts usually ended in the penultimate of Round Number One, when a pale streak, having the appearance of a bulldog in a dreadful hurry, could be noticed heading for the back door of Saloon Number Four, where his master was assistant chauffeur of the faro box.

Then came the time when Solemn and Dirty Shirt had a sudden revulsion, temporarily resigned as chief inebriates of Red Bluff and sighed once more for the consolation of contact with the silent, immeasurable desert. The next two months thereafter, they spent mostly on the raw edge of Hell-fire Basin, out near the foot of Dead Angel Mountain, in recuperation from the half year previous.

Succeeding Solemn and Dirty Shirt's vacation, was the banquet when Red Bluff, under the auspices of Colonel Spilkins and others, got Versus, their mouse-colored burro drunk on champagne and then insulted her with beans, resulting in the adjournment of the banquet.

Chronologically, it is now the following night:

Solemn and Dirty Shirt paused beside the shed under which, next door the blacksmith shop, the Borax Trust had lately installed the new prop manufacturing plant, viz: One 36-inch buzz-saw, propelled by one six horsepower gasoline engine, operated by Pedro; the intention being to reduce to the proper length the massive timbers used in holding up the roof of the borax mine.

Dirty Shirt and Solemn had just completed a thorough and comprehensive tour of Red Bluff's all seven gurgle emporiums, and were en route to Dirty Shirt's cabin for a well-earned night's rest. Their thoughts dwelt on Angel and his pathetic isolation as the exclusive fighting rooster of the sudden metropolis of Red Bluff, which had so spontaneously echoed to the discovery of the borax mine.

" Something has got to be did about it!" Solemn said, with a catch in his voice, as he and Dirty Shirt leaned against the southwest corner post of the buzz-saw shed. " There ain't no use talkin'! Angel's got to be provided with a chance to fight any danged time he wants to fight. I feel plumb sorry for that poor rooster!"

" That's what I figure," Dirty Shirt agreed, " it's a darned outrage for anything to be prohibited self-expression that way! I was readin' in a paper once about how repression wrecks th' constitutional works of people, and if Angel is repressed too blamed long he's bound to blow up!"

Almost miraculously an idea flashed into Solemn's mind. It was coincident with the appearance of " Old Bob," the veteran iron-gray tomcat attached to Mother Skillern's two-story frame hotel. Old Bob was the lone feline inhabitant of Red Bluff's two hundred and seven population. He had also been attending a party or something, probably down at the livery stable to catch a couple of mice, or possibly get better acquainted with the family of pole-cats living thereunder, and was drifting through the white moonlight of early morning back toward home. As Old Bob's graceful form, husky and close-knit, appeared before the eyes of Solemn the idea was born:

" Kitty, kitty, kitty!" Solemn called caressingly.

" What you goin' to do?" Dirty Shirt inquired.

" Never mind what I'm goin' to do!" Solemn retorted, " Even if I told you, some folks are too darned dense to comprehend!"

Dirty Shirt tolerantly ignored the rebuff.

Twenty years' partnership and association with Solemn had familiarized him, to a certain extent, with the other's idiosyncrasies.

"Come on!" Solemn half-chuckled, lifting Old Bob in his arms and starting to retrace his steps toward Wong Gee's café.

Dirty Shirt himself began to get the same thought working in Solemn's mind, and Dirty Shirt grinned.

Old Bob was an armful for Solemn, but Solemn did not complain. He felt that he was bound on an errand of mercy.

If he could provide Angel with even a temporary vent for his too-long suppressed desire to annihilate something, Solemn considered that the mere physical exertion of lugging a twelve pound tomcat through the streets of Red Bluff at 4:30 A.M. was a trifling sacrifice on his part. For Solemn had never been able wholly to efface from his memory the pathetic appeal he had seen in Angel's black eyes that evening eight months before when he and Dirty Shirt had first invested in ham and eggs in Wong Gee's restaurant.

Wong Gee had retired, hours before, to his sleeping quarters in the pantry between the kitchen and the dining room.

"What's the mallow? What th' hell's th' mallow?" Wong Gee queried, sleepily, in response to Solemn's impatient rattling of the door. "What you wantee?"

"Open up, Wong Gee!" Solemn answered, "I've got a proposition."

"'Ploposition?'" Wong Gee questioned, opening the door, "what you mean 'plopposition?'"

"A proposition to give Angel some exercise!" Solemn replied, as he and Dirty Shirt stepped inside.

"We've got a scheme for entertainin' Angel!" Dirty Shirt chipped in, "we've got a dandy plan to help him unrepress and have a fight! Bring him out. Will he fight a cat?"

"Angel fight anything—cat, dog, devil—even, what you call him?—buzz-saw! Him lonesome allee time fo' fight anything—Angel fight buzz-saw—"

"So will Old Bob!" Solemn laughed. "that's what give me the idea! Between them they ought to enjoy it quite a lot!"

Angel crowed lustily from his coop behind the restaurant; Old Bob squirmed in Solemn's arms and meowed.

"Bring him out," Dirty Shirt urged Wong Gee. "Go get Angel and let him and Old Bob turn loose—"

But Solemn had suddenly acquired a larger vision:

"That ain't the project at all!" he interrupted. "This ain't goin' to be no amateur contest—this is a championship engagement! And the combatants have got to be trained—"

"Angel him always tlained!" Wong Gee broke in. "Him too damned tlained allee time! Angel never quit being tlained!"

"Well, we'll train him a little extra for this episode!" Solemn declared, "all we wanted to do to-night was sign up the articles of incorporation! Dirty Shirt can train Angel and I'll personally manage Old Bob myself. We'll hold the fight in Saloon Number Four, next Saturday P.M., and show Red Bluff a gladiatorial explosion that will knock spots off of civilization!"

For the several intervening days, Mother Skillern wondered where Old Bob had gone.

Old Bob himself had no doubt whatever as to his location. He was in the lower story of the double-deck wire coop behind Wong Gee's restaurant, and the most disagreeable rooster extant lived on the upper floor.

Those were Old Bob's sentiments. Day and night, without ceasing, he was reminded of rooster—he could hear rooster, smell rooster, through the cracks in the ceiling of his apartment, could see rooster, and fervently in his heart Old Bob resolved that if ever he got the chance he would taste rooster! This ambition was stimulated by the consummate cunning of Solemn's system of training Old Bob. It was very simple: Nothing to eat except barely enough raw liver to make Old Bob's appetite a two-edged sword and each edge a trifle sharper than the other.

If Old Bob wanted to take a nap, Angel selected that particular time of day or night to practice crowing; should Old Bob desire to meditate, Angel instantly developed an irresistible passion to scratch and kept Old Bob busy dodging things which fell through the open spaces in the ceiling.

Not only that, but Old Bob had an intuitive feeling that that darned rooster was beginning to look down on him and consider himself a whole lot better than cats in general and Old Bob especially! Solemn watched the maturing of rooster-antipathy in Old Bob's soul and chuckled with glee.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt naturally manifested strong partisanship for their respective protégés.

"When this thing's over," Solemn boasted with confident fervor, "Angel will come up minus any more anxiety to ever fight again! After Saturday P.M., the champion fightin' rooster of the Western hemisphere is goin' to answer to the name of Old Bob—even if he is a cat!"

To which Dirty Shirt with equal feeling replied:

"You are teetotally crazy! When my client, designated Angel, gets through with the imitation pugilist you think you're trainin' he'll not only continue to wear the fightin' rooster laurels of the ultimate world but he'll also have the additional glory of bein' known as the best cat exterminator ever invented!"

Each was entirely sincere in his convictions.

Dirty Shirt had seen Angel respond remarkably to the line of treatment he had been administering and which consisted merely in unlimited raw eggs mixed with cayenne pepper and cracker crumbs. At the first taste of eggs and cayenne, Angel instantly recognized the time-honored formula preceding a battle. His eyes lighted with new-found hope and eagerness and the look of drooping despondency left him.

He crowed with refreshed vigor and wondered where in thunder the rooster he was going to fight was keeping himself. No answering crow echoed to his repeated challenges.

True, there was something in the coop below him, but Angel heard its meouws instead of crows and knew it was cat. The odor of cat also came up through the floor and Angel resented it. He never did like cat much anyhow and this one seemed to consider the lower apartment his permanent address.

In addition to that, Angel could frequently hear him spitting, and a cat spitting had always been an abomination and outrage to the sensibilities of Angel. Therefore, Angel took malicious delight in cussing that unpleasant cat, who lived below him, in the most classical rooster profanity he could devise.

Also, Angel concluded that after he had licked whoever he was going to fight, he'd work some scheme to get in contact with the cat in question and show him up for just what he was—give him a good dose of real scientific rooster-cat rough and tumble.

Angel's vivacity filled Dirty Shirt with pride and pleasurable anticipation as to the outcome of the approaching engagement. And Dirty Shirt was leaving no stone unturned or it might be said, egg unbroken—to have his principal in the pink of condition when he entered the arena.

Jose Gabica Pasadena San Diego Garcia, affectionately known about Red Bluff as "Chico," not only operated the guitar department of the orchestra in the dance hall attachment of Saloon Number Two, but in days of yore, in far away Mexico, had been a famous professional preparer of rooster matadors for the ring. To Chico Dirty Shirt appealed on Saturday morning for the last word in topping-off Angel for the sanguinary affair of the afternoon.

"Just what would you do, Chico," Dirty Shirt queried in a whisper when he met the distinguished Mexican, "if you wanted a rooster to be totally sure of winning the greatest battle of his life? What would you give him for the final supreme stimulation, something to make him willing to fight, well, for instance, a tiger or a catamount or a buzz-saw, or anything like that?"

"Ah, *amigo mio*," Chico replied, his eyes glittering with memories of other more splendid days when all Mexico acclaimed him the greatest engineer of fighting roosters between Tia Juana and Calabasca, "there is one thing, senor, which will give to a rooster the 'finish'—the ambition to fight anything, even as you say, the catamount, the tiger, or the buzz-saw itself!"

"What is it?" Dirty Shirt asked eagerly.

Chico leaned closer and whispered a single magic word:

"*Mirijuana!*"

"My Gawd, yes! I forgot about it!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed, "but where'll I get any?"

Chico winked—

"I—myself—will give Angel a dose, Senor Dirty Shirt!"

Angel didn't know what the idea was in mixing the pulverized stuff which resembled tea leaves with the usual egg and cayenne pepper, but it tasted pretty good and he ate it anyhow. The thing Angel did know was that in a little while he felt that life wouldn't be worth living unless he could kill something — several somethings — immediately.

He thrilled, trembled, vibrated with the most stupendous desire imaginable to fight the whole rooster population, all the cats in the world plus the dog inhabitants, and every other thing that existed in one glorious simultaneous tackle! That last shot of egg and cayenne, spiked with the other something Chico had mixed in it, in Angel's judgment, certainly had exploding atoms beaten six of the longest blocks in Salt Lake City when it came to generating impulses for universal and unabridged murder.

No wonder the government wants to prohibit *mirijuana!*

Angel was feeling that way when Dirty Shirt slipped him, despite his vicious struggles, into a sack and started for the scene of carnage-to-be at 2:40 P.M. sharp on that memorable Saturday afternoon.

"I'll be along in a minute with Old Bob!" Solemn promised, as Dirty Shirt, closely followed by Wong Gee, headed for Saloon Number Four.

For legitimate reasons, Solemn wished also to convey Old Bob under cover to the battleground. He stepped into the kitchen to see if he could locate an empty gunny sack. None was available and Solemn continued his search into the pantry-bedroom Wong Gee occupied and in which he likewise stored potatoes and other bulky supplies. Still no sack was in sight.

Searching about, Solemn stumbled over a newly opened five gallon keg of molasses, barked his shins on the edge of the keg and swore. He glanced toward the bed and concluded to take the pillow slip in which to carry Old Bob over to Saloon Number Four.

As he jerked the pillow from the bed, the most brilliant inspiration of his career hit Solemn. For a moment the magnitude, beauty and originality of the conception overcame him.

"I'll show them Red Bluffers a new kind of rooster!" he muttered, "they're wantin' shocks, an' by gosh they'll get one in this case at least!"

To think, with Solemn, was also to act.

He hurried to the coop, grabbed Old Bob by the back of the neck, yanked him out of prison and retraced his steps to the pantry. There he wrapped the pillow slip around the cat's head—for safety's sake—soused the rest of his furry body into the five gallon keg of thick, gummy molasses, pulled him out of the mess, ripped open Wong Gee's perfectly good chicken feather pillow, rolled Old Bob in the mass of feathers, dropped the totally feathered and unrecognizable cat into the pillow slip and hastened toward Saloon Number Four, to keep the tryst of slaughter with Angel and Dirty Shirt.

Red Bluff had been advised merely, and mysteriously, that a worthy foeman, and one, too, who would gratify Angel's fighting ambitions to a frazzle, had at last been discovered. Solemn, Dirty Shirt and Wong Gee had kept the name of the Great Unknown an inviolate secret.

Partly was this due to the inherent tendency of the trio to be dramatic; but principally was it because of possible objections Mother Skillern might advance against Old Bob's participation in the cruel and unusual pastime of rooster-cat prize fighting.

A large assortment of Red Bluff was assembled in the main auditorium of Saloon Number Four, waiting for the spectacular event soon to occur. The tension was perceptible.

As Solemn stepped through the door a hush of expectancy settled over the throng. In the silence there came, like the wail of a lost soul, fragmentary shrieks from the complaining buzz-saw down at the prop manufacturing establishment, next to the blacksmith shop, as Pedro pushed the great timbers against the whirling steel teeth.

The rules agreed upon by Solemn and Dirty Shirt were simple: Each was to stand on an opposite side of the circle the spectators would form in the center of the room, dump their respective gladiators onto the floor and let them go to it.

"Ready!" Solemn yelled.

"Fire!" Dirty Shirt echoed.

Out of Dirty Shirt's sack Angel slid. A light of unimpeachable murder was in his eyes. Simultaneously something skidded with a squashy thud out of Solemn's sack and hit the floor on the other side of the human ring.

Spectators caught their breaths in horror, many of them thinking it had come at last and they were seeing things that were not, when they got the first glimpse of Old Bob, superimposed into a cross between a bird and a cat.

Old Bob himself felt queer as the mischief—and looked more so. But he saw Angel, that despicable rooster, standing before him and all of Old Bob's desire for revenge, all his ambition to eat rooster and get even for indignities heaped upon him during the last several days flamed instantly into a seething conflagration.

Old Bob squatted, arched his back, started to spit and swear in low guttural accents and began to swell up—his plumage, from the small pin-feathers behind his ears to the large cluster adherent to his inch-and-a-half tail, sticking out in terrifying disarray.

At first Angel thought that he also was seeing things. A second look convinced him that his first impressions were right; there wasn't any such a thing as that thing in front of him! Still it was something. What it was, Angel tried hard to figure out. It looked as if it might be a rooster; it resembled cat; perhaps it was both!

Angel had fought virtually every animal and fowl mentioned in the zoological vernacular, but never anything which looked like this. He wondered if that last shot of egg and cayenne, plus the other stuff Chico had put in it had affected his imagination.

Then a sudden, unholy joy took possession of Angel. He saw through it all: This new device inviting destruction before him was a sort of epitome of the total animal and fowl creation!

The whole works, in some strange manner, had been conveniently resolved into a single specimen, the sole purpose being to facilitate Angel's feverish passion to kill a couple of multitudes of things all at once, at one operation, without hesitation.

Proceeding on that theory, Angel's head lowered threateningly, the two plumes in his tail were elevated, his neck stretched forward, the sinews of his legs became taut and the feathers along his backbone bristled upward as if each were a saw-toothed bayonet thirsting to stab the life blood out of some cringing wretch.

Twelve pounds of hungry, insulted, feather-decorated cat hurtled through the air, aiming to land on top of Angel and start to eating rooster. Old Bob was disappointed. Angel wasn't there.

Midway in the journey something sounding like Angel had passed overhead, flying low, and kicked Old Bob twice on the side of the neck as it went by. Old Bob himself was reasonably quick, and twisted a hind leg up in time to rake a bunch of feathers off of Angel's wishbone.

"This is goin' to be good!" Colonel Spilkins exclaimed:

"Who said '*goin' to be?*'" the crowd yelled.

Old Bob and Angel were not wasting time telling what was "going to be." They were busy making it happen.

Old Bob swung a front paw for the white meat of Angel's bosom; Angel sidestepped and countered with right and left spur jabs to the region of Old Bob's appendix.

Old Bob reversed his mode of attack and leaped again for general assault, but went bottom side up so all four feet as well as teeth would be available for action when the bombing plane named Angel scooted over him. Angel nose-dived to the left and spotted two inshoots of his bill under Old Bob's ear.

But Old Bob was busy, too; he shot out his right front paw and as Angel tilted for altitude he connected with the rooster's secondary Adam's apple and where two tail feathers grew before there wasn't any any-

more. It began to look as if it would end in mutual cancellation.

At this stage, Old Bob made another catapultic assault. That time, Angel did not pass entirely over, instead he zoomed unexpectedly and came down astride Old Bob's back. He cinch-locked his spurs into Old Bob's feather encrusted hide, just back of the brisket; his bill closed over Old Bob's left ear and he began to chew.

Old Bob spit and swore, end-flopped and sunfished and raked Angel's drum-sticks fore and aft with his hind claws, but Angel was a rough-riding rooster with a diploma for stick-on-it-iveness and he declined to dismount.

All of which caused a sudden wave of nostalgia to sweep over Old Bob. He remembered it had been days since he had seen Mother Skillern, or the dear familiar old lounging place under the office table in Red Bluff's two story frame hotel. He decided to take whatever was riding him home and show it to Mother Skillern.

To that end, Old Bob hit the breeze and hit it with all four spark plugs clicking in unison. The sharp turn at the door of Saloon Number Four caused him to skid, and he did a multiple scoot and somersault. Angel, as a result, was totally unseated. Old Bob didn't wait.

Angel had just straightened up, wiped the sweat from his eyes, and released one crow when Mother Skillern, at practically the other end of the street, saw something shoot onto the porch of the hotel, ricochet through the door—fortunately open—slide across the dining room and come to a stop under the sideboard in the corner next to the drummer's table.

"My Gawd!" Mother Skillern exclaimed.

Whatever it was she had seen loked like an excited sofa cushion, without any cover on it, which was in the last stages of disreputable moulting; but it had four legs, was shaped like a cat, turned around when it was safely under the china cabinet and humbly said:

"Meouw!"

Later, Mother Skillern gave Old Bob a bath, hand-picked him, plucked him, cut his hair and eliminated most of the feathers Wong Gee missed from his pillow that night. She also made some remarks about the male population of Red Bluff.

Angel?

It is sad, but the record must be preserved.

Angel paused in front of Saloon Number Four, announced that he had but recently licked all the roosters and cats in creation; also, he was still desirous of committing a few more murders.

Pedro pushed an extra large timber against the teeth of the buzz-saw down at the prop factory, adjacent to the blacksmith shop. The buzz-saw swore at a knot in the timber in the high treble piccolo accents buzz-saws affect.

