ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

JAN. 26

PRICE 10¢ IN CANADA 15¢

Whirlwind Walsh

A Northwest "Mounty" Novelette

by J. Allan Dunn

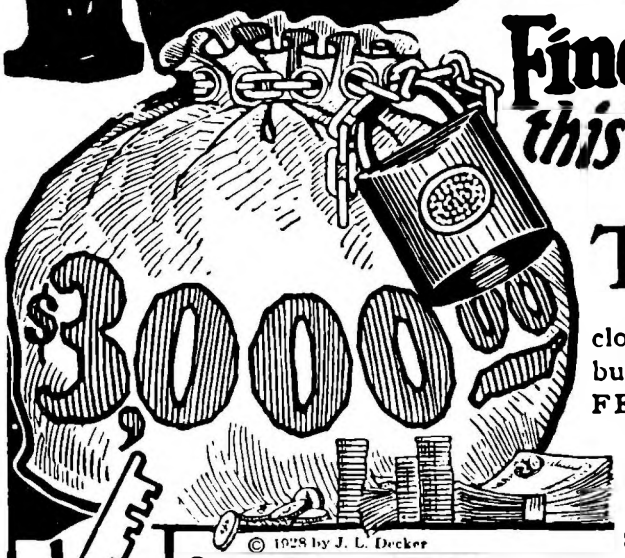
Also in this issue

The Mystery of Ball Bar Ranch

by Arthur Preston Hankins

REWARD

Find the key to unlock this FREE Bag of Gold



THERE are 19 keys pictured here. To be sure, they all look alike, but, examine them closely 18 of them are exactly alike but **"ONE,"** and only one is DIFFERENT FROM ALL THE OTHERS It is the key to OPEN THE PADLOCK on this $3,000.00 FREE "Bag of Gold." **SEE IF YOU CAN FIND IT.**

CLUES The difference may be in the size, the shape, or even in the notches. So, STUDY EACH KEY CAREFULLY and if you can find the **"ONE"** KEY that is different from all the others SEND THE NUMBER OF IT TO ME AT ONCE. You may become the winner of a Chrysler "75" Royal Sedan or $3,000.00 cash money,—without one cent of cost to you. I will give away ABSOLUTELY FREE.—5 new six-cylinder 4-door Sedans and the winners can have CASH MONEY INSTEAD of the automobiles if they prefer it. 25 BIG PRIZES TO BE GIVEN FREE—totaling $7,300.00 cash.

➡ Or Win a CHRYSLER "75" Sedan ⬅

Choice of this beautiful Chrysler "75" Royal Sedan or $3,000.00 cash. We pay all the freight and tax in full on all the prizes and deliver them anywhere in the U. S. A. This is an AMAZING OPPORTUNITY ACT QUICK, and here is why—

$1,000.00 CASH—EXTRA FOR PROMPTNESS

I will pay $1,000.00 cash money extra JUST FOR PROMPTNESS. Duplicate prizes will be paid in full in case of ties. YOU CAN WIN the Chrysler "75" Royal Sedan or—$3,000.00 cash. ANSWER QUICK.

You Cannot Lose Absolutely everyone who takes full advantage of this opportunity will be rewarded. But, hurry, — *find the* **"ONE"** *key* that is different from all the others and RUSH THE NUMBER OF IT and your name and address to me TODAY on a postal card or in a letter. And, just say:—"Key number is different from all the others. Please tell me how I can get this magnificent Chrysler '75' Royal Sedan—or—$3,000.00 CASH MONEY without obligation or one penny of cost to me."

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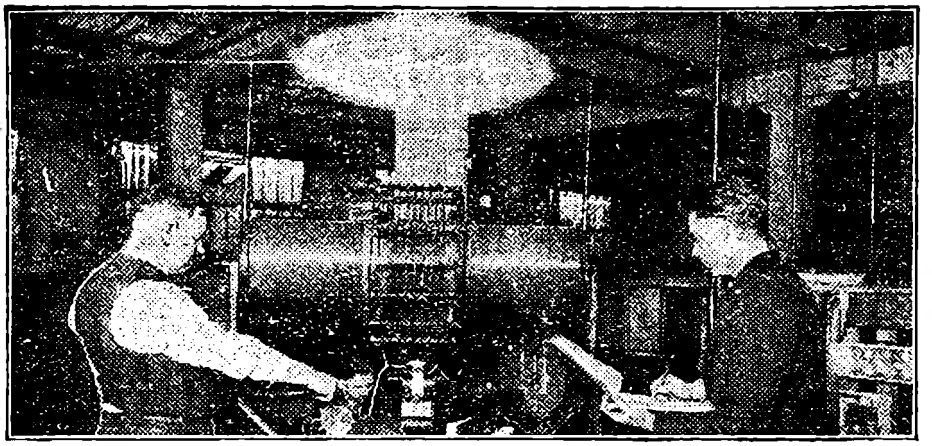