Angel cocked his head to one side and listened. It sounded to him as if another fool rooster was challenging to mortal combat!

Maybe, after all, one had been left out of the combination he had just annihilated. Very well, Angel would go see!

The buzz-saw shrieked wickedly at another large knot as Angel arrived at the open air shed of the prop mill. Angel replied with a torrent of defiant abuse; squinted his eyes at the thing spinning so dizzily, like a blur, before him; admitted that this stranger-rooster was something unusual when it came to action, but decided to tackle him anyhow.

Game chicken was well splattered over Pedro's hands, face and clothing, before he threw the switch and stopped the buzz-saw.

"My Gawd, Angel has self-assassinated himself!"

Dirty Shirt handed a portion of Angel to Wong Gee and said, in a voice that trembled with emotion:

"Too much *mirijuana!* When will we have th' funeral?"

"'Funelal?'" Wong Gee repeated. "No 'funelal!' Chlicken flicassee—plenty nice Angel flicassee to-mollow fo' dinner!"

Next Week: "EDITH" IN THE SEVENTH OASIS

Flood

By THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

Author of "Where All Trails End," "Sea Change," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

RUNNERS OF THE WOODS.

GABE LOON would have made a clean get-away and reached safety and protection without accident but for the tender age and lack of suitable clothing of his companion. He had planned cunningly and well. He deserved complete success.

The two bottles of gin had been a happy inspiration. They worked like a charm. The return of the rifle after extracting the bolt therefrom, and the mention of a ten dollar bill, and the theft of the ammunition, had all served toward distracting and delaying Pete Woodhall.

Everything had worked in Gabe's favor—even the unintentional dropping of the shell which had brought to the pursuer's attention the fact that the bolt was gone from the rifle; for the blind rage which had followed the discovery of that fact had delayed the chase considerably. The old Indian deserved to win, but the extreme youth and unseasonable wardrobe of his companion were against him.

Gabe and the child did not travel a straight line after leaving Pete Woodhall. They moved hand in hand for a time, and stepped on no more snow than was absolutely unavoidable. But it was not long before Gabe became aware of the little boy's tears.

Jacob was crying with the cold. He had no mittens, his stockings were thin and the icy wind played the mischief under the loose draped blanket. So they halted to do a job of temporary tailoring.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 5.

Gabe cut up half a blanket, from which he made bags for Jacob's hands and feet and strips to wind about his legs and to belt in the draped robe. This was better, but not entirely satisfactory. Foot bags caught frequently in roots and spikes of brush; hand bags came off and bandages unwound. The child felt much warmer, however, and manfully dried his tears.

He was kept busy pulling himself together and winding himself up. As the desolate light of the bitter day lowered and failed, he grew leg weary and stumbled often.

Gabe could not carry him, being already loaded to capacity with a full and heavy pack, a heavy gun, a rifle, and a pair of snowshoes. The best the old man could do was to lend a hand. So, when the last of the dreary light faded out, Gabe called it a day and made camp.

No fire was lighted. Gabe found a natural shelter, a hollow beneath sweeping boughs of spruce flanked on right and left with tangles of brush. He floored the narrow place with fir tips and cedar tips, deep and soft, and closed the entrance with a few larger and tougher boughs backed with his snowshoes and pack. He spread one blanket and rolled the others about himself and the child. The low roof moved slightly in the wind, and a few thin wisps of icy air crept about, but it seemed a haven of warmth and comfort to the boy reclining softly with blankets snugged about him and his new friend beside him.

"Will he follow us?" he asked.

"Try to, sure."

"Will he find us, do you think, Mr. Loon?"

"Not in one 'undred year. Woodhall ain't got owl's eyes nor nose like a 'ound dog. An' he don't see much track. Don't you fret. You trust Gabe Loon."

"I do. I think you are as clever as you are brave"

"Sure—an' more clever, maybe. Now we drink some cold tea an' eat some bread an' cold roast pa'tridge. You don't hear me shoot off no gun yesterday. Nope. Too smart, me. Shoot um with a stick."

Both ate heartily, and emptied the flask of cold tea, and talked in whispers. Then Gabe lit his pipe; and, soon after that, the boy fell asleep. Gabe smoked out the pipe, assured himself that the big gun lay exactly convenient to his right hand and exactly at arm's length, then lay down and closed his eyes.

Gabe awoke before dawn and set his nose and an eye to a crack in the natural roof. The wind had blown out and snow was falling thick and fast. Gabe considered his position. He was in as good a hiding place as any one could wish for; and with this snow falling, it was growing better every minute.

With the practice of caution, and food and water enough, one might lie here undetected by a searching enemy for days, for weeks—for long enough to discourage the enemy, certainly. But to be cautious, one would have to do without fire; and without fire, how was one to melt snow for tea and cook food?

To quench the thirst with snow would be exceedingly unwise, as Gabe knew; and his supply of cooked food was extremely limited. It couldn't be done without a fire; and, under the circumstances, a fire was out of the question.

They must move, and that immediately, while the snow was still falling thickly to wipe out their tracks. So he awoke Jacob.

They made a dry breakfast. The child was thirsty and wanted to eat a handful of snow, but Gabe would not let him.

"No good," he said. "Make yer t'roat sore. Strike water pretty soon an' drink one bellyful."

He adjusted the boy's unique garments as securely as he could. They paused for a few seconds at the mouth of their den while Gabe sniffed the air and peered around at the snow filled dark and, somehow or other, took his bearings and found his course. The snow on the ground was light and not yet deep enough to call for rackets. It was not quite to his knees.

He went ahead, with Jacob close at his heels and holding an end of his woollen sash for guidance. He advanced at half his ordinary rate of traveling, lagging on every step, so as not to tire the child. Day came —nothing more than a grayness behind and above the flickering veils of descending

snow. They reached the creek, descended to its white surface through snow hung brush and halted there for a minute or two.

A few scoops of a snowshoe cleared a flake of black ice. A dozen discreet hacks with the ax pierced through to the clear water. They both drank, and Gabe filled his flask. He scooped the displaced snow back into the little hole before the slow journey was resumed.

Gabe led the way downward with the course of the narrow stream, keeping well under the overhang of the wooded bank. It was easier for the child here, where the footing was level—but the snow deepened steadily, and within two hours of leaving the water hole they were forced to halt again and rest for half an hour.

When winter caught Archie McKim and Joe Newsam at the mouth of Gunflint Creek it did little, if anything, toward delaying their advance. They thrust Tim Leblanc's canoe into the bushes and covered it safely with brush. They ate hearty breakfasts and made up their dunnage into two packs by the first bleak light of dawn.

"Lucky thing ye fetched them snowshoes along," said Joe. "An' the moccasins an' things."

"Luck?" queried Archie. "Aye, it's a lucky thing I was born with human intelligence."

They traveled afoot all day through that bitter wind and thin wash of biting snow. Archie led the way, though he had kept the heavier of the two packs for himself. Joe was amazed at the speed with which he moved over that rough ground and hurdles of "blow-downs" and through snarls of underbrush.

Joe was not only amazed, but he was sorely put to it to keep in touch with Dandy Devil McKim. He wondered if this could be the same man as the deliberate agriculturist who used to rub his big knees with both hands beside the kitchen stove and dolefully predict a change of wind.

They wore their borrowed snowshoes next day and kept right on. Archie continued in the lead, leaping many of the obstacles in the way with the agility of a breechy steer. He paused now and then to shake the snow out of his whiskers, and Joe was always thankful for those pauses.

Pete Woodhall pursued Gabe Loon and little Jacob Kester through the winter wilderness; and Archie and Joe sought the trail of Woodhall; and one Tim Leblanc, a person of mixed blood and uncertain temper, moved hotly in pursuit of the "dirty downriver farmers" who had ventured to hire his canoe and buy his provisions without permission. He admitted that the strangers had left enough money—but that wasn't the point.

The point was that a couple of potato growers from downriver had treated him, Timothy Leblanc, with indignity—had behaved toward him as if he were nothing and nobody, even in his own house, although he had not been in the house at the time, and flashed their dirty money just as if they were better men than he was. And nothing that Charlie Dix could say had the slightest effect on his dangerous temper; and Mrs. Dix did everything in her power to add fuel to his rage against the men from downriver—and one of them a colored man, mind you!—and urged him to follow them with blood in his eye.

He pursued them, armed like a pirate, hating them more for having left money behind than he would have if they had stolen his belongings like ordinary, inferior thieves. It was that calm acceptance of superiority on their part that infuriated him. There wasn't another man on the river who would have felt and acted as he did with so little cause.

Leblanc was a dangerous person to antagonize, as Charlie Dix had warned Archie McKim. He was, in short, a fighting fool.

The snowfall ceased early in the afternoon and was followed by clear and windless hours of daylight and a calm night of cold white stars. Gabe Loon would have been glad of wind and drifting snow. And the next morning broke calm and bright, but bitterly cold; and so the weather held all that day.

The progress of Gabe and little Jacob was difficult and slow. The child would have been better off for a pair of small snow-

shoes. The snow was deep, and not light for those small legs.

Woodhall happened upon the water hole quite by chance. He had been traveling for hours without the faintest idea of the whereabouts of the trail of his quarry when his keen and roving glance chanced upon it, overlooked it, returned to it—for it was no more than a tiny white dimple near the edge of the white path of the frozen creek.

Gabe had leveled the hole, but the water had gnawed underneath for some time before the cut in the ice had frozen again. He went to it, examined it and found the scar and chips of ice.

So he headed down the course of the stream at a good pace. But he had lost a great deal of precious time, what with returning to the shelter of boughs for his outfit, and one thing and another.

Woodhall did not come upon Gabe Loon and the child until the night of the day following his discovery of the water hole. It was close upon midnight when he tracked them into camp. It was not much of a camp—just a short, wide trench in the snow well sheltered by brush and roofed at one end with boughs of spruce. A round black blotch at the farther end showed where a small fire had burned.

Woodhall approached like a shadow. One watching him there in the star shimmer, among the shadows, would be puzzled to say whether he had moved or had been where he now was all the while. And yet he drew nearer and nearer to the roofed end of the trench.

He cleared the webs from his feet and sank deep. He plowed slowly forward, parting the brush before him without a sound. He dug himself into the head of the trench, beneath the roof of boughs. Seconds passed, half a minute, before he made his next move.

He listened to the breathing of the man and the child, thus locating each to a fraction of an inch. He withdrew a mitten and extended an inquiring hand. He touched the butt of the double-barreled gun, where it lay uncased and ready on a fold of Gabe's blanket. He advanced his hand to the grip, then lifted the heavy weapon and drew it to him with a shaking arm.

It was a muzzle loader. An exploring finger told him that the nipples were capped and the hammers down. This was good enough. He knew that he need not worry just now about the rifle, which he felt sure was in its case and unloaded.

He backed away noiselessly, moved around and stepped into the trench at the end where the little fire had been.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNEXPECTED ARRIVALS.

A VOICE awoke the sleepers in the trench of snow. Gabe's consciousness was pricked by it as the quick of the finger nail by a needle; and as he sat up with a jerk, even before his eyes were open, he put his right hand to the exact spot where the grip of the old gun should have been. He fumbled the edge of the blanket for a second, then snapped his legs under him and ducked forward on his hands and knees and grabbed for his ax—and missed it. Pete Woodhall laughed.

"Quit it, ye old fool!" said Woodhall. "I got ye covered with yer own gun; an' I ain't the only one in these woods with a twitchy finger."

Gabe backed to his bed, and Jacob's side, without a word. The child was sitting up, speechless, but wide awake.

"Ye reckon ye're smart, I guess," jeered Woodhall. "Maybe ye're smart enough to make a fire, right here on the old spot. I see ye got some bark an' dry wood handy. Go to it!"

"Go to 'ell!" retorted Gabe, inspired to recklessness by a last angry flicker of his chilling spirit.

"None o' yer lip, old man. Git busy. Hump yerself."

Gabe's heart sank—but his brain got to work; and his hands, for he crawled forward again and made a little fire. He put on a kettle of ice, to thaw and then boil, and sliced frozen bacon into the pan—all by Pete Woodhall's orders.

Woodhall sat smiling just beyond the fire, smoking his pipe, with Gabe's gun across his knees. Later, all three ate bacon and biscuit and drank tea. Woodhall laced his

tea with the very last shot of the second bottle of gin.

"I don't want the kid," said Woodhall, relighting his pipe. "Ye kin take him the rest of the way back to them Kester fools—and to hell with you! But I'll take yer money, an' the rifles an' ca'tridges back agin, an' that thar slab of bacon, an' yer grand watch an' chain, so's I won't be late a gittin' to whar I'm a headin' for. How much money ye got on ye, anyhow?"

"Money? I ain't got no money," replied the Maliseet. "What would I carry money in the woods for?"

"Dig it out, ye dirty old liar! Ain't ye willin' to pay for the kid? Gimme the hundred ye offered me at first. Dig for it—or maybe this here old gun 'll go off an' I'll take all ye got in yer pockets off yer dead corpse."

The Maliseet grunted and dug a hand deep into the many layers of clothing upon his breast. Deep he dug, but exceedingly slowly; and all the while he was trying to think of a plan for delaying Woodhall's action, and for keeping his money as well as the child, and silently lamenting the fact that he had not left all his capital down-river in a bank.

He reached the waterproof wallet and began to fumble it with nervous fingers in a desperate attempt to untie it and produce from it the sum of one hundred dollars. Or ninety. Ninety would do—nine tens. He could say that the ten which he had pretended to leave with the boltless rifle had been out of the hundred. He fumbled and fumbled.

Then Woodhall got swiftly and smoothly to his feet and stepped over the fire, still with the big gun ready in his right hand and pointed to the front, and stooped down. Quick as a flash he made a grab with his left hand and an upward jab with his left knee. His knee caught Gabe under the chin, and his hand came away from the woolly depths of Gabe's bosom with the waterproof wallet and a length of broken shoestring.

A disconcerting memory of a somewhat similar incident, of an almost identical action on his part, flashed into his mind; and for an instant his wits balked and his hand lagged, and in that instant of time two unexpected things happened. Dazed by the jar and pain of the blow on the chin, and maddened with rage, Gabe sprang head first and struck Woodhall fairly on the belt with his well padded skull; and little Jacob Kester, who had advanced unnoticed, struck Woodhall across the face with a stick from the fire.

The gun went flying aside from Woodhall's fingers, the cocked hammer fell and the right barrel discharged itself with a deafening bang into a bank of snow. For a moment action was suspended while every one looked about him to see who was shot. Then Woodhall grabbed again, Gabe dodged and stumbled into the edge of the fire and Jacob prodded and whacked with his stick.

It was a desperate scrap while it lasted, and the eight-year-old boy stayed with it—but it ended in a victory for Pete Woodhall. Jacob lost his stick and was flung to the far end of the trench, breathless and bruised and frightened.

Gabe Loon lay flat on his back with a slight odor of singed wool arising from him, and Woodhall anchored upon him with both knees in the pit of his stomach and both hands on his throat. And the waterproof wallet was in Woodhall's pocket.

Woodhall was a mad beast. Reason, caution, all thought of the future, even the last instinctive sense of self-preservation—fury had bereft him of all, of everything but a desire to kill. One eye was closed and his lips were blistered from the blows of the smoldering stick administered by his own son.

He breathed with open mouth, still gasping from the head thrust of the Maliseet. He felt sick with pain and hate, and the ache to kill and to punish. He would kill this tricky old man first, then break the child's spirit. They had gone too far! Hell! They had conjured a devil.

He would tighten the grip of his hands on this leathery throat—tighter, tighter, until the twisting lips parted and the tongue came out. He would grip and grip until the black eyes glazed and the last twitch of nerves and muscles faded away beneath his hands and his knees.

And then the boy, his son, the child who

despised him and had struck him again and again! Ah, he would break that spirit! He had broken it in the child's mother.

Gabe struggled, flat there on his back. The child cowered against the far end of the trench, sobbing. Gabe's struggles became feebler.

The child raised and turned his head, rubbed away freezing tears, choked down his sobs and saw, by the glow and flicker of the fire, his friend's moccasined feet and thin legs twitching and writhing, and the enemy's long back humped forward terribly. For a few seconds he stared, motionless, and then, suddenly, he knew what was happening. He understood.

Fear and weakness left him. He stood up, lifting at the same time the nearest thing at hand—a rifle in a canvas stocking. He lifted it in both hands and went forward, noiseless on the snow, and struck.

The stroke fell with but little more force than the weight of the rifle; and it did not fall straight. It struck Woodhall's right shoulder.

Woodhall pitched forward with an oath, turned instantly with a face to haunt one's nights, leaped to his feet and struck with clenched fist. The child fell a yard away and lay still. Then Woodhall turned again, and again dropped upon the half strangled old man.

Archie McKim and young Joe, bedded down for the night in a thicket of small spruces and restless with the cold, were awakened from shallow sleep by the report of a gun. They were up in a moment.

Within thirty seconds they were off, Archie in the lead. It was not long before Archie caught a pulse of red fire shine low among the crowded black shapes and shadows of the forest. Their speeding snowshoes clicked faintly now and then, and padded softly, and knocked up little spurts of dry snow.

Gabe Loon's twisting lips parted at last, his eyelids flickered and his head jerked back convulsively; and Woodhall laughed and dug his thumbs deeper. Just then something caused Woodhall to look up—but too late.

He was struck and hurled back by great hands on the ends of arms like a horse's legs. A momentary vision of wild whiskers and flaming eyes had been his; and then he landed.

He struck a pair of snowshoes, seized them without thought and hurled himself out of the trench and into the deep snow and tangled brush. He leaped, stumbled, plunged.

A shot rang out and something zipped close beside him. He dodged to the left, stumbled into the snow weighted lower boughs of a great fir, staggered up and plunged again.

He crawled a little way, half smothered by the deep snow; then paused at last in his desperate exertions long enough to slip his feet into the thongs of the snowshoes. Then he ran.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF THE CHASE.

GABE LOON rolled this way and that in the trampled trench of snow in his painful efforts to refill his lungs. Beyond smiting him once or twice on the back and shouting a few words of encouragement, there was nothing for the rescuers to do but let him roll.

So the rescuers turned their attention to little Jacob, who lay motionless with blood on his face. It was at sight of that blood that Archie fired blindly, but with a scalding desire to kill, in the direction of Woodhall's flight.

The boy came around in a minute in Archie's arms. Joe Newsam washed the small face tenderly with snow, discovering the injuries to be nothing more serious than a swollen nose and a cut lip.

Gabe caught up with a few gulps of breath at last, staggered to his feet and fairly devoured the frosty air, then sat down with both hands at his throat and his eyes blinking.

"Damn near t'ing!" he remarked, at last, rubbing his windpipe.

Then his right hand went to his breast, deep, and fumbled about in the depths. He withdrew it and stared about at the

trampled snow and black edge of the fire without a word. Then he withdrew his hand, buttoned the fronts of his numerous garments and grunted.

"Lost somethin'?" queried Archie.

"Four 'undred an' twenty dollar," said the Maliseet.

The fire was built up, the boy and Gabe were put to bed, water was boiled, tea made, bacon and flapjacks were fried. All made merry.

Jacob ate flapjacks in spite of his cut lip, and Gabe swallowed pints of tea in spite of the soreness of his throat. All were in high spirits. The boy was rescued and the kidnaper was beaten.

They felt that there was nothing more to fear from Pete Woodhall. He had shot his bolt, and they knew that he would get out of the country at top speed with the wallet containing four hundred and twenty dollars. No one doubted Gabe's statement concerning the contents of the wallet.

Gabe and the child fell asleep at last, full fed and full hearted. They felt sore in spots—but what of that? They were victors. They had fought good fights. The child glowed with thoughts of the blows he had struck in defence of his friend at the man whom he knew to be a cheat and a coward and a beast, and whom he firmly believed to be a monstrous liar.

Gabe glowed with the knowledge that an old score was settled and that a good and perilous piece of work had, with a little luck and much heroic effort, been brought to a successful conclusion—and that Silas Kester would more than make good to him his loss in dollars. They slept soundly, despite their bruises.

Archie and Joe widened the trench, chopped and spread boughs, dragged fuel to within easy reach and rolled up in their blankets. All slept late. Sunshine was flooding level through the eastward trees when Joe rolled out and kicked the fire into a blaze and put on the kettle.

The boy and Gabe Loon awoke to find themselves sore and stiff here and there—but what matter? Time and the world were theirs now. All they had to do was to get home to Lob's Point. Archie McKim came out of his blankets as spry as a colt.

They breakfasted extensively, without haste. After that, Gabe and Jacob retold their heroic stories.

Archie produced a bottle of liniment and needles and thread. After treating the strains of the rescued with the liniment and bathing cuts and bruises with hot water, he cut a coat out of a blanket for Jacob and set to work stitching it. The others reclined near at hand, watching him idly. Then Tim Leblanc walked into camp and threw down his pack.

Leblanc was sizable—tall enough, and more than broad enough at the shoulders. He was thirty-five years of age, which is old enough to be seasoned and toughened and yet young enough to be limber. He was old enough to be experienced in the rougher ways on the upper river, of lumber camps and "drives" and all other phases of the life of a white-water boy.

He was a man of his hands and his feet, adroit and knowing and agile. In his own estimation and that of many of his friends, he was cock of the river. One or two of the several strains of blood in him were fighting strains; and he had a fierce, unreasoning temper.

Tim Leblanc threw down his pack and his rifle and kicked off his snowshoes.

"Whar's McKim?" he asked in a threatening voice.

"My name's McKim," said Archie, laying aside his sewing. "What's yer own name, if ye don't object to me askin'?"

"Ye look old enough to be honest," returned Leblanc, ignoring the question. "I never see a holier lookin' bunch o' whiskers. But ye're a damn t'ief, for all yer ancient an' holy looks!"

"I cal'late ye must be Timothy Leblanc, jedgin' from what Charlie Dix told me," said Archie in a mild voice.

"Ye're dead right I be Timothy Leblanc! An' I'm looking for the highbellied, t'ievin' downriver farmers what stole me canoe an' half me outfit widout so much as 'by yer leave' like they had a right to anyt'ing they wanted, an' to hell wid the poor man!"

"We had to take the canoe an' stuff, Mister Leblanc," said Archie. "We was in a hurry. Maybe ye didn't find the money I left behind in payment for what

we took? I left it, anyhow; an' if it wasn't enough, say so."

"Money! Who asked ye for money? Damn yer dirty money!"

"I jedge, from your talk, ye ain't satisfied."

"An' ye jedge right!"

"What then? D'ye cal'late to satisfy yerself with shootin' off yer mouth an' wavin' yer arms 'round?"

Beside himself with rage, Leblanc jumped for the other without waiting for him to get to his feet. Archie was surely taken at a grave disadvantage, and yet the immediate result of Leblanc's attack appeared to prove otherwise.

As the cock of the river flung himself forward, Archie settled back on the flat of his shoulders and folded back his long legs. Instead of landing on Archie's head and shoulders, Leblanc landed fairly on the soles of Archie's moccasins; and then the long legs straightened with astounding force and the cock of the river made a retrograde flight beyond his jumping off place and lit on the back of his neck in the deep snow. When he got himself right end up and the snow out of his eyes, he found Archie out there waiting for him.

It was a distinguished battle. The spectators, Gabe Loon and Joe and the small boy, sat spellbound. It was unlike any fight of which the boy had ever read, and Joe had never seen anything that could hold a candle to it.

Feet and hands were used with equal facility. Every trick of offense and defense known to three generations of white-water boys was demonstrated by the bewhiskered giant who had been named Dandy Devil McKim and the stalwart fellow who was now cock of the river. Joe held his breath for fear that one or another of this friend's stiff limbs would snap at any moment under the terrific strain to which they were being subjected.

Rough-and-tumble does not describe a tenth of it. The famous and deadly "slash" was delivered twice, once by each of the combatants, but fortunately without reaching the mark either time. This extraordinary mode of attack called for a handspring on the part of the attacker. When delivered in spiked boots on an unready objective, it was deadly. It is now extinct even on the upper river.

Leblanc had weight and youth on his side, Archie had height and reach on his. For several minutes there appeared to be nothing to choose between them in the matters of skill and strength and agility. Each escaped a knockout from hand or foot by a hair's breadth more than once. Twice they went to the trampled snow together, only to whirl up again and tear apart.

Archie had blood in his whiskers. Leblanc showed a useless eye. Then Leblanc called his teeth into play and, for a fraction of a second, got a hold with them on the outer edge of Archie's left hand.

That was too much for Archie McKim's calm spirit. A fist like a petrified ham came in contact with the left side of Tim Leblanc's head.

It was not until fifteen minutes later that Leblanc returned to consciousness of life. He looked dizzily upon the same peaceful scene which he had disturbed for a little while so short a time before with his unexpected and violent intrusion.

There sat Archie McKim stitching away at a garment of blanketing, and there reclined the small boy and the large young negro and the elderly Maliseet idly looking on. Leblanc groaned.

"Ye'll feel better afore long," said Archie, glancing up from his sewing. "Yer neck ain't broke, an' Joe here give it a good rubbin' with liniment. Ye hadn't oughter bit me."

"What'd ye hit me wid?" asked the sufferer.

Archie raised his great right hand, and the needle which he held between the thumb and fore-finger looked ridiculously out of place there. Leblanc groaned again.

"Charlie Dix said as how ye're called the cock o' the river," said Archie, in his mild drawl. "I was named that same myself hereabouts, nigh onto thirty years ago. Kinder looks like I'd been re-elected."

He chuckled at that as if at a statement absurd enough to pass as a joke. Then he smoothed his whiskers with quite an air of a humorous great-grandfather and resumed his stitching.

"If I was give my choice between fightin' you an' lockin' horns with Squire Ingoldsby's Durham Bull, I'd choose the bull," said Joe Newsam. "Sufferin' cats! What about yer rheumatiz?"

"Thar's a time an' place for everything," replied Archie. "Down to Lob's P'int is the place for rheumatiz, moored alongside the kitchen stove. This here Gunflint Crick country calls for a loosenin' up o' j'ints an' an uncommon robustious faith in God."

"Ye talk like a cussed preacher!" groaned Tim Leblanc.

They set out for the big river next morning, dragging Leblanc on an improvised sled. They dropped him at his own house, with an extra ten dollar bill and a little sermon from Archie McKim on the lamentable effects of a vile temper on soul and body.

Their arrival at the big house of Lob's Point is still talked about. Mrs. Kester cried on the shoulder of every member of the party, and Sally Goodine swooned with excitement, and Silas Kester was too deeply moved to say a word.

The neighbors made such a din with guns and horns that Squire Ingoldsby heard it through the walls of his fine house of Overisland and ran the whole distance in his slippers and without his hat.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BAG OF BOOKS.

THE household at Lob's Point settled back into the old, peaceful routine. It was increased by one; for old Gabe Loon, invited to make his home under that wide roof, could not think of a pleasanter or more comfortable way of putting in the future.

Jacob was none the worse for his adventure with Pete Woodhall. He had been lonely, but not often afraid, and he had fought for his friend, and so thoroughly did he believe the man with the scarred face to be a liar that he never gave another thought to the queer things he had been told by those sneering lips.

One day, in April, Mrs. Kester walked through the big shrubbery in the side garden in search of the green blades of daffodils. She found a few blades, and then she discovered a bag of sodden black leather. Even as she lifted the bag and found it heavy her memory flew back to the summer afternoon when the man with the scarred face was seen by little Jacob in Silas's room and afterward, by herself, on all fours in the edge of the shrubbery.

The bag was locked. She picked it up and carried it to Silas's room. Silas was not there. She found a knife and slit the strong leather and pulled out the old books one by one.

When Silas Kester entered his room fifteen minutes later, Albina was still seated at his big desk with the old books open before her and the empty black bag on the floor beside her feet. He realized the full significance of the scene at a glance, but he was puzzled, having believed all these months that Woodhall had carried off the bag of books.

"Where did you get it?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"I found it in the shrubbery," she answered. "I think it is what I saw that man looking for, on his hands and knees. But I don't understand. Was he bringing these books to you?"

"He took the books from that drawer, bag and all," replied the man, stepping closer and laying a hand on her shoulder. "I found them in the cabin we rescued the boy from—went down among the islands in June the same year, looking for it, and found it—and found those books. I thought it better not to tell any one, even you, of what I found. I burned the cabin. For myself, I didn't care who the boy's father was."

"Neither do I care," said Albina. "He is our son. I could not love him more, and he could not love us more than he does. He came to us when needed him. I sometimes think that he was guided safely to us—by the children—down the flooded river."

"Yes," said Silas.

There was a fire of old gnarled maple elbows burning hotly on the wide hearth. Silas poked it to a brisker flame, then took

the old books over and laid them, open, in the red and consuming heart of it.

" We'll take no more chances with them," he said

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PEDDLER.

SILAS KESTER kept an eye to windward for a few years, then forgot all about Pete Woodhall. The years passed in peace and plenty and honor.

Archie McKim spent more and more of every day beside the kitchen stove, and rubbed his joints more and more, and at last made himself a pair of crutches. Gabe Loon waxed fat and talkative in the big kitchen, and with the tales he told of himself and his great friend, Paul Snider, he added to his reputation for wisdom and courage; and one morning he was found dead in his bed with a contented smile on his small brown face.

Joe Newsam came gradually to the occupation of Archie's place as farm foreman and Silas's right hand man. He married; and Silas built a new house for him near the smithy.

Jacob Kester went down river to school, and later to college, but all his vacations were spent at or about Lob's Point, where his heart was. When his last examination paper was written, he came home for good.

He was a tall, quiet youth, gray-eyed, gentle and a thorough sportsman. All the traditions of the honest and fearless Kesters were his, and a taste in reading that was even finer than Silas's own, and a love for the old house and the wide intervales and the crowded islands.

One evening in April, fourteen years and some months after the violent theft of Gabe Loon's wallet by Pete Woodhall away up on Gunflint Creek, a bewhiskered stranger carrying a peddler's pack arrived at Than Lunt's house at the upper edge of French Village. Supper was on the table when Than opened the door to him, so of course he was invited to " set in " to the repast of fried salt pork and boiled potatoes. dried-apple pie, sugar cookies, strawberry preserves and strong tea.

He said his name was Baker, that he had come a long way since breakfast, that the roads and trade were bad. These statements, and a few questions concerning the village and neighborhood, were the sum of his conversation. He wasn't much of a talker, but he was a good listener.

The old couple, Than and Eliza Lunt, were tireless chatterers. They told the peddler all the news and gossip of the countryside, grave and gay, commendable and scandalous.

He listened with a grave face, but now and then a brightening or dulling of his dark eyes, to tales of village trickery, of salmon poaching, of domestic virtues and errors, or rural comedy and tragedy, of fights and frolics and vanity and charity, of the pride of the Ingoldsbys and the shame of the half-breed Rassers, of the worth and generosity of the Kesters, of the beauty of Squire Ingoldsby's daughter who had been to school in England, and of the strength and learning of Silas Kester's son who had been down river to college.

" There'll be a weddin' some day," said the old lady. " Gentry the both of 'em—as good as you'd find anywheres. An' that will surely be great property—Lob's P'int and Overisland j'ined together! They be great folks, them Ingoldsbys and Kesters, and proud—but they don't show their pride to poor folk like us. They ain't like the new run of upstarts from the city. If you was to go to Silas Kester's house this minute, Mr. Baker, ye'd be treated with the best."

The peddler said nothing to that, but his bearded lips twisted slightly and his dark eyes brightened and then dulled like stone.

The peddler gave the old couple several articles from his pack. They made up a bed for him in the kitchen, with a soft mattress and soft blankets and fine sheets. But he lay awake a long time, prodded by a devil of envy and hatred and malice and embittered vanity and poisoned self-pity and all uncharitableness.

As he lay awake he heard the river crack the rotten ice again and again with reports like guns, and later, just before he fell

asleep, he heard rain fingering the windows. The rain was still falling when he awoke, and the devil within him was still at work. He combed his whiskers with care so that a scar on his left cheek did not show.

After breakfast he made several calls here and there in the village, selling trinkets and mouth organs and pipes and papers of needles. He had dinner with the Lunts at noon and went out into the rain again immediately afterward.

He had been without liquor for three days; but he soon found his way to Dwight Lorry's humble dwelling, where there was potent stuff to be had for the buying. He bought and drank.

By dusk he was drunk, and Dwight was in not much better condition. A little later he was drunker and got to throwing things at his host—a knife, bottles and the like; after which he crumpled up and lost touch with the activities of the world.

Dwight Lorry had sense enough left to realize that the peddler would not be a safe companion for the night, for at the first return of consciousness he would probably throw things again. At the same time he felt that just to roll him outside into the rain would not be exactly the right thing to do.

So he dragged him across the yard to the little barn. But even the barn did not satisfy him. Here were a horse, a cow, and a pitchfork, and what more likely than that the peddler would commence throwing the pitchfork before morning and injure the horse or the cow? Thus reasoned Dwight Lorry, and he congratulated himself on the way his brain was working.

Then he thought of the old shed behind the barn on the brow of the bank. It wasn't much of a shed, but the roof was tight, and he felt that the peddler didn't deserve anything more than a roof to keep the rain off him. It was where he stored his wagon and scow and sturgeon boat for the winter, and what was good enough for them for six long months was good enough for the peddler for one night.

So he seized the prone and unconscious stranger by the collar again and dragged him out of the barn and down to the shed. He fell several times on the way.

Reaching his objective at last, he kicked open the door and dragged his burden inside. He stumbled about in the dark and knocked a shin against a gunwale of the scow.

Then he heaved the offensive peddler over the offending gunwale. He felt, through some drunken twist of reasoning, that by so doing he squared accounts with both of them.

"Damn you!" he said to the gunwale of the unresponsive scow; and: "Lay there, blast you!" he said to the unconscious peddler. Then he turned and staggered out, leaving the door open behind him. Twenty minutes later he was sound asleep in his bed.

The river swelled and the rotted ice broke and moved. The black water, which had been rising all day, crept to the top of the bank and beneath the loose flooring of Dwight Lorry's old shed. It lifted the old planks gently but surely. It floated the scow.

A pan of ice hit a corner of the shed and slued it halfway round. The black water continued to creep up, to brim over, and out through the open door of the twisted shed floated the scow.

It scraped among flooded willows, swung around in a slow eddy, hung for nearly a minute broadside—on to a stranded log and then was bumped free by a cake of gray ice.

Down at Overisland, below Lob's Point, Squire Ingoldsby sat in his fine library before a glowing hearth, full dressed. He was anxious about his new boathouse and its contents, but he did not want to disturb his men unless the river forced him to it. He had sat alone since ten o'clock, and now it was close upon midnight. The rest of the household slept. Already he had been down to the boathouse three times for a look at the rising flood.

He was a hale man of seventy-two, full blooded and high spirited. He sat with a glass and a large decanter of port at his elbow, and sipped down a glassful every now and then to keep himself awake. At five minutes to twelve he placed a log on the fire, replaced his slippers with high and well greased boots, donned raincoat and hat, took up a lighted lantern and went out into the seeping night.

Outside he picked up a pikepole. Thus

equipped, and still smacking the flavor of his last sip of wine, he made his way briskly down to the river.

He found the boathouse still high and dry. He went down to the edge of the creeping water and raised the lantern and looked out upon the sliding black and white flood. The cakes of rotted ice bumped and crumbled and slobbered as they drifted along. His eyes were keen—extraordinarily so for their age. His clearness of vision was one of the numerous things he prided himself on.

He saw something coming that was not ice, drifting into the wavering ray of his lantern, swinging close inshore. Curiosity prompted him to thrust out the long pole and attempt to gaff it. The iron failed to catch, and at that moment he saw that the thing was a scow. He was not interested in scows—but, on the other hand, he was not accustomed to strike and miss.

He set down the lantern, leaned forward and made another hack with the ironed pole. This time the right angled spike struck deep into the flat gunwale and held, and for a few seconds the drag of the drifting scow came within an ace of pulling the squire into the black water. But the hale old man gave ground a little so as to regain his balance, let a yard or so of pole slip through his hands, then gripped tight and set his heels into the wet sod and put his back into the pull.

His blood was up—the blood of Ingoldsbys and Lovelaces. A fig for the scow!—but he had undertaken to bring it ashore, so ashore he would bring it, though the devil himself and all the flooded rivers in the Province dragged against him! And he did it. Not only did he bring an end of it to the edge of the slippery sod, but he jerked and worried and dragged until he had half its length high and dry.

The squire felt that as he had done the confounded scow the honor of pulling it from the river onto his own land he might as well condescend a step farther and examine it for some mark of ownership. So he fetched the lantern.

"The devil!" he exclaimed; and well he might, for there in the bottom of the scow sat the bewhiskered peddler gaping at the light, and looking far more like the devil than like anything else one could think of on the spur of the moment. He recovered his composure in a second.

"Who are you, and where have you come from?" the squire demanded.

"I'm a poor peddler," replied the other, after blinking his eyes and opening and shutting his mouth several times. "I reckon I went adrift from French Village—but I don't know where I've got to."

He shivered violently.

"You're on the Overisland front; and I'm Squire Ingoldsby," said the rescuer. "You must be chilled to the bone. Come out of that and up to the house, or you'll catch your death."

The peddler got stiffly and unsteadily to his feet, staggered forward and fell flat. This was partly the result of chill, but not entirely so. He got instantly to his hands and knees and crawled forward and over the square nose of the scow. Ingoldsby helped him to an upright position and steadied him so.

"Faugh!" exclaimed the squire. "You reek of cheap gin!"

"An' what of it?" cried the peddler, bracing his legs. "What d'ye expect? We ain't all rich!"

"Can you walk without assistance?" asked the squire coldly.