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Enter anytime. Experts teach you on electrical machinery and *not books*. They guide you every step of the way with individual attention. You do the actual work on real full-size machinery in full operation. Take motors for instance. Instead of learning from books and charts—you actually build motors. You can't help but know all about them. Anyone can learn this fascinating way.

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That's how my methods make men master electricity in 12 wonderful weeks. You don't need experience—Coyne training starts from the very beginning. You don't need advanced education—you learn by doing. Age is no handicap—Coyne students range from 16 to 45.

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Earn While You Learn

We help many students who haven't much money to secure part-time jobs to earn a good part or all of living expenses while training.

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This school is 29 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by electrical industry. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs—facts—jobs—salaries—opportunities. See what Coyne training can do for you in just 90 days! This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail the coupon.

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Fill In And Mail To Day

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Dear Mr. Lewis: Without obligation send me your big free catalog and all details of Free Employment Service, Radio, Aeroplane and Automotive Electrical Courses, and how many "earn while learning." *Also tell me about your offer of railroad fare to Chicago.*

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H. C. Lewis, President Dept. 19-60

500 So. Paulina St., Chicago

ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 201 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 26, 1929 NUMBER 1

SERIALS

COMPLETE STORIES

OTHER FEATURES

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

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and
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LOW PAY.. LONG HOURS.. ROUTINE.. NO FUTURE

Always worrying over money. Always skimping and economizing—going without the comforts and luxuries that every man DESERVES for his family and himself.

The Time Clock—a badge of hawk-like supervision and The Rut. A constant reminder that one is "just another name on the pay-roll."

Human cogs in a great machine. No chance to meet people, travel or have interesting experiences. A long, slow, tiresome road that leads nowhere.

Always wondering what would happen in case of a "lay-off" or loss of job. No chance to express ideas and ability—no chance to get ahead. COULD there be a way out?

I Said "Good-bye" to It All After Reading This Amazing Book—Raised My Pay 700%!

Where Shall We Send Your Copy—*FREE*?

WHEN a man who has been struggling along at a low-pay job suddenly steps out and commences to earn real money—$5,000, $7,500 or $10,000 a year—he usually gives his friends quite a shock. It's hard for them to believe he is the same man they used to know—but such things happen much more frequently than most people realize. Not only one, but HUNDREDS have altered the whole course of their lives after reading the amazing book illustrated at the right.

True, it is only a book—just seven ounces of paper and printers' ink—but it contains the most vivid and inspiring message that any ambitious man can read! It reveals facts and secrets that will open almost any man's eyes to things he has never even dreamed of!

Remarkable Salary Increases

For example, E. B. Hansen, of Akron, Ohio, is just one case. Not long ago he was a foreman in the rubber-curing room of a big factory at a salary of $150 a month. One day this remarkable volume, "Modern Salesmanship," fell into his hands. And from that day on, Mr. Hansen clearly saw the way to say "good-bye" forever to low pay, long hours, and tiresome routine! Today he has reaped the rewards that this little volume placed within his reach. His salary runs well into the 5-figure class—actually exceeding $10,000 a year!

Another man, Wm. Shore of Neenah, California, was a cowboy when he sent for "Modern Salesmanship." Now he is a star salesman making as high as $525 in a single week. O. D. Oliver of Norman, Oklahoma, read it and jumped from $200 a month to over $10,000 a year! C. V. Champion of Danville, Illinois, raised his salary to over $10,000 a year and became President of his company in the bargain!

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about any of these men when they started. None of them had any special advantages—although all of them realized that SALESMANSHIP offers bigger rewards than any other profession under the sun. But, like many other men, they subscribed to the foolish belief that successful salesmen are born with some sort of "magic gift." "Modern Salesmanship" showed them that nothing could be farther from the truth! Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—laws that you can master as easily as you learned the alphabet.