"Sure I kin walk. Damn nigh froze—an' wringin' wet to the hide—but that's good 'nough for me—poor devil what drinks gin! Sure I kin walk! An' don't ye talk to me like I'm a dog, neither! I got my pride—an' a taste for good liquor, too. D'ye think I'd drink squareface gin if I owned yer cellar?"

"Now, follow me—if you can," said Ingoldsby with much scorn and a little pity and something of resignation in his voice.

The peddler's head cleared after a few uncertain steps, and his legs steadied and strengthened as the blood warmed in them. He did very well on the gentler slopes of the long path to the house, but on the steeper grades he had to crawl. He swore to himself as he crawled. His brain was amazingly active; and so was the devil of hate, malice and all uncharitableness.

The squire led the way to the side door which opened into his library. He opened the door and entered ahead of the peddler, then closed it after them. He raised the lantern and looked searchingly into the fellow's face.

"Get close up to the fire and pull off your clothes," he said. "There are some blankets here that 'll serve your turn until your things are dry."

The peddler obeyed, and was soon out of his sodden garments and squatted on the hearth rug with soft blankets draped about him. The squire resumed his slippers and his seat.

The peddler's black eyes regarded the big decanter with an intentness that could not be ignored. The squire got up with a sound between a snort and a sigh, and fetched another glass from a cupboard. He filled it and handed it to the man on the hearth. The red wine vanished in the twinkling of an eye.

"What is your name?" asked the squire.

The other's black eyes glistened and his bearded lips twisted slightly.

"It's one thing an' agin it's another—but the name I was born with—that's as good as yer own," he replied.

"That is not the point," said the squire icily.

"My name's Woodhall. Maybe ye've heared it."

Ingoldsby started, but instantly regained his attitude of calm and chill superiority.

"You are a fool to admit it," he said. "My memory is not defective, and I am a magistrate. It is—let me see—fourteen years since a man named Woodhall, calling himself Steve something-or-other, kidnaped the son of a friend of mine."

"Was it the son of yer friend?"

"His adopted son—which does not lessen the crime."

The peddler sneered. "Little Jacob? His name was Peter when I first knowed 'im. An' he drifted away on a flood an' was picked up by Kester. Maybe ye know that already. If ye don't, ask Kester. Peter's his name. But now he's Jacob, an' a rich man—an' like to be richer. Jacob Kester? Hell! There ain't no more Kester in him nor there be in yerself."

"Are you still drunk? What are you talking about?"

"I know what I'm talkin' about, don't ye fret. What d'ye cal'late I took the kid away for, anyhow, that time?"

"For the purpose of forcing money out of Silas Kester."

"That's right. But why didn't I carry off yer little girl? Ye're rich as Kester—an' maybe richer. I'll tell ye. I had a right to that kid—him they call Jacob Kester."

"A right? You? Are you drunk or crazy? What are you driving at? Speak out!"

"What's all the hurry? Maybe ye know how Silas Kester come by that baby twenty-one year ago, or maybe ye don't. I see ye do. That's all right.

"An' now I'll tell 'e something Kester knows already. This here young Jacob Kester—him that's been to college an' all that—his name's Peter Woodhall—an' that's my name, too. D'ye git it? His ma was Susan Jane Howland—an' that was the name o' my wife.

"Beardsley Woodhall was my own pa—him what took to the woods when all the money an' gentility was used up an' all the thievin' Ingoldsbys had et dirt—him that married a half-breed woman up on Gunflint Crick. That's me.

"That's yer fine Jacob Kester. That's his blood—Woodhall an' Howland an' 'breed! If ye think I'm lyin', ask Silas Kester."

John Ingoldsby sat speechless, staring at the fellow on the hearth rug. He had worried greatly, off and on, over the mystery of young Jacob Kester's antecedents, and had schooled himself to accept the fact that the chances were heavily against their being distinguished—but this was worse than his worst suspicion. The murderous, outcast Woodhalls! And half-breeds!

"I'll show 'e somethin'," said the peddler, making a long arm and pulling his steaming coat from the back of a chair. From an inner pocket he brought a packet wrapped in oiled silk and tied about with twine. He opened it and disclosed a small flat case.

"I cal'lated this might come in handy some day, so I kep' it," he said, passing it to Ingoldsby.

The squire opened the little case with fumbling fingers. Within he found a photograph which, for a moment, he mistook for that of his young friend Jacob Kester. Then he realized that this was of a young woman, and that it was old and slightly faded.

"Turn it over," said the peddler.

Ingoldsby obeyed. On the back of the photograph, in faded ink, he read:

For my deer husband, Peter Woodhall,
From his loving Susan Jane.

"That's her," said the peddler. "That's my wife—as was. D'ye know anybody what looks like her?"

The squire replaced the photograph and closed the little case and handed it back to the peddler. His round, weathered face was gray. He got slowly to his feet and crossed the library and opened a door onto a large, windowless closet containing a few boxes, several pieces of broken furniture and several piles of old books and magazines on the floor. He stood the door wide open and turned back to the man on the hearth.

"Your clothes are dry enough by now," he said. "Gather them up and come here."

"What's the idee?" asked the peddler.

"The idea is that you'll finish the night in this closet and accompany me to Lob's Point in the morning," said the squire. "You have made the statement several times that Mr. Silas Kester is aware of certain astounding facts. Very well! If there is any truth in your abominable story, I'll hear it from Mr. Kester."

"Ain't I proved it already?" exclaimed the peddler, the sneer gone from his lips and voice and eyes. "Don't this here photygraft prove it? Ye kin ask Kester yerself. There ain't no call for me to go with ye."

His brain was clear now, and he remembered an ax, and a little leather pouch attached to a silver chain, and Silas Kester's knowledge of these things. In his heart he cursed Dwight Lorry's gin, the flood and the devil of envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness that had brought him to this pass.

Ingoldsby stepped over to the nearest wall and took down an old sword in a scabbard of varnished black leather. He drew the gleaming blade, dropped the scabbard and advanced upon the peddler. The gleam of his eyes was as metallic as the sword.

"Pick them up," he said.

The peddler sprang to his feet, cursing. Ingoldsby came on, flickering the cold steel.

"This was my grandfather's sword," said the squire. "Don't force me to defile it with your filthy blood."

The peddler snatched up his garments one by one, backing always with the point of the sword now threatening his throat and now his breast. He backed, foot by foot, across the carpet and into the closet. Ingoldsby shut the heavy door of oak and turned the big key.

The squire returned the sword to its place and went back to his chair. He poured and gulped a glass of port, then settled his elbows on the arms of the chair and sank his face between his hands.

"Blood will out," he thought miserably. "Blood tells." At last he fell asleep.

A door that had stood ajar opened softly and a tall girl entered the library. She wore something of silk and white down over her nightdress and her bright hair in two long braids. She paused for a moment beside her father's chair, then glided to the door of the closet. She turned the key with the utmost caution and opened the door. There stood the peddler, fully dressed, staring at her.

"Give me that photograph and take these," she whispered, and extended her left hand. The peddler glanced at the hand, then produced the little case containing the photograph and gave it to her. She immediately opened her hand into his, releasing a few gold coins, half a dozen rings set with jewels, a gold bracelet. She turned then without a word and moved noiselessly toward the outer door.

The peddler followed her, with an eye on the sleeping squire. She opened the door and let him out into the black rain.

Then she returned to the hearth, examined the photograph intently, pressed her lips to it and then thrust it, case and all, down between two glowing logs. She stole out by the door of her entrance; and John Ingoldsby slept on.

It was dawn when the squire awoke. He sat up and stared at the ashes on the hearth, then around the room. "My God!" he whispered; and he got to his feet and crossed the room with reluctant steps and sagging shoulders, like an old man.

He found the door of the closet unlocked. He opened it and looked within and found the closet empty. He turned and surveyed the gray lit room again, then fixed his gaze on the decanter of port and the two glasses on the little table beside the hearth.

Two glasses! So he had not dreamed it. But how had the fellow escaped? The door had been unlocked for him! But by whom? He felt dazed and heartsick.

The mystery of the fellow's escape seemed a small thing to him compared with the tragic fact that he had ever been in that room. He returned to his chair, only to be startled out of it in a minute by the opening of the outer door and the entrance of Silas Kester.

Silas was hatless, breathing hard and mud spattered to the knees.

"What's the meaning of this?" he exclaimed, thrusting a small bit of paper into the squire's hand. "Why should they do it that way? What has happened? Do you know anything about it?"

Ingoldsby examined the paper. It read:

DEAR DAD:

We are off to town to be married. It is Carol's idea—this furtive manner and unreasonable hour and all—two o'clock in the morning! It suits me, of course—but seems a trifle rough on you and mother and the Ingoldsbys—cheating you out of a fine wedding and all that sort of thing. But don't worry; and please let them know at Overisland as soon as you read this. We shall be home again in a few days. Your loving son,

JACOB K.

"Are they gone?" asked the squire dully, staring at the paper.

"They've been gone these three hours and more," returned Kester. "But why? What's your girl's idea? Couldn't she wait until May? What foolish, romantic novels has she been reading?"

The truth concerning the escape of the peddler flashed in the squire's dazed mind. For seconds he stood and gazed at his old friend without word or motion.

He moved suddenly, plucked up one of the wine glasses and broke it on the hearth, fetched another, filled two glasses and passed one of them to Silas. Some of the color was back in his face by this time. He raised his glass.

"Here's to your theory!" he said.

"My theory?" queried Kester.

"That environment is everything," said the squire. "God grant that you're right!"—and he swallowed the wine.

Kester considered the other for a moment with a questioning and reflective glance, then "God grant it!" he said, and drained his glass.

THE END

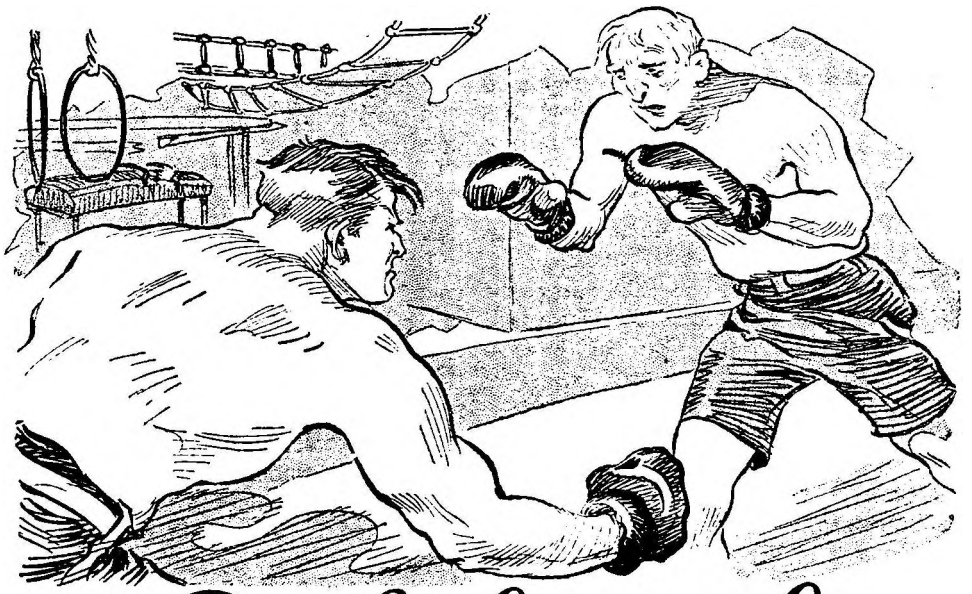
WITH TEA AND SILK AND SANDALWOOD

WHERE the herded islands raise black snouts and nuzzle the sullen shore
And the shore ice crawls and groans and bawls at the wallowing combers' roar;
Black wind whips at the glaring lamps that leap and plunge and wreathe
And bites like a dirk from the whirling murk while the long seas lick beneath.

Over oily swells the dim dawn crawls through the deeps of the outer dark,
From truck to rail each straining sail bends spectral pale and stark;
Great viscid rollers writhe aloft, collapse and fall abeam—
While ghostly white in the eerie light the flooded scuppers gleam.

Then the sun winks up like a leering eye across the flying spume,
And the standing gear twangs sharp and clear from jib to spanker boom,
With crescent canvas soaring high—battered and patched and torn,
The last of the stately China fleet sweeps homeward round the Horn.

Walbridge Dudley.



Sockological Socker Dooley

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

The author of this popular series of fight stories, concerning the victories and vicissitudes of the illustrious "Socker Dooley," writes from an intimate knowledge of the ring. He was welterweight champion of the United States Navy when that title could be won only by scientific and desperate effort. So here you have authentic narratives of the squared circle from a trained wordsmith and a clever gloveman combined.

It is a delight to the discriminating reader to encounter on the fiction page a professional boxer who acts and talks and thinks like a human being, differing from his brother men mainly in that his occupation is extra hazardous and his public career usually no longer than that of a President. *Time!*—THE EDITOR.

SOME things are unreasonable, some understandable and not a few inevitable. Fate is an alchemist. With fingers which reach at will into the four corners of the globe she chooses her ingredients, mixes them and doubtless has her reward in the results.

Scientists may tell you that certain results are produced by psychological reactions: that is merely an effort to offer ex-

planations for unexplainable things, if I may be permitted the expression. We gaze in wonderment at the firmament; look upon the distant twinkle of unknown stars as a direct manifestation of the omnipotent hand, while all about us, every day, are transpiring things even more incomprehensible.

Take for instance the slum born lad who hews his way through the handicaps of his heritage to scale the peaks of achievement or, conversely, the lad born with every advantage who makes a mess of things and winds up a total loss. Can this be explained? Is it psychology or is it alchemy? Is it that some force has played upon latent powers within the lad, or is it purely a matter of the ingredients originally supplied by nature?

You answer.

At the risk of life and limb I am going to take issue with the psychologists in behalf of the chemical theory and I am going to offer in testimony the actual incidents which threw exponents of the two forces together and the contingent happenings. Maybe you hadn't better attempt an answer until you have heard the evidence.

First, the chemical side. Socker Dooley never even heard of the word psychology. He had taken the physique which Fate, the great alchemist, had built for him and done with it things which had scaled the barriers. With a world of heart, a little intelligence where affairs of the ring were concerned, and a wallop that would spread the average knuckle duster all over the surrounding scenery, he had won fame and fortune.

Then, because the chemical forces of which he was made were all acquisitive and not in the least retentive, he had proceeded to go broke. Lastingly and irrevocably broke. Now he was an ex-champion whose only reward came from a knowledge of past performance. Any one will concede that memory never yet served adequately to patch a man's pants nor to feed his hungry mouth. From which you will see that Socker Dooley was a being detached from the creature comforts, a wanderer of the trackless spaces of life, a bum!

Second, the psychological side. Professor Phineas Martin had a physique that cast a shadow just too small to cover a cockroach. Every time he walked over a grating the onlookers shuddered in anticipation of his immediate disappearance. Cut off his feet and you could mail him to any foreign country at a cost not to exceed a nickel. Chemically the gentleman had been cheated beyond expression. He looked like a watch charm!

But brains? Well, the professor sure could concentrate. At college, where he taught, his knowledge knocked all the students so dumb they flunked every examination. It had never been accomplished before. He held them spellbound all year and they couldn't shake off the effects in time to pass examinations.

He knew psychology better than the man who started it. He could tell you just what a given man would do under a given set of circumstances if the man was a given kind of a man with given tendencies. He had so many brains that he couldn't keep them all under control. No matter what you wanted to know he could tell you if he didn't happen to be thinking about something else. When he centered his colossal mind on the solution of a colossal problem he thought of nothing else. Remember that because it is what started all this story.

You will see from the foregoing that Socker Dooley and Phineas Martin were antitheses; had nothing in common; were as far apart as the two mythical poles. Socker was all chemical, which is substance. Martin all theory, which is fantastic.

Socker played the cards of life in terms of food, clothing and hope. Phineas in terms of anything from the fourth dimension to relativity and inferiority complexes. Socker lived in a mundane world faced incessantly by the dictates of physical comfort. Phineas lived in a world of his own creation, dreaming of discoveries that would release all things from the confining limitations of the mundane.

Socker's mind, incapable of flight, held to his body. Phineas's body, incapable of flight, became detached from his mind which roamed fields of its own choosing while his body struggled along like a ship without a rudder. He was apt to follow

his mind out into the street in the morning without realizing that his body carried no shoes.

II.

SOCKER DOOLEY roamed aimlessly through the little park which adorns Union Square. It is a small park, but a haven for many of the souls which seem to have been discarded by the wheel of fortune. Its benches are ever a harbor for the weary travelers who go nowhere.

The preceding night had been a trying one. Late fall weather conduces to nights of chill and any one who attempts to mix them with an alley bed learns that it doesn't work. For the last two hours Socker had tramped the streets in an effort to restore circulation to his aching limbs. Then the sun came up. Its warmth was grateful. He had watched it as it seemed to rise from behind the huge buildings of Broadway; waited impatiently for it to attain a place in the heavens from whence its direct rays might drive the biting tang from the air.

With a sigh of relief he sank onto one of the benches. Directly across the footpath was another deserted bench which offered a startling sight. At one end of it was a perfectly excellent overcoat which seemed to boast no interested owner. After a cold night in an alley and early morning hours spent in rubbing chilled wrists, that was some sight!

With considerable alacrity Socker changed benches and cast wary glances about in search of prying eyes. There was none. Gingerly he let his hand fall upon the garment, pulled it a little closer to him. A psychologist would have known instantly that another psychologist had preceded him to the bench and become so engrossed in thought that he had left his coat. It was easy to see that the rising sun had obviated the need for the garment.

But Socker was no psychologist. If he had an inferiority complex it asserted itself only at sight of a badge and all without Socker's knowledge.

Here was a perfectly good coat, sorely needed. The cloth felt warm and alluring to his battered fingers. The neat little fur collar seemed to cry out for the privilege of protecting his swollen ears from the biting winds. With another careful glance in all directions he lifted the coat onto his arm and struck off across the park. His back had a quivery sensation as though some one was about to grab him from behind and his ears were expectant of a sudden hue and cry which would require immediate footwork on his part. Neither came.

He turned into Fifteenth Street and paused behind a big truck in order to slip the coat on. His attempt to get his flat hand into the sleeve was like the camel and needle act. It couldn't be done.

"Gawd!" sighed Socker, regretfully, "it's boy's size. 'Bout as useful ter me as snowshoes in Hades!" But he had the coat and dared not throw it away because of the attention he would attract. Being of a purely chemical structure Socker never thought to look in the pockets until he had traversed several blocks.

Imagine his amazement and joy at discovering a twenty dollar bill wrapped around several twos and ones! And he had had no breakfast that morning!

Feverishly he dug his hands into the other pockets. In the inner one he came upon a leather folder which looked like more money but proved disappointing. All it held were some cards proclaiming the name and address of Professor Phineas Martin. Socker saw that he was not far from the number given.

"Guess it ain't a kid's coat at dat," he muttered, "an' it's a cinch de bimbo dat wears dis envelope ain't gonna scare me none in a fight!" He held the coat from him in order better to realize its diminutive proportions. "Well, me fer de Waldorf an' a private dinin' room." There is no joy greater to a hungry man than hunting for a restaurant, especially when hope has long since departed that he would have any use for such a place after he found it.

III.

STIMULATED by the food and hot drink Socker left the café intent upon going to the address given on the cards and finding out if a reward for the coat would be

offered. If any questions were asked about the money he would assure the owner that no money was in the coat when he found it. Reasonable enough. The coat was too small for a man and who would expect money to remain long on a Union Square bench?

He found the place and the professor at the same time. Was it the professor's coat? It was. Was there a reward for his time, his trouble and his honesty in bringing it back? There was. The good professor dug up a ten dollar bill and offered it without so much as a thought of the money that had been in the coat.

"Do yuh work in a circus?" inquired Socker, looking at the emaciated personage before him.

"Circus? Circus. Circus!" gasped the professor in three different tones and degrees of understanding. "I, work in a circus?—Ah! A most interesting person, most interesting!" He had seen in Socker such a man as he seldom met. What might not this type contribute unknowingly to the psychological world?

"I was jus' t'inkin' dat." agreed Socker, his eyes appraising the little man.

"My good fellow," began the professor in placating tone, "this is most interesting, most interesting. Why should you associate me with a circus?"

"Freaks." Laconically.

"F-r-e-a-k-s! You mean—f-r-e-a-k-s?"

"I mean—I mean—F-r-e-a-k-s!" grinned Socker in imitation.

"I am no freak—I am a professor!" There was a world of scorn and pique in the tone.

"Physical culture?" Socker had the ten, why not the fun?

But the taunt roused the professor to the use of his weapons which were purely mental. He controlled his anger in consideration of the things to be learned. Here was a man uncouth, uneducated, battered, yet who retained his honesty as was attested by his return of the coat.

"So you laugh at my size? It is to be expected. A glance at me shows that I have given no thought to my body. A glance at you shows that you have given every thought to yours. We are opposites. Will you come in for a morning cigar and chat?"

Could Napoleon march? Can a duck swim? Would Socker go in? Happy days!

Once in the study the professor began quizzing Socker and seemed to gloat over the responses of the fighter. In the learned man's world there was no fistic combat, no pugilists. Here was opportunity to leave the realm of thought for that of reality and to take back into that higher and better world, gems of thought that had been purloined from an unknowing mind.

IV.

PROFESSOR PHINEAS MARTIN rose to address his class in advanced psychology:

"Gentlemen, I am prepared to offer you a surprise," he announced. "For many weeks we have yearned for some method of testing the teachings of advancd psychological phenomena. We have learned from our study that the human brain in a substance which vibrates in accordance with thought impulses given it. We have learned, too, that thought impulses may be guided to control these vibrations.

"Some of you, skeptics though you show yourselves to be, have quite plainly indicated a desire to see actual tests of the theories expounded. Such a test I have planned for you.

"Let me reiterate that most minds become calloused to the reception of new thoughts. Our daily life, as a people, is growing ever more narrow. The very nature of our business existence is such as to heighten competition and make specialists of us all because of the necessity of giving all our thought to our own particular sphere of activity.

"The result is a dwarfing of intellects. We find no time for explorations into the unknown in the mental potential. We also become travelers of a single road, in other words, engrossed in one track thought to the preclusion of progress in the arts and sciences. We place self interest above all else and are driven, psychologically, into certain thought areas. We never emerge from them.

"We have learned that a man who has

operated one lathe for months is not as efficient if transferred to another lathe of exactly the same make. We see, too, that even the same lathe moved to other surroundings impairs the operator's efficiency until he shall have become acclimated to the new location. This is obviously psychological.

" Now, I am going to attempt a demonstration of the power of psychology to disrupt even a well established train of thought. I am going to show you a man with a perfect physique, suddenly rendered helpless before the attack of a much weaker man who knows nothing of physical combat. And I am going to ask that you bear in mind that the stronger man is also a fighter, trained to the art. A man who has achieved great fame in the prize ring and who, except for psychology, would destroy the weaker man as a cat devours a mouse."

In very orderly though deeply enthusiastic interest the students left the class room and repaired to the college gymnasium. There they ranged against walls and awaited the appearance of the central figures in the test to be enacted. If there was to be anything in the line of a fight they wanted to be at the ringside.

The professor disappeared into an anteroom and returned leading one of the students dressed in boxing trunks.

" You all know Arthur Kapps," he announced confidently. " Arthur has been a great football player on the varsity eleven for two seasons and has won glory for our alma mater. You also know that Arthur knows nothing of the art of prize fighting.

" Because he has no fear he has agreed to serve in the coming test. He will be pitted against a man who knows nothing but prize fighting! He is Mr. Socker Dooley, once champion. His name is famous indeed among those who know that sort of thing. While unknown to you, of course, he is really celebrated in his world."

" Hooray for Socker," chimed a voice in the rear and several of the students laughed knowingly.

" Let it be understood that this Dooley man knows nothing of the test to be made. I have merely requested him to come here for an exhibition against one of the college boys for which I am paying him one hundred dollars. Please attach due thought to the exhibition.

" As Mr. Dooley enters the room I am going to have several of the students assembled in gymnasium togs. Among them will be Arthur. In a very casual manner it will be arranged that Dooley will see Arthur apparently teaching the others gymnastics. He will perform several feats of strength which will have been arranged in advance and the psychological effect upon Mr. Dooley will be such as to make him fight defensively thus shattering his own attack. You will see a great body fettered by a small mind, the mind being shackled by psychological direction."

Several students entered and gathered about various apparatus. Socker was invited into the room and strutted before the students as he used to strut before the fans. He was asked to wait until the present class in gymnastics finished.

He watched the Arthur person as he went from student to student. He saw him step up to the lad at the punching bag; saw him draw back and strike the bag nonchalantly. Then he saw the bag burst under the impact of the blow! Smiling tolerantly Arthur proceeded to a set of parallel bars. With the same *sang froid* he leaned across one bar, seized the other in his two hands and pulled the two together until the stout ashen bar broke with a loud snap.

" Wat de hell is he, a elephant!" grunted Socker.

" Will you see if you can fix this rope, Mr. Kapps?" called a lad at a wall pulley. " It is badly tangled and won't run through the sheave."

Socker saw Kapps walk to the machine, take the heavy window cord in his hand and examine it, heard him say:

" It is badly tangled. We need a new one."

" I'll get a knife." The lad started away to get a knife with which to saw the rope in two. No one knew better than Socker the strength of such cord as that.

" Oh, never mind," smiled Kapps, " guess I can bust it!" He wound the rope about his hands and Socker grinned expectantly.

The man didn't live who could break window cord in his hands.

Kapps gave a sharp yank and the cord parted. He regarded his palms a moment reflectively. "Tough stuff that," he vouchsafed, then ordered the students off the floor.

In a moment he was shaking hands very mildly with Socker Dooley.

"This is the gentleman I wanted you to test with," announced the good professor. "I am going to ask that you show consideration for him and do not strike him unnecessarily hard."

"Huh! Dis guy needs a lot uh sympathy, he does. Ain't yuh got a lion around dat I kin walk up to and spit in his eye?"

"But Arthur knows nothing of fighting," the professor assured him. "Of course he is very strong. We are told that he is the world's strongest man. But science should keep you free of his grasp and I am very certain he will not use his strength to the full. Remember, Arthur, this is merely a scientific exhibition and there must be no broken bones when you seize Mr. Dooley at close quarters.

"All right, gentlemen. Give the exhibitors' room and bring forth the sparring mittens!"

At this command the class fell back and the gloves were put on. What would Socker do? He wouldn't quit, of course. On the other hand he hadn't had a glove on for a year! His wind would last long enough to climb into a ring, but he would need a rest before the first bell!

Here indeed was a dilemma. If he landed clean on this man-elephant and failed to score a knockout, what might he expect from those arms? A man that could shatter a punching bag had no right taking liberties with the face of Socker Dooley! One shot like that which had ruined the bag and Socker would bust with a louder bang than any rubber ball.

"If he drops a right like dat on me Adam's apple I'll choke ter death on cider," Socker assured himself. Me fer tuh play dis gur'illa wit' care. I ain't gonna lay a glove on 'im!"

How easy it would have been, too. In ten seconds of fighting Socker refused as many opportunities to land upon the youthful face before him. Instead, he kept clear, hoping against hope that the class would have had enough before he dropped of exhaustion. Many times Arthur swung punches that Socker had no difficulty in avoiding. It was evident that the lad was pulling his blows, because Socker could see that they had little real hurt behind them. Not any consecutive hundred of them would have broken that bag.

Psychology had triumphed. Socker was scared blue. He was intent upon earning that hundred and living to enjoy it, so why fight?

But psychology is two sided, like everything else. It took two rounds for Arthur to realize that fame was just around the corner from him. Suppose he could knock out this great fighter. Would he not ever after be a campus lion?

Many times Socker had heard the word "psychology" mentioned in whispered tones at his back. It meant exactly twice as much as nothing to him. How then, could he be expected to know that it had gripped Arthur and started brain vibrations of a hopeful nature?

In the third round Arthur came from his corner intent upon destruction. There was no one alive who would recognize the look more quickly than Socker. It had been his one and only business to read the signs of attack in the eyes of opponents. Visions he had of that devasting blow on the punching bag; of the snapped window cord and he felt the approach of disaster. But courage—in the ring it is called "heart,"—had never been lacking in the Dooley make-up.

To go down fighting was the ultimate of his creed. He flexed his muscles and met the approaching Arthur with all the determination which had characterized his ring days.

A lightning-like left found lodgment on the collegiate chin. Back went the head in a surprised snap. Before Arthur had a chance to recover, the remnant of Socker Dooley was after him. Again the left landed, followed closely by the right. Such happenings were quite beyond the ken of the assaulted Arthur.

Even as Socker Dooley reverted to his old self, Arthur gave rein to his natural tendencies. He ducked his head as in the days when "hitting the line" on the gridiron. Socker saw the charge coming. Setting himself, he shot forth an uppercut that carried every ounce of his "stuff" behind it. It caught the rushing footballer on the side of the chin and whirled him about. But inside the glove of Socker Dooley another story was being unfolded. A tale that had to do with knuckles which had become chalky and powdered under the impact of a hard blow.

There entered the true psychology. Both men were themselves, made so by an array of circumstances inspiring certain thought. The one, the trained fighter, the other the young and strong lad whose willingness far exceeded his ability.

With a broken knuckle Socker couldn't follow the advantage of his blow. Arthur recuperated while Phineas almost passed from the picture under pressure of the sudden turn affairs had taken.

"Psychological reversion to type—" he began, but his words were lost in the acclaim by which the sudden and unexpected action had been received by the students.

For a moment the two men glared at each other, then Arthur began another charge. Socker sidestepped and placed a snappy left to the head.

"Why don't you stand up and fight?" demanded Arthur in bewildered fashion.

"Too busy sockin' yuh 'adenoids,'" Socker countered, grinning.

Once more Arthur rushed in and again Socker danced free from harm after driving another left to the head.

Seeing the hopelessness of his rushes Arthur essayed to spar with Socker. What a travesty! Arthur saw more gloves in a minute than he had ever before counted and they all centered in a grand rush for his head. He was like a cork buffeted by the seas. In desperation he got in close and folded his arms about the older man. Immediately Socker had mental visions of crushed ribs.

As a last resort he slid close to the collegian and snuggled his thick left shoulder under the youngster's chin. Suddenly that shoulder shot upward, there was a thud as the jawbone of the student snapped against the upper portion of his head with numbing force. Once more Socker's instinct and experience told a tale of truth. He felt the body of Arthur sag in his arms. Quickly he stepped free and with every ounce of his strength crashed the left hand to the staggering lad's face.

Fifteen seconds later Arthur viewed anew the mundane world from which he had slipped.

He heard Phineas Martin expostulating:

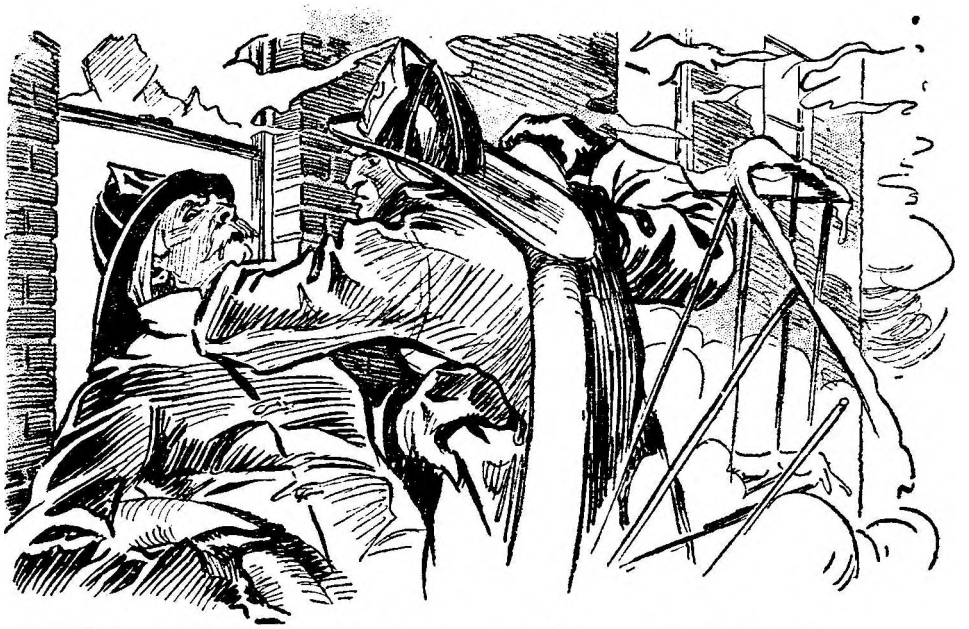
"It was a psychological victory in spite of Arthur's defeat. Under the correct environment the guiding hand of psychology forced each man to drop into the mental rut previously established under stress. It was a psychological victory!"

In the showers Socker was the cynosure of admiring eyes. Questions galore were showered upon him by the students even as water gorged him from the spray. With his great body glistening and his eyes shining with a new found faith in the world, he grinned at the boys.

"How did you whip him, Socker?" asked several at once.

"Well," vouchsafed Socker thoughtfully, "this Martin insect is hell fer brains an' he says ut was a 'sockological' victory. Dat's good enough fer me!"

And after all, why not? What's a busted knuckle compared with some hundred and thirty American iron men? Be reasonable.



Teakettle Ten

By KARL W. DETZER

STONE AGE SULLIVAN commanded Engine Ten; commanded in a squeaking voice and with epithets that shamed the fires he fought. Five feet two from the mole on his forehead to his rheumatic instep, loose-hung and disjointed, making untidiness of person a virtue, he never had been a pretty fireman. But after forty years of gongs and broken sleep, of zero weather on ice-enameled walls, of smashed shoulders, flying glass and smoke filled lungs, mothers in the neighborhood of Engine Ten used his name to frighten unruly youth into obedience.

And had you looked inquiringly at his right hand, with its stumps where three fingers should have been, and a white scar that ran raggedly up the wrist, he might answer your inquiry, or might not.

"It was ate off!" he explained sharply if his temper were good, and let it go at that. Only on the dog watches, when his rheumatics had gone to bed with him and refused him sleep, would he talk of the fire at Box 816.

Stone Age Sullivan's story is colored, prejudiced, one-sided, as are all tales of bold deeds written too close to the memory. You must inquire among the hundred others who labored in the snow back of the river that March night two years ago. Yes, and of those who attended the banquet of the Fire Fans Club six months before, when Stone Age Sullivan upset his glass and the ugly affair had its thoughtless beginning.

Engine Ten was the last of its kind. It was also the prize joke of the fire department, with its four panting horses, its restricted territory, its old hose wagon and its shiny, played-out steam pumper. And Stone Age Sullivan was antiquated, entirely as antiquated as the equipment on which he

rode. He hated gasoline. He thought motor driven fire apparatus a monstrosity. Steam did it! Steam and horses.

Inventive years dealt hardly with the old horse drawn pumpers. Only six were left in the city. Five of these led sleepy lives in the far outskirts. Engine Ten drowsed down town across the river. It went to duty with a clatter of hoofs, racing motorized apparatus as if it had a chance of winning. It was a crowded district where it panted through, a tangle of warehouses netting the waterfront.

" Teakettle Ten," the department called it. All it could pour was five hundred gallons of water a minute. Gasoline pumpers got out eight hundred. But even so Stone Age Sullivan never cared—until the dinner of the Fire Fans Club.

Thought of hitching up horses to get to a fire was great sport to the Fire Fans, that bustling lot of youths and graybeards who still thrill at the clang of bells. They cheered when the first assistant marshal spoke. Stone Age Sullivan brooded.

" Within six months," the assistant marshal announced with blunt eloquence, " we'll shut up the stalls in the last of the old time houses. There's six new gasoline pumpers being tested now in the department shops. Three will go into service next week, two more in three months. The last one goes to Engine Ten."

" Sullivan!" shouted a modern enthusiast across the room. Some one else cried for a speech.

There was a flapping of hands, necks were craned, and Stone Age Sullivan arose awkwardly at a table far down the room. His face flared redder than its accustomed scorched orange hue, and he worked his hands in his napkin. When he spoke his voice was pitched so high that a recruit, over in one corner, laughed aloud.

" Big Boss," he began, " it's hard news you're bringing! But I'm glad that I'm to be the last. I know a bit or two about this fire business, and I don't trust this here gasoline—steam for me, and horses every time."

He pushed a finger into his collar, as if to rid his throat of the squeak. A voice yelled: " Go on!"

" That's what I'm aimin' to do, brother!" Stone Age Sullivan called back hotly. " I'm going to tell some of you Johnny-Jump-Ups and you amatoor firemen what a old timer knows. I been watching this gasoline going on ten year, and I've seen it eating away the guts of the department. Ree-cruits ain't spiny these days like they was when I was a lad—no backbone or nothing. And it's not their fault—it's the gasoline. They don't trust their engine, which you can't blame them. Now you ask me to speech, and I'm speeching. These here motors ain't honest, they ain't safe, and you know it! All I got to say is I'm sorry to lose my teams."

He sat down, and the progressive Fire Fans had a roaring good laugh. It started at the press table, and swept up the room, with the assistant marshal banging for order and Stone Age Sullivan perspiring and pushing back his chair. And when Captain Mike McQuire of Engine Thirty-Two, put his head in his hands and rocked, the master of Engine Ten upset his glass, turned his back on the banquet, resigned loudly and profanely from the club, and stamped out of the room.

He met McQuire a few days later at a smoky basement fire. Captain Mike grinned again as Stone Age Sullivan shuffled past him with a nozzle under his arm. Sullivan, warm and touchy, saw the grin, halted for half a pace, and squeaked back:

" Watch your step, Mike McQuire, you young upstart! Me and you ain't had the last of our laugh yet, not by a handpump full."