City and traveling sales positions are open in every line all over the country. For years, thousands of leading firms have called on the N. S. T. A. to supply them with salesmen. Employment service is free to both employers and members, and thousands have secured positions this way.

Free to Every Man

See for yourself WHY "Modern Salesmanship" has been the deciding factor in the careers of so many men who are now making $10,000 a year. Learn for yourself the REAL TRUTH about the art of selling! You do not risk one penny nor incur the slightest obligation. And since it may mean the turning point of your whole career, it certainly is worth your time to fill out and clip the blank below. Send it now!

National Salesmen's Training Association

Dept. A-751, N. S. T. A. Bldg. CHICAGO, ILL.

National Salesmen's Training Assn.,
Dept. A-751, N. S. T. A. Bldg.,
Chicago, Ill.

Without cost or obligation you may send me your free book, "Modern Salesmanship."

Name.....

Address.....

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

Age.....Occupation.....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

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

March 2d Classified Forms Close February 2d.

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FASTEST SELLING NECESSITY ON MARKET. GOOD PAY. ASTOUNDING BONUS. FINEST SELLING EQUIPMENT. Lowest prices. Big demand. A repeater. No money or experience required. Business grows bigger steadily. Write today for first consideration. SPENCER MEAD COMPANY, Harrison & Throop, Dept. A-709, Chicago.

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ASTROLOGY

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Will you win in love? Will you be successful in business? Will your investments prove profitable? Would a change in occupation give you a bigger income? Will you inherit money? What will be your lucky days?

World's Foremost Astrologer, Prof. A. F. Seward, has just completed a Special 15-Page Astrological Reading based on your sign of the Zodiac. This Forecast gives predictions—month by month—with exact days, dates, and happenings for 1929. Covers business and social affairs such as signing papers and contracts, seeking employment, speculation, travel, love, marriage, "lucky days," etc. Let Astrology reveal your future. People who follow the professor's predictions report uncanny accuracy. Send exact birthdate with $1.00 for your complete reading. Franklin Publishing Company, 800 N. Clark St., Dept. 161, Chicago, Ill.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE COMPOSE MUSIC. OUR COMPOSER WROTE MANY SONG HITS. MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY, 236 WEST 55TH ST. (NEAR BROADWAY), DEPT. 209, NEW YORK.

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INVENTORS—WRITE FOR OUR GUIDE BOOK, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

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30x3 1-2	2.28	1.15
32x3 1-2	2.78	1.15
31x4	3.00	1.20
32x4	3.00	1.25
33x4	3.00	1.25
34x4	3.00	1.25
32x4 1-2	3.25	1.75
33x4 1-2	3.25	1.85
34x4 1-2	3.50	1.85
35x4 1-2	3.50	1.85
36x4 1-2	3.50	1.85
30x5	4.00	2.00
33x5	4.00	2.00
36x5	4.00	2.00

Slightly Used Balloon Tires

SIZE	TIRES	TUBES
29x4.40	$2.75	$1.25
30x5.25	3.25	1.85
30x6.77	3.25	1.75
31x5.25	3.25	1.75
33x6.00	3.50	1.85
32x6.20	3.50	1.85

Other Balloon Size Tires, $3.50

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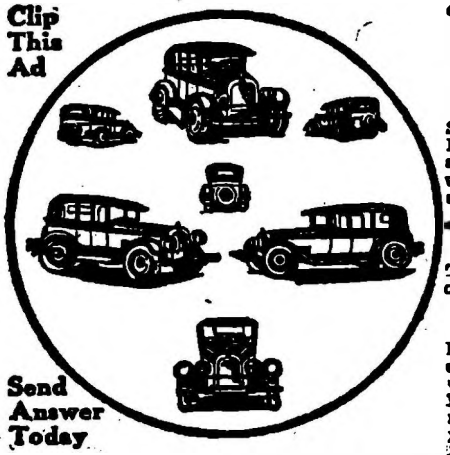


Send Answer Today

Win Nash Sedan

Or $2,750.00 in Cash

Someone who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a fully equipped 7-Passenger, Advanced Six Nash Sedan, or its full value in cash ($2,000.00). We are also giving away a Dodge