It was March when the order was posted, the third of the month, a date when the fire at Box 816 made history. Engine Ten, in three more days, would put away its teakettle. The department began the day by wondering what Captain Sullivan would do about it. It finished by wondering when the snow would stop.

The first flurry came at noon. By three o'clock it was piling up in soft heaps. Dusk blew in with a stiff gale off the lake and the drifts stacked higher. Surface car schedules went to pieces at six o'clock. Emergency men plodded out at seven, snowplows bucked five foot drifts, stuck fast, and

waited for shovels to dig them out. Stone Age Sullivan worked with his men to clear his own driveway. And at midnight sharp came a call from Box 816.

It is a "far box," this alarm 816, centrally enough located, but stuck in seclusion, behind high rows of warehouses back of the north slip of the river, a place of silence after sundown except for the feet of watchmen.

The hose wagon hitch led out. They were a fast, lean team that pulled the hose. They "minded the gong," lunged when the captain's toe tripped quick, slowed to a lope if he rang in barks. Teakettle Ten lumbered in the drifted wake, its slower horses stepping high, snorting, whipping back their tails, annoyed that any man should so forget himself as to discover fire on such a night.

Stone Age Sullivan held the first team down himself; Driver Pat Malone used the whip and listened. Snow was hub deep in Illinois Street. At the corner of Cass the lead horses pawed, wallowed, broke a trail and plunged on, a heavy, sidewheel gait that did for a gallop. Stone Age Sullivan banged his bell, the engine answered half a block behind, whining, its tune a singsong.

Across Dearborn Street and State, through those tortuous byways back of the *Tribune* plant, hose team and engine of Teakettle Ten floundered on their last snowy run. At Michigan Boulevard Sullivan looked sharply to his right. Hard, bright lights showed another car, that kicked up snow as high as the top bridge girders.

"Thirty-Two—Mike McQuire!" the commander of Teakettle Ten growled to his driver. "Won't they find sweet running over here!"

Pat Malone did not answer; he was watching the horses. They left the boulevard behind, and came out into the open, that flat, newly made territory which edges the shore of Lake Michigan, unbuilt, where winds from the north play freely across vast unbroken acres. The snow whipped down like a fog, and put out the lights behind. Drifts covered the wheels, the hose wagon labored. Behind, less insistent than before, the soprano bell of Teakettle Ten cried through the wind.

Another sound fell in behind them. Engine Thirty-Two sped into the horses' tracks, its siren gave a burst of gasoline exuberance, then trailed into silence.

"Stuck!" squealed Stone Age Sullivan. "Hear 'em? They's stuck!" He sucked his breath triumphantly. "There's a blasted motor for ye!"

"Look there!" Malone lifted his mitten in front of him, pointing toward the river bank, where the last of the tall warehouses lift their smoke-shawled heads above the city. A thin glimmer of pink light seeped through the snow whirl, floated brighter and disappeared.

"She's busted through—whatever she is!" Sullivan said; then to the team: "Easy, Buck—easy, Mack!"

The hose wagon groaned to a halt. Its tired horses reared, strained, and fell back.

Stone Age Sullivan turned on his other men.

"Shovels, you guys!" he cried to Pipemen Henry and Steimel, who hung on the rear step; "shovel and get us out!"

The two firemen jerked their broad-lipped scoops from atop the hose and waded around the wheels. They burrowed into the six foot drift that had blocked the team's fore legs, snow flew away in a screeching wind. Once more the path was broken, the bell of the engine whined closer behind. The hose wagon slid forward.

The pink light had become steadier now. It blurred the snow-softened landscape into strange shadows and purplish highlights. Once more the siren of Engine Thirty-Two wailed dismally across the drifts, coughed and hiccuped into silence—Mike McQuire was shovelling again. Engine Ten was profiting this time by its ancient equipment; Stone Age Sullivan swore good naturedly.

"Over here's a plug—you, Henry—look for it! Course it's buried—dig!"

Henry leaped off the tail board again, and bucked the snow. His figure, buried to the waist, made a long jumping shadow. Malone craned forward, staring into the vague red blur ahead where the fire was.

"It's that ratty old hide warehouse," he announced, "down near the north slip."

"Cobwebs and powder!" answered his

commander, and spat. "Too late to stop it now. It's done for, even if we get help. Things is at a pretty pass, ain't it? One pumper at a fire!"

"Thirty-Two may get here." Driver Malone dared treason.

"Get here?" Sullivan leaped out into the offending drift and tried to budge the near horse forward. "On that wagon? Not with mules! T'ain't no place to talk." He stopped Malone sharply.

"Hydrant!" the voice of Pipeman Henry came out of the white fog. He had found the fire plug. The horses pressed forward, at the bang of the flat bell. The wheels moved. Captain Sullivan grunted. He knew his team would get there. Another turn and his satisfaction fled.

"Get up!" he bellowed.

Buck and Mack, the lean fast pair, tried again and stopped. The front wheels rocked. It was no good coaxing. Overside, leaning down, Stone Age Sullivan saw the top of the wheels settle and disappear in soft, sticky pockets of snow. The hose wagon of Engine Ten was stuck for the night. Stone Age Sullivan knew the feel of it.

"You Steimel, Malone, Henry!" he cried, standing up on the dashboard. "Unhitch—take this here team back to the engine. Make a four line, drag the pumper 'round."

The men slid in behind the horses, and fumbled at snaps with cold, stiff fingers. Once Malone looked up quickly, and saw a burning board lifted high above the flame-crowned warehouse. He grunted, and spoke softly to the team. It waded out now, confused, unencumbered by the hose wagon. Malone drove back to the engine that was creeping through the heaps.

It was easier to get ahead with four horses.

"Over here!" Stone Age Sullivan was crying. "Bring 'em up here—plug! Hydrant here!"

The heaving double hitch plowed sixty yards from the water main—fifty—forty. Then a drift rubbed the leaders' bent heads. Four horses leaned on their tugs, and the engine stuck.

"Leave me at 'em, I'll move 'em!" Sullivan thrashed angrily toward the Teakettle. He stumbled and kicked up a cloud of snow for the wind to play with, fell once more, staggered up, reached toward the bit of the near horse.

Jenkins, the engine driver, used his whip the same instant. The long, black line snapped. Buck seemed sulky to the master of the other team. He laid his thong on the balky head. The big horse jerked. Its teeth came down savagely and Stone Age Sullivan gave a short, gritting cry. Buck snorted. Drops of red showed from his nose. Down on his knees, Stone Age Sullivan gripped his right hand, tried to warm it with his breath through his bloody, frozen glove.

"Hurt?" screamed Jenkins.

Sullivan, staggering up, did not answer.

"Use your whip again!" he ordered. "Slam him hard! Bitin' devil! We ain't stuck, that lead horse! I say—"

Wind beat out his voice. He reached up his left hand and pulled the horses on. With plunges and heaves the double team, their sides swelling, dragged Teakettle Ten into position beside the hydrant. Lame Ike Razmus, the engineer, pounded the fire box with coal.

"Got to work quick," he growled, "or the snow'll put out me light!"

"Couple up that there suction!" ordered Stone Age Sullivan, slipping his bleeding hand back into its glove. "Couple up! You don't need shovels! All you need's backbone!"

Malone and Henry jerked the suction pipe off its rack. Jenkins made it tight to the plug. Snow froze on his spanner. Their commander bellowed:

"Now the rest of you—back to the wagon! Get off ten section of hose—ten section—give me that nozzle! I'll lead out!"

The hide warehouse was spitting fire out of every window in the top floor. A stench of burning tallow spread through the wet air. Stone Age Sullivan stopped in snow that oozed over the tops of his boots, put his unhurt hand to his left ear. It was quiet behind him. Engine Thirty-Two had stopped its siren. Mike McQuire must be digging—let 'im dig!

He led out, as they say in the fire department, the nozzle under his arm, and snow on the peak of his helmet. His body swung left and right in great strides as he bucked the drifts. The wind had lost its sharp edge next to the building, and a flicker of warmth flipped down from the hot brick walls. Sullivan squeezed his right arm against his side. His right hand had turned strangely numb—it hurt indistinctly. He swore again, rich old-fashioned oaths that gave his chest room.

Jenkins, Henry, Steimel and Malone trailed after him, dragging the hose out of kinks and knots, pulling it across the snow. Ike Razmus lifted down his brass lantern and squinted through the thickening air at the water gages. He still feared the snow would put out his fire. Steam didn't go far on a night like this. He could admit it if the captain wouldn't.

The warehouse ahead bulged with flames. Already its upper windows showed writhing, blazing arms. A sharper light, now pink, now purple, seeped out of the lower floors. An iron fire-escape angled up the brick wall. Toward the foot of this Stone Age Sullivan led a crooked, staggering quartet of men.

II.

THREE blocks behind, Captain Mike McQuire had given up the chase. Engine Thirty-Two lay by a curbstone hydrant. Snow buried its hood, whence a toiling motor still throbbed, as if no weather could make it die. Squad One stalled behind it; back of the squad Engine Ninety-Eight dug her nose into a snow bank, grumbled and fell silent. Truck Nine and Truck Three were waylaid still farther back. The whole fire department might be barricaded behind a fence of snow—except Teakettle Ten.

"Sullivan's went through!" some one bawled across the wind to Mike McQuire.

A battalion chief waddled up, heard the shout, and added his own voice to the uproar.

"Lay your line, Thirty-Two—Ninety-Eight, lay your line! Lead off, couple up together—help them, squad—you Truck Ten, help 'em! Lead off. Siamese if you got to—follow up behind Engine Ten!"

He was off in a snow whirl, calling upon his driver to "pull a four-eleven, quick!" He knew the dangers of long drags of line. Each length of hose means decreased pressure. They were a thousand feet from the fire now, this snow-bound fleet of pumpers and ladders—twenty lengths of hose! Water couldn't rise to hit a third story window with that much line laid—a four-eleven it must be, ten more engines at least.

Captain Mike McQuire wiped the sweat under his snow-peaked helmet. Stone Age Sullivan, reactionary, a thousand years behind the times, was on the job up there ahead. Captain McQuire didn't laugh. He remembered Sullivan's taunt in the cellar that other day they met. He waded across the snow, wet and irritable, lugging a brass nozzle. The crew of his stalled apparatus fell in behind him.

Beside the burning warehouse, Stone Age Sullivan, sick with the smell of hot hides, tried to get his feet braced securely on the fire-escape. The heat swept down from above; the snow melted as it whipped against the hot walls. His men were breathless. They staggered ahead with their ungainly coils of hose, their faces hot that a minute before had been stinging with cold. Sullivan tried to shift the nozzle to his right hand, and found that he could not close his fingers. He looked at his glove, swore at the frozen blood that held it stiff, and gripped the nozzle under his elbow.

"Give me a hand!" he ordered as Malone panted into the light beside the fire-escape, "give me a hand and I'll make that third story window!"

So Malone and Henry and Steimel carried the hose aloft, their faces dipped behind rubber collars to ward off the heat; but Stone Age Sullivan went ahead. Past the smoking windows of the first floor, up to the second story where red lights already played against the dust-streaked glass. There he halted, squatted on the iron balcony, hunched over like a gnome, the brass nozzle shining in his arms.

"Water!" the master of Teakettle Ten cried aggrievedly. "Water! And Malone! Henry! Beat it back, you apes, back and get another lead of hose off the engine. Tell Razmus to give me water and then you

lay another line up the other side. I'll hold this end meself!"

Malone grumbled his answer and the crew of Engine Ten slid back into the powdery night. Alone on the grilled landing of his fire-escape, Stone Age Sullivan sank down in his rubber coat, breathed in short gasps, and prepared to fry. A minute passed—two of them. Then a wheeze of air at the nozzle told that Razmus was sending water.

The great brass tip slid upward toward the third story window, where flames pawed out like lusty horses. A spurt of brown water, a growl as the air bubbles rushed through, and then came the stream, a pink column one inch thick, that charged into the window frame above, rattled against the wall, and hissed as it turned to steam.

The fire, which had been performing antics on the high ledge, withdrew into the building. Stone Age Sullivan went up another step. Then a flame tipped over the cornice and lashed a hot, stinging tongue downward. The nozzle tilted higher and raked the roof line; the fire retreated. Sullivan went up another step. He felt sick.

"It's the blasted smell," he growled to himself, and pressed his hurt arm tight against his side.

Within there was a crunching of timbers, as a floor heavy-laden with bales, crashed through its burned joists. The fire, given air and fresh encouragement, leaped out of a hole in the roof, explored the night sky and sank back, dampened with snow.

The nozzle shifted back to the window. The stream poured through this time, striking the rafters aslant, raining down five hundred gallons a minute. The hose jerked, with that thudding inequality of power that comes from worn out steam pumps. Muddy little streams ran over the window sill. Stone Age Sullivan went up another step.

"Blast me hand!" he squeaked when he tried to grip the nozzle again, "the dirty thing's bleedin'!"

There was a cry on the ground below. Sullivan looked down, wasted water and stared. It was not his own men returned with the second line. Twenty helmeted and rubber-sheeted figures were charging toward the foot of his icy fire-escape. In the lead, even in the unsteady light, and through the soupy mixture of smoke and snow, he made out the form of Mike McQuire, holding a brass nozzle fiercely against his chest.

"Thirty-Two got here!" Stone Age Sullivan felt ashamed for a moment. Then he recovered his old hate and returned to his job. He shifted the position of his stream and went up another step.

Captain Mike McQuire began climbing.

"Water!" he shouted to his men, "pass the word back; charge the line!"

He stumbled up the fire-escape, and halted at the landing, just below Sullivan's heels.

"It was a bad fire here last night," squeaked the commander of Teakettle Ten; "you ought to have been on hand."

"Lay off, Sullivan!" growled McQuire. "Can't you see I'm sent to help?"

"Might help around the back—I'm handling it here!"

His words were broken by a grunting roof that fell in upon the sagged floors and sent a great troop of excited sparks into the snowflakes. The wind off the lake, tempered before, grew surly hot, and Stone Age Sullivan ducked deeper into his rubber coat.

A spurt of water from McQuire's nozzle slapped against the building and disappeared in steam. Stone Age Sullivan laughed and shot his own stream higher.

"Where's your power?" he asked derisively. "You ain't got the strength of my Teakettle!"

"Ain't hogging the fire-escape," returned McQuire, and yanked on his line.

"Room first for them as has water," Sullivan retorted.

McQuire whipped his stream irritably. It lifted in a bent column that lacked push or force. Sullivan tittered.

"How far off's your engine at?" he asked. "Awful unhealthy," he persisted. "Think you got two hundred gallons?"

"We're three blocks off!" McQuire attempted compromise.

"Sure, same as the rest of your fancy wagons."

Two minutes passed. McQuire's column dropped short of the flame.

"Got to get by you!" he shouted up, "this here pressure's too low."

"Stay where you're at!" answered Sullivan.

A teetering wall cut short the dispute for a moment. The fire-escape lurched in, righted, and swung out.

"Leave me past!" McQuire edged up to Sullivan's foot.

"I'll step on you!"

There was a wheeze, some sharp words broke across the wind, and Captain Mike McQuire went aloft, passing Stone Age Sullivan on the narrow iron stair. Sullivan swung his nozzle, catching the captain of Thirty-Two in the chest. McQuire protesting that he hated back numbers, dropped his own brass hand grips and charged the man who refused him room.

III.

DOWN in the snow the last of the twenty firemen had turned their backs, running toward the stalled engines, after another line of hose. The ground was deserted; yellow smoke billowed up from the slow burning hides! flames mounted higher.

Sullivan fought with the will that carried him through forty years of flame and smoke, but McQuire was younger; cold rage battled on his side. It was a short fight. McQuire set his jaw contemptuously, picked up his hose and went aloft. Stone Age Sullivan, minus his usually reliable breath, propped back on the fire-escape and gasped accusing words derisively at himself. His nozzle flopped idly at his left elbow, his eyes pinched shut, and five hundred gallons a minute of good, wet water missed its mark and played wantonly and wastefully upon the snow.

"Me measly hand!" he growled at last, and shook himself into action. "I'd 've pitched him on the ground!"

He tilted up the stream and went back to the fight. Slowly, he aimed at the window, missed, aimed again, and saw the stream push back the flames. Treading the heels of the man who had thrashed him, he went up another step.

"Out of the way!" he ordered.

"Stay down, old timer, you'll get hurt again."

Mike McQuire was almost good humored. He slashed water at roof and wall and windows. "You've got power to throw from where you're at!"

"Never mind what I've got. When we git down I'll spile you!"

"When we're done I'll tend you myself!" answered McQuire, and they returned to their duties.

The window blackened. Close together, the two men moved toward it. For a moment McQuire squirted his insufficient stream into the neighboring window at the left. Sullivan held his own nozzle steady—he had a vantage point here; he could rain in all the water Ike Razmus sent up. The fire-escape began to feel hot through his leather gauntlets. It burned his right arm—cold, heat or pain—which was it? Hugging the injured hand tight against his chest, Stone Age Sullivan felt a quick, bestial rage at his biting horse. He wormed a step upward, trying to look for his bloody glove. A wave of hot air belched out of the warehouse window. Stone Age Sullivan settled back to work. It was not his hand that made him sick—it was this unholy smell.

More cries came up from below. Malone was shouting. Sullivan recognized his voice. Engine Ten was getting its second line around to the rear—that would make it better!

His ears deafened with the roar of the rafters crashing near at hand. He became suddenly sleepy. Mike McQuire, looking below, saw his tough old enemy captain of Ten stand up involuntarily, sway, lean toward the building, then to the outer rail. McQuire dropped his nozzle and slid back six steps. He collared the rounded shoulders between his arms and held hard.

"Leave me go!" Sullivan growled epithets that only very old and very experienced firemen know, hot, lacing words that are born of smoke and flame.

"Shut up, you pensioner!" growled McQuire. "Lord! Wall's going!"

He knew the sway, the rumble within, the trembling underfoot that told of a brick wall settling from its foundations. He

looked down, almost in panic for a second, then up, then far out across the pink snow.

Sullivan winced under his grip.

"Get your hands off!" His thin voice broke shrilly. McQuire held on, unrelenting. He went up swiftly, with the springing motion of a cat on a ladder, straight toward the top of the wall. The swaying bricks spread their angle farther out. McQuire hoisted Stone Age Sullivan as he climbed.

"Leave me be!" demanded Sullivan.

"And git yourself kilt?"

Captain McQuire stood hazardously atop the wall. The fire whipped past him, melted the rubber on his back, and forced tears streaming from his eyes. He held his breath—he knew what a breath up there would do. It would be his last, and he had hopes of living still. The wall swung in three feet. It hesitated, shook, and settled back. Then it tottered out.

Firemen know the ways of such things, no man on the corner need tell them how. When a wall falls outward, as most walls do, there is only one hope for the reckless laborer hanging to a ladder along the side. That is to get to the top—where a man is flung clear of the wreckage—that and a prayer that he might land on something soft.

The north wall went first. McQuire, crouching on the flame spitting sill of the east, heard the bricks as they rumbled down. Then his own slid out, two feet, three, five feet, moving a little faster. A floor collapsed somewhere inside and fanned fire out of the windows. The uprights leaned farther—seven feet, another inch.

With a roar from McQuire and a shrill squeak from Sullivan, the hide warehouse slid tumultuously into ruin. A smashing rush of bricks drowned all sound of the flames. Electric wires, snapping, played blue and green. The world seemed to rock, and two clinging bodies volcanoed high above the wreckage.

It was a snow bank five feet high where they dropped, Sullivan kicking and weak of voice, McQuire pumping out epithets in a steady, grumbling, incoherent stream. The commander of Teakettle Ten rolled to his feet, running first one way, then another. McQuire lay still.

"I'll be back and 'tend you later," Sullivan's voice grated senselessly; "where's me nozzle?"

It was Squad One found them, Sullivan raving, still running painfully up and down, and McQuire numb, sluggish, half conscious, with a bump on his head. The old warehouse burned itself out, uninterrupted further by Tea kettle Ten or Thirty-Two. Lazy streams from other hose played on surrounding sheds to keep the fire within respectful limits. The snow fell on unheeded.

At a restaurant, far back in the white, drifting whirl, its windows steamy and its air sticky and warm, men laid the pair of them out on the counter. And when they stripped off the clotted mitten on Sullivan's hard right hand, they found the places where three fingers should have been. Driver Malone explained.

"It was Buck; he's a devil, that horse! I see him nab the old man—habit of his. I always was for gettin' rid of him, but the old man 'd rather burn up. We got to take gasoline if we get rid of Buck—he don't trust gasoline."

An arriving doctor suggested the hospital. Stone Age Sullivan, whose spine was still good for its ounce of pain, heard the suggestion, and demanded that the medical man do his duty there and then and have it over; which the medical man did. The job was over when McQuire, rubbing his head, struggled to pull himself to an upright position.

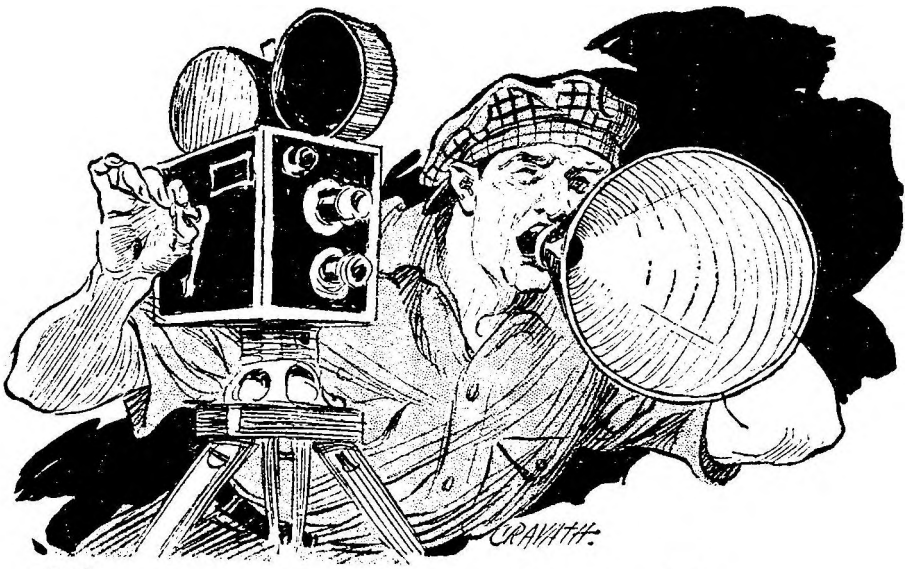
"Hello, Mac!" Sullivan spoke huskily, without giving sign of temper.

"Hello, Sully!"

Such was the fire at Box 816, except that Stone Age Sullivan called the department headquarters from Engine Ten's barn the next day and asked fiercely for the marshal.

"Big Boss? Say—this is Sullivan. When you goin' to git rid of them measly nags and give me a gasoline pumper? Something I can trust."

"And," said the marshal, telling it afterward, "damned if I don't believe he meant it!"



Between the Lines

By SAMUEL G. CAMP

PICK up any of the magazines which habitually spells the word Success with a capital, and you will find that fully nine-tenths of the boys which has scored heavily in business, art, literature, and the sciences, including Mah Jongg, invariably attributes their remarkable success to their beautiful and charming helpmates. As a matter of fact, they say, it was only through the constant help and encouragement of the little woman that they finally attained to the astonishing heights which they now occupy. Or words to that effect.

Which statement the average reader accepts as a beautiful tribute to the female of the species—and with a mental reservation which might be put into some such words as "Apple sauce!" or the like, according to taste.

But not so fast, as they say in the movies. Did you ever stop to think that—reading between the lines, as you might say—there is, possibly, considerably more fact than fiction to the above statement of our leading lights in the worlds of business, art, and *et cetera?* That, in fact, and to put the matter in a more or less brutal manner, had these highly successful birds *not* succeeded, why the little woman would of almost certainly crowned them with the vacuum cleaner, or something?

Well, I hope to tell you!

Take myself for a sample. At the time my unblushing bride married me, I was twisting a wicked camera for O-Kay Comedies. So about three weeks after the fatal wedding the little woman began to lend me her constant help and encouragement.

"Jim," she says to me one day, "is there any reason why you shouldn't be a director instead of a mere camera man?"

"Absolutely none whatsoever," I told her. "As far as all the qualifications is concerned, why, I got Rex Ingram looking like one of the ex-bartenders which composed our principal pictures when the industry was

still in its infancy—which it still is, for that matter, as anybody who is in the business will tell you."

That's what I told her, and it was more or less the truth. But if I'd stopped to think, if I'd only known how much constant help and encouragement I was due to receive from the wife with regards to this directorship thing, why, you can lay a bet that my reply would of been something distinctly different.

" Well, then," says the Mrs., " why don't you try to get a job as a director? Think of the difference it would make to us! Not only the difference in the money, but socially!"

" Socially, eh?" I says. " Well, of course, I don't suppose you'd exactly class a camera man with the aristocracy of the movie world, so to say; but, still and all, a camera man ain't exactly considered the scum of the earth, at that. And, besides, my social position, as I suppose you'd call it, was plenty good enough when you married me."

" Certainly," says the wife. " But are you always going to be contented to always stick in one spot? Haven't you got any ambition?"

So about then I see which way the wind is blowing and start to hedge.

" Ambition?" I says. " Why, I got all kinds! But listen. I was just kidding. As a matter of fact, I still got a lot of things to learn before I'd even consider myself a capable director—let alone what Mannie Eckstein, our hard boiled and exceedingly neurotical president, would consider me."

" I don't believe it," says the little woman flatly. " Listen. When Ralph Brooks, or whatever that director's name is you're working with, got sick when you were filming your last picture, didn't you practically complete the picture yourself, not only the directing, but the photography?"

" Why, yes," I had to admit. " But—"

" Well, what more do you want?" demands the clinging vine. " What you lack is self-confidence. You got plenty of ability if you'd only push yourself ahead."

" Admitting all that," I says, " I want to tell you that just now is a very poor time to start pushing yourself ahead in the movie business. Maybe you don't know it, but just now the movie industry is in the throes of one of its periodical fits of economy. Salaries is being cut right and left, and all sorts of people, even the stars, are getting the gate. So I hope to tell you that just at the present stage of the game a camera crank in the hand is worth a coupla jobs as a director in the bush, and don't let anybody kid you about that!"

" So they're letting people go?" says the Mrs. " Even the stars, and some of the directors?"

" In bunches," I says.

" Well, then," she says, " that makes so much less competition, doesn't it? And so now is the time for you to start after a directorship, when there aren't so many people who are already directors to compete with."

If you can figure that one out, why, send your answer to the Puzzle Editor!

" Well," I told her, " that's certainly one way of looking at it, though it strikes me there's something wrong with the picture somewhere. But, anyway, even admitting that now is the time for every good man to promote himself as a movie director, why, I'm here to say that I've got the same chance of cheating Will Hays out of his job that I got of Mannie Eckstein giving me a job as director!"

" Why?" snaps the little lady.

" Because for one thing," I told her, " Mannie's already got plenty directors. And because for another, I'm a camera man, and a darn good one, and Mannie couldn't see me in any other capacity, not with a telescope."

" You mean," says the Mrs., " that Mr. Eckstein is so used to considering you in the light of a camera man, as you might say, that the idea of your being a director, or the like, would never occur to him?"

" Something like that," I says.

" Well, then," the wife suggests, " the thing for you to do is get him used to the idea."

" How get him used?" I asked.

" Well," she says, " first ask him if he won't give you a job directing. Then, if he turns you down, why, keep suggesting the idea to him."

" You mean ride him?" I asked her.

"Believe me, Mannie Eckstein is one hard bird to ride!"

"I don't mean ride him," she says. "Maybe you've heard of what is called the power of suggestion. That's what I mean. Just keep suggesting the idea to him. Then some time when there's an opening as a director, why, naturally he'll think of you."

"That's a laugh," I remarked. "You might just as well try to use the power of suggestion on an army mule."

"Well, anyway," says the little woman in a most determined manner, "I want to have you try it. So the first thing to do is to ask Mr. Eckstein to make you a director."

"O. K.," I says. "I'll ask Mr. Eckstein to make me a director—while I wait"

So maybe a week goes by, during which I get plenty more help and encouragement from my faithful spouse, but I don't get no good chance to put this director idea up to Mr. Mannie Eckstein, eager as I was to do it, of course—just as eager as was the Christian martyrs to enter the arena.

You see, Mr. Mannie Eckstein considers himself a personage of no little importance, and no doubt he is right about it, the Eckstein Studios being one of the largest movie plants here in the East, and housing not only the O-Kay Comedies company, but XLNT Pictures as well, the last named turning out a very nice line of heart throb stuff and being, really, Mannie's chief iron in the movie fire—both brands being the property of Mr. Eckstein, you understand.

Anyway, besides being prouder than Lucifer of Mr. Mannie Eckstein, and therefore always looking for every little chance to show his authority, Mr. Eckstein also possesses the temper of a neurotical mountain lion and is likewise the proud owner of a line of language which, when Mr. Eckstein is sufficiently aroused, would raise blisters on a sheet of asbestos, no fooling! Furthermore, Mr. Eckstein will never see two hundred again—pounds, that's to say—and turns himself out in the style to which only movie magnates and our most successful bootleggers is accustomed.

Which thumb nail sketch of Mr. Eckstein, as you might call it, will probably do for the present, though I might add that Mr. Eckstein is one of the oldest old-timers we got in the business, coming into it when—if I must say it once more—the industry was still in its infancy, the cloak and suit trade's loss, so I've heard, being the cinema art's gain, as you might say.

Mr. Eckstein's original movie venture was O-Kay Comedies, and the scene of his early struggles was Hollywood. Some years later Mr. Eckstein shifted the scene of his activities to New York, at the time when he absorbed the XLNT Pictures brand—the story of which absorption, it was rumored at the time, was not entirely creditable to Mr. Eckstein. However, in the movie business you got to fight fire with fire, the same as anywhere else, and I got an idea that, as regards Mr. Eckstein's business methods, which it would probably be a compliment to call them merely shady, why, Mr. Eckstein had little or nothing on his brother magnates. And with it all, why, Mannie isn't such a bad scout at that—though you'd never guess it from the above description.

But, anyway, as I say, it's maybe a week or so before I get my eagerly awaited opportunity to put this director thing up to Mr. Eckstein. Then one day all by luck and chance I catch Mr. Eckstein all alone in his private and confidential office at the Eckstein studio, and so I take myself by the hand and start the little ball rolling. Because the little woman, who is backing me every inch of the way—I hope to tell you she is!—is by this time beginning to show signs of decided impatience.

So I says to Mannie:

"Mr. Eckstein, listen. What would you think of me as a director?"

Well, I saw too late that Mr. Eckstein was even more nervous and irritable than usual that morning, if you could believe it possible.

"You!" he yells, whirling swiftly in his swivel chair so as to face the source of the disturbance, namely myself. "You a director! Where should you get such an idea as that in your head? What should I think of you? I should think if you wasn't a better director than the directors I already got, then you wouldn't be worth the space which you would occupy in Hades!"

Well, that was encouraging, or the opposite, according to the way you looked at it.

Anyway, "Well," I says, "if that's the case, if you ain't satisfied with the directors you got at present, why not give me a chance?"

Mannie glares at me without saying a word for what must of been fully half a minute. Then he says in a slightly calmer tone of voice:

"So you want to be a director, hey? Well, if nerve was ability, why, you got Griffith stopped right now! Where did you get that idea?".

"Well, I'll tell you," I told him. "The facts is, I got one of the most helpful and encouraging wives on record. So she wants me to be a director, and so—"

"Listen," cuts in Mr. Eckstein. "You can believe me, bum directors is as common as Seventh Avenue, but a high class camera man, that's something else again! So you can tell the wife for me that she should spoil an expert camera man to make a rotten director, which the woods is already full of them! And that's that! Out!"

"But—" I begun.

"Out!" roars Mr. Eckstein.

So for various reasons I didn't make no further attempt to prolong the interview. I went away from there.

So that night I told the wife things had turned out just like I'd expected they would. It was practically impossible, I told her, for Mannie to see me as anything but a camera man.

"Well," snaps the little woman, "Mr. Eckstein isn't the only movie magnate in the world!"

"No," I says. "But I got no kick on the way Mannie's used me, and I'm going to stay with him. And, besides, with this slump going on, I wouldn't have a chance anywheres else, anyway."

And I made that one stick.

"Well, then," says the Mrs., "you'll have to do what I suggested."

"What was that?" I asked her.

"Try the power of suggestion," she replied. "Keep suggesting the idea of yourself as a director to him."

"I'll do that," I says. "Let's go!"

So for several weeks, constantly aided and abetted by the little woman, I try the power of suggestion on Mr. Mannie Eckstein. And at the end of that time, why, it's perfectly plain to be seen that the mere sight of me affects Mr. Eckstein in the same way that a red flag affects a bull.

Also, unless all signs deceive me, my job is hanging by a mere thread.

So I laid off the power of suggestion. But for reasons which I'll leave you to guess at, I didn't notify the Mrs.

Then one day there was a well defined rumor around the lot to the effect that Mr. Ralph Brooks, the well known O-Kay Comedies director, was on the verge of resigning. And that night, in what must of been a moment of absent-mindedness, or worse, I mentioned the fact to the wife.

Right away she was all excitement.

"Jim," she says, "the first thing to-morrow morning you see Mr. Eckstein and apply for Mr. Brooks's position!"

It looked like the fat was in the fire all right.

"Now, listen," I says. "On the level, just about one word more from me with regards to this director business, and Mannie 'll give me the gate! You can take that straight from me! Why—"

"Nonsense!" cuts in the little woman. "You know very well he wouldn't let you go! And, anyway, I won't take any excuses. You've simply got to do as I say—see Mr. Eckstein before somebody else gets the job!"

"Very well," I told her, "if I simply must. But don't forget this: If the next thing you hear from me I'm in a hospital, and out of a job, why you got nobody to blame but yourself!"

Well, I got out of it luckier than I expected after all, principally on account of Mannie being in one of his exceedingly rare fits of good humor that morning, no doubt on account of having picked up a nickel in the street, or the like. Anyway, when I come away I was still in one piece and I still had a job—but it wasn't Mr. Ralph Brooks's job.

"Yes," says Mannie, "Brooks is leaving us, but the matter has been understood for some time and Brooks's successor has already been engaged—Mr. Percival Norris, of Hollywood, who will join us in a few days."

"Norris, eh," I says. "Why, that boy's a regular big leaguer!"

"If I was to tell you what I'm paying him," groans Mannie, "why, you'd think he was Baby Ruth! So you still got this director idea in your head, hey?"

"Well," I says, "you might say the wife has still got it in my head."

"Take my advice," advises Mannie. "Forget it."

"You ain't talking to me," I told him. "What I mean, this is a matter which is absolutely beyond my control."

Which was letting it off easy, if you could of heard the manner in which the partner of my joys and sorrows receives the news that I am still a mere camera man. She was fit to be tied, and that's the truth! Also I'm here to say that from thence forward, why, the constant help and encouragement which I get from the little woman makes the Yale cheering section at a Harvard game look like it was laying down on the team! Happy days, what I mean!

Well, Mr. Percival Norris reports for duty a coupla weeks later. The first close-up I get of Percival reveals an undersized little shrimp with a French pastry complexion, wearing his hair, collar and necktie in the well known Byronic manner, and likewise an air of great abstraction, like as if his mind was continually dwelling on some burning question of the day, like, for instance: Shall We or Shall We Not Join the League of Nations, or I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now, or matters of that sort.

Physically speaking, there was positively nothing worthy of note about Percival except his eyes, which was exceedingly large and wild looking.

It looked like Percival was no doubt of a very imaginative nature, which was doubtlessly the reason for his great success as a director.

Imaginative? Well, I hope to tell you!

For instance, one day all by luck and chance I happened to overhear a conversation which took place between Percival and a couple of birds who was perfect strangers to me. Friends of Percival's no doubt. They looked like a coupla tired business men.

The incident took place at the Café de Boulevard, which is situated near the Eckstein studio. I was sitting at a near-by table. Percival didn't see me.

So, anyway, after a while the conversation swung round to big game hunting. So one of Percival's acquaintances relates the thrilling story of his adventures while in Western Alaska hunting what he calls Kodiak bears—I guess he must of meant Kodak. Anyway, he says these Kodiak bears is positively the world's largest bears. Well, you can search me. Personally I lost no bears, big or little.

So one day this baby is out hunting these mammoth brutes, as you might say, when, you can believe him or not, all of a sudden he flushes a covey numbering no less than four of them! Well, three of them almost immediately bites the dust, but the fourth one is merely wounded and instantly charges—only to be brought down at the intrepid hunter's very feet!

Hot dog!

But listen. No later than the following day, Percival relates this same story to me word for word, you might almost say, changing merely a few names and dates and adding merely one bear, and with no other than himself in the part of the intrepid sportsman!

"There's a man I'd like to have hear that story," I told him. "A red-blooded adventurer like yourself."

"Friend of yours?" asks Percival.

"Not exactly," I says. "Doc Cook."

But he didn't get me.

Not much later I accidently listened in on Percival recounting to our leading comedian a little thing which once happened to myself when working on location in the wilds of New Jersey, and which I had related to Percival a day or so before. And once more, of course, Percival was the hero of the tale.

In fact, and to make a long story short, it took me maybe an even month to make absolutely certain of the fact that Mr. Percival Norris was by all odds the most magnificent and positively convincing liar with which I had ever come in contact—and I got a large acquaintance amongst publicity agents, and the like.

No doubt it was Percival's highly imaginative nature which was responsible. The facts of the case seemed to be something like this: Listening in on some highly dramatical tale, it seems like Percival puts himself in the narrator's place to such an extent that the incidents related automatically becomes an actual chapter in the life and adventures of Percival Norris, himself—see? Then, later, on being reminded of it by some chance remark, or the like, why, Percival proceeds to unfold the tale as actually happening to himself; and not only that, but I honestly think that he really more than half believes it!

So, as a prevaricator, why you might say that Percival was of the unconscious variety. Anyway, he was good at it.

In the meantime, from Mr. Mannie Eckstein's point of view, things had been going from very bad to much worse. And Mr. Percival Norris was the cause of it all. You see, before coming East, Percival had been doing legitimate feature stuff for a company which if money was any object, well, you'd never notice it. So Percival finds it difficult to break himself of his exceedingly expensive habits—if he tries. Anyway, what that boy does to the Eckstein treasury easily classifies as a crime!

Him and Mannie had some terrible runins; but Percival goes right on spending. Finally Mannie, gets to the cracking point.

"Jimmy," Mr. Eckstein wails to me one day, "listen. I tell you something. With this man Norris spending money like it was Apollinaris, or something, I am already ninety per cent crazy and going up! And I got no use for him anyway. I don't like the way he combs his hair! I give you my word, Jimmy, could I get rid of him, I would honestly give ten thousand dollars toward a censorship fund! What could be fairer than that? I ask you! Why, the money he spends on a rotten little slapstick comedy, for a fact you'd think he was filming 'Ben-Hur!'"

"Suppose," I says, "Mr. Norris starts for Hollywood, or somewheres in a hurry, and never comes back. Do I get a chance to try this job?"

"You got something on Norris?" inquires Mr. Eckstein eagerly.

"Well," I told him, "I got an idea I can start something, but I guess it'll be up to you to finish it."

"Go to it!" says Mannie. "Start something! I dare you! And believe me, I finish it! And I give you a chance to make good as a director!"

So it looked like here at last was my chance. But I didn't say nothing about it to the little woman. I was already getting plenty help and encouragement. And, besides, there was nothing certain about my putting it over.

At that, it begun to look like maybe after all there was something to this power of suggestion stuff of the wife's. Because here was Mannie giving me the chance to try out as a director—conditionally, anyway—which he certainly would not of done six months before, even with his back to the wall as in the present circumstances.

Anyway, from Mannie I went straight to a bird by the name of Phillips. This Phillips works in a film exchange, and all by luck and chance I'd recently got acquainted with him. He's a little guy about the size of, say, Mr. Percival Norris. Also, quite a number of years back he'd worked for a private detective agency in Hollywood, and what that boy didn't know about the manners and customs of the original movie magnates when the industry was still in its—that's to say when the game was still young!

"Do me a favor," I says to Phillips. "Meet me at the Café de Boulevard for lunch. I'll have Mr. Percival Norris, our justly famed director, with me, and I want to have you tell him that stick-up story of yours. You know what I mean. The one about the sweet-faced little movie star and the hard-hearted magnate. I'll lead up to it so as to give you a chance to ring it in. But listen. Fake the name of the magnate. Call him, say, Goldheimer."

"What's the idea?" demands Phillips. "You know, I don't tell that story to everybody. It might get me in trouble."

"Fear not," I told him. "I'll guarantee it won't go no further. Not with yourself as the hero, anyway."

"O. K.," he says. "Anything to oblige."

Well, it went off without a hitch. When

Phillips starts doing his stuff I get up and join some people at another table. Because Percival would of no doubt remembered that I had also listened in. Though maybe it wouldn't of made any difference. That boy was certainly imaginative!

But from where I was sitting I could see that Percival was all ears. Well, it was quite an interesting story.

Next morning I invited no less than Mr. Mannie Eckstein, the great movie magnate, to join me for lunch at the Café de Boulevard. I told him Mr. Percival Norris would be amongst those present. Notwithstanding the liberality with which Percival spends Mr. Eckstein's money, why, personally, as you might say, he didn't hesitate an instant to accept my second invitation to lunch within the space of two days.

Also I sort of hinted to Mr. Eckstein that maybe there might be something stirring.

Mr. Eckstein accepted with alacrity.

So that noon I and Percival and Mr. Mannie Eckstein formed quite a distinguished looking party at the famous Café de Boulevard.

So to start the conversational ball rolling —and maybe something else—I says carelessly:

"Well, I see by the paper where there was another bank messenger stick-up yesterday."

"Speaking of stick-ups," says Percival instantly, "here's one I guess I never told you. Get it. It's good! It happened quite a while back, before I broke into the movies. Probably you'd never guess that at one time I was a regular Hawkshaw with a badge and everything. Well, it's a fact. I did gum-shoe stuff for a private detective agency in the village of Hollywood—just to get along. Feature that!

"Well, about this stick-up stuff, at the time I'm doubling for Nick Carter, why, there was a bird by the name of Goldheimer, a graduate of the cloak and suit trade, trying to get a toe-hold in the movie business."

You should of seen Mannie sit up and take notice when Percival pulls that line about the cloak and suit trade!

"So this man, Goldheimer, see," continues Percival, "is getting out a fierce line of two-reel custard-pie atrocities, so it naturally follows that he's coining money, of course. Also, as you might expect, he thinks no more of a nickel than he does of his right eye; and as for his business methods, why, Goldheimer makes Mr. Jesse James, and the bucket-shop boys of the present era look like a bunch of pikers!"

I noticed that Mr. Mannie Eckstein's face was beginning to take on a beautiful purple tinge.

"Well, anyway," says Percival, "it seems there's a little girl by the name of Deane, Carol Deane, working for Goldheimer; and she's not only got the looks, but, with half a chance, would probably turn out to be a great little actress."

At the mention of Carol Deane, I guess most anybody but the imaginative Percival, all wrapped up in his story, so to say, would of noticed that Mr. Mannie Eckstein was either on the point of having a fit or committing a murder, or both. But not Percival!

"Anyway," goes on Percival, "Warren Hoyt, who at the time was directing the old Climax productions, saw the possibilities in this little Deane wren, and, after a terrible struggle, succeeded in borrowing her from Goldheimer—she was just the type Hoyt needed, see, for the picture he was doing at the time.

"Well, to make a short story shorter, Carol Dean's work in that picture of Hoyt's was one of the outstanding sensations of the year, and the Climax people stood ready to pay her an even two thousand a week for a period of three years when she'd completed her Goldheimer contract which had only a few months to run. And then it turned out that before letting her go, Goldheimer had practically forced Carol to give him an option on a renewal of her contract, on its original terms—one hundred dollars the week!

"And they couldn't do a thing with Goldheimer. Not a thing! That old pirate —though I'm not saying his methods were any worse than those of his contemporary magnates—had a world-famous star sewed up at one hundred fish a week, and he proposed to take every advantage of the situation!

"So the Climax people turned the matter

over to the detective agency by which I was employed. It was agreed that nothing could be done except by strong-arm methods. Also, I think you will agree that such methods were justified. Anyway, by fair means or foul, it was necessary to separate Mr. Goldheimer from that option!

"So, as one of the agency's most successful operatives, why, the assignment was turned over to me. I soon discovered that Goldheimer's office was practically, as you might say, under his hat. He constantly carried important papers in a large black wallet in his inside coat pocket. Of course, the option might not be among them—but it was worth trying!

"Well, I trailed Goldheimer for three or four days, including nights, without getting a safe chance to put it across. Then one night I got him where I wanted him. So I pulled one of those old frontier model Colts on him. It looked like Big Bertha, and it wasn't loaded. I had a handkerchief over the lower part of my face in the approved stick-up style.

"'Stick 'em up!' I told him. 'And don't be noisy if you know what's good for you!'

"Well, say, honestly, I wish you could of seen the look on Goldheimer's map! Funny? I hope to tell you! And his hands went up. He was actually scared to a pulp!

"So then I frisked him for the black wallet—and I might say right here that in it was the Carol Deane option! But—"

But at that precise moment Mr. Mannie Eckstein blew up!

"Robber!" yells Mannie exploding out of his chair. "So I got you now! And before a witness! You heard him, Jimmy? You heard him? Goldheimer, hey? You must be crazy to tell me that straight to my face! Or else you got a rotten memory! Anyway, I got you now—and before a witness! Hold him, Jimmy, while I get me an officer! And if he tries to get away—kill him! I give you leaf!"

And Mr. Eckstein starts for the street like Zev finishing under the whip!

"Beat it!" I advised Percival. "Get going before the old man gets back with the bull! Don't you get it? Goldheimer is Mannie, himself! And he's got you dead to rights! Say, where did you get that stuff, anyway? But never mind! Right or wrong, the old man will law the life out of you! And if you ever show up on the lot—he'll murder you!"

"But—" sputters Percival.

"Here they come!" I warned him.

And Percival saw a light. As Mannie and the cop came crashing in the front entrance, Percival shot out of the side door like a scared rabbit—and he made his getaway.

Mannie was considerably disappointed at Percival's escape—owing to my foot slipping, or something, as I explained it to him. However, on realizing that there was very little or no danger of Percival ever showing up again, why, Mr. Eckstein soon became reconciled to the situation.

And what is more, Mr. Eckstein gave me my chance as a director. And I guess you know whether or not I made good. But I can truthfully say this: Whatever I am—to whatever degree of success I have attained—why, I owe it all to the constant help and encouragement of my ever loving wife.

I hope to tell you!

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THE 179TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

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Fists First

By GILBERT RIDDELL

COLONEL SANDY DUNCAN sat on the spacious porch of the Hussars' Club. Colonel Sandy had been a hussar in his youth, and would be a hussar until he died. Although the Georgia Hussars had been disbanded for some years as a military organization, the club, their trophies and traditions, still lived. Colonel Sandy was as much a part of that institution as its battle-scarred Confederate flags and antiquated guns.

The colonel uncrossed his legs, smoothed his trousers over his knees, and recrossed his limbs. His trousers had no crease; they had been built that way, and all their predecessors since 1880, when the colonel had been presented to the then popular dandy, the Prince of Wales.

There was a buzz of excitement this afternoon in the usually quiet club. A gentleman of very good family had met and settled a difficulty of long standing with another gentleman of equally good family; the latter, being slightly slower in his movements, had passed on, leaving us something to discuss for many days to come.

On the table between us were two tumblers containing ice, mint leaves, and a liquid that would awaken in the unregenerate fond memories of old Bourbon days. As the colonel lovingly buried his nose among the leaves a twinkle came into his bright old eye, and he set the glass down in a way which told me that he was about to indulge in one of those reminiscences for which he was so justly famous.

" This use of guns to settle personal difficulties, sah, is all wrong," the colonel started. " My father, of course, had a great name in his day as a duelist, and I still have his silver mounted dueling pistols. But, nevertheless, it became a custom in our family to settle such matters with fists alone when possible.

" Well, on our rice plantation we had a foreman by the name of Dave Carroll, a

Georgia cracker clear to the bone. In fact, he was all bone and muscle, and stood about six feet two in his socks, if he ever had worn any, which I doubt.

"Prize fightin' in those days had not become a gentle art. Men fought for the love of fightin'; there was no prize. There were no three-minute rounds and two-minute rests, and a man didn't go down, take a count of ten seconds, and spend the rest of the evening supping and dancing in a cabaret. No, sah! A fight was a—well, a fight.

"As I was saying, this foreman of ours was just naturally a champion. He didn't have a press agent nor a manager, but if any one wanted a fight with him all he had to do was to mention the fact, and he got it. After Dave had licked about every eligible in this county and the next, he had acquired such a reputation that there seemed to be no one left who cared to join him in his favorite pastime. He just naturally pined so for a fight that we all felt sorry for him.

"About this time my father received a letter from an old friend, who had gone West, bought a ranch and engaged in cattle raising. He had prospered, and now owned a great ranch and many head of cattle. But his great difficulty was a lack of help, and he wrote that it was especially hard to get—and keep—a good foreman. He seemed to lose an average of a man a month, on account of gunplay. The West was sparsely populated then, and at this rate he would soon have no one to run his ranch. What he needed was a man who could restrain the homicidal ardor of his cow-punchers. In his dilemma he turned to father for such a man.

"We immediately thought of Dave, and as things were slow with us, father put it up to him. It was certainly a pleasure to see Dave's face light up with joy at the prospect of handling that gang of roughnecks. Even after father explained conditions in the West, and impressed Dave with the fact that it wasn't a case of fist fighting, but that if he had anything to say he must be prepared to 'say it with guns,' he was eager to go.

"Well, Dave left us for new fields to conquer, and we felt pretty bad to think that Georgia's best fist fighter might go down under a gun in the hands of some fellow who wasn't game enough to stand up and fight like a man.

"We were all kind of worried as the months passed by and there came no word from Dave. But at the end of a year father received a letter that filled us all with pride.

"Dave's boss wrote, thanking him again for sending Dave, and relating how he had reduced the death rate by convincing his gang that only a coward would use a gun to settle personal differences. He told them that a real man fought with his fists and got more satisfaction out of a good fight. His eloquence was so convincing that the men agreed to park their guns for a month, and during that period Dave proved his theories further by licking the whole outfit, one by one.

"Well, we heard nothing further of Dave for some five or six years, when one morning I was surprised to see his big form seated on the stump of a tree right on our own plantation.

"I hurried over to greet him. As I approached he rose to his feet, and I noticed that he did it with a great deal of difficulty. When I saw his face I stopped short. I can't describe its condition, sah; I defy the best sport writer of modern times to do justice to it.

"'Why, Dave,' I exclaimed, 'what are you doing back in Georgia? And what on earth happened to you? Have you had a collision with a freight car?'

"One side of Dave's battered mouth lifted in what was a sorry attempt at a smile, and his voice drawled sadly from between his swollen lips.

"'No, sah,' he said; 'I got a coupler weeks off from the ranch and came down home for a fight.'

"'You mean to say, man, you came all the way from Arkansas to Georgia for a fight? Have you killed off all those cow-punchers?' I asked.

"'No, sah; they're healthier than ever,' he told me. 'But you see I gotter letter from'—he hesitated—'a certain party heah, tellin' he was tired of hearin' about

my bein' able ter lick any man in Chatham County, an' ef he ever got a chance he'd like ter show me what fightin' is—an' generally aggravatin' me. So I just come over ter put a stop ter that kin' of talk.'

"'Well, Dave, did you lick your man?' I asked.

"'Not exactly, sah,' he replied. 'We fit yesterday mornin', an' I called it a draw. And then we fit again yesterday afternoon, an' he called it a draw. But I honestly think, sah, I got the worst of it. Anyway, I'm satisfied that he's the one man that can give me satisfaction.'

"'Dave,' I asked, gazing in awe at the 'satisfaction' spread all over his face and expressed by his painful movements, 'who is this fellow, if you don't mind tellin' me?'

"'Well, I don't know as I min' tellin' you, sah, except that it's a sort of a family matter, an' I wouldn't like it to go no further. It is my young brother, Harry. He was only a kid when I left heah; but he's sorter growed up while I was away.'"

A LITTLE BIT OF BITTERS

WHEN the score is tie, at zero, and my own especial hero
(He can hit a ball from Hereabouts to Hence!)
Raps the pellet such a wallop that its cover shows a scallop
As the homer soars a mile above the fence,
I am glutted with such gladness, such amazing, merry madness,
That I smash my nearest neighbor on the jowl—
And it agitates me queerly to discover that it's merely
A long foul!

If the Enemy are winning up until the final inning,
When My Pretty Pets regain their batting eye,
And though two have been retired, all my hopes are freshly fired
With another run on third to make it tie;
If the batter belts a grounder, such a nasty little bounder
That he's "safe" by quite a margin on the clout—
Ah, my kingdom for a lasso! as I hear that husky basso,
"Batter's out!"

How I always revel in it—in that psychologic minute,
Just immediately before the start of play!
All the ecstasies are blended when the practice pranks are ended
And the ump has sung "The batt'ries for to-day!"
Flooding joy with naught to bar it! Not a single thing to mar it!
But—(and this shall chill your blood within your veins)
From the bench unto the platter strides the visitor's first batter
And—it rains!

Yet I'm fain to make confession to a personal obsession—
I would scorn to have the rose without the thorn.
All herein recited terrors, and such other faults—like errors—
Would the game be sweeter still of such things shorn?
Though I didn't hear your answer, I will bet my only pants, sir,
That you yelled in indignation, "Leave 'em there!"
For, although they may annoy us, they're the *salt* upon our joyous
Baseball fare!

Edward S. Morrissey.

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THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health is yours once more.*

"I am office manager for a large mercantile corporation. Two years ago I began to develop 'nerves,' stomach trouble, insomnia, and worst of all to me, an irritable disposition towards those under me. Chatting with a friend I spoke of always feeling so rotten that life was hardly worth living. My friend urged me to try Fleischmann's Yeast, attributing his own excellent health to its daily use. At the end of a week I was eating it with a relish, and feeling a great deal improved. Now a day never passes that I don't eat at least three cakes—using them as a between-meal snack—with the result that I am in the best of health with an eager zest for my work."

(Extract from letter of Mr. G. A. Dempsey of Winnipeg, Canada)

"I watched her crumble the crisp cake into the milk. We drifted into conversation. She sang of the magic of Fleischmann's Yeast. Many months before, her doctor had recommended it and she confessed she owed the clearness of her complexion to its use.

"I was persuaded to try the yeast in milk, and prepared to swallow an obnoxious dose. I was pleasantly surprised. It proved a delightfully palatable drink.

"Fleischmann's Yeast waged a successful battle against the canker sores, dried up the existing ones and cured the stomach condition which was causing them. I faced my winter's work with enthusiasm, and came through triumphant."

(Extract from a letter of Miss Grace S. Baumann of Philadelphia)

"I knew my headaches and unwholesome complexion were caused by constipation. To take frequent cathartics was my regular program and even by doing this I was tired and dopey. 'I like what yeast does for me' said one of my customers and asked if I had ever tried it. I acted on this suggestion and began to drink yeast in milk regularly. Soon people began to comment on how well I was looking—my husband said I grew younger—the mirror told me my complexion and eyes were clear and bright. Cathartics are now a thing of the past."

(A letter from Mrs. Mabelle Conomikes of Marathon, N. Y.

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain. Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tin foil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! A few days' supply will keep fresh in *your* ice box as well as in the grocer's. Write for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-3, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York City.

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Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, published weekly at New York, N. Y., for April 1st, 1924. Required by the Act of Congress of August 24th, 1912.

State of NEW YORK
County of NEW YORK } s.s. :

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared WM. T. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publishers of THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24th, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publishers—THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—MATTHEW WHITE, JR., 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—ROBERT H. DAVIS, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—WM. T. DEWART, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the Owners are: (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

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There are no bonds, mortgages, or other securities against THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

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WM. T. DEWART, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of April, 1924.

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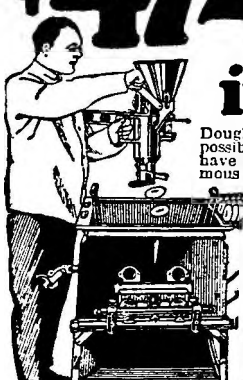

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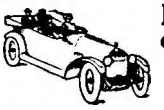

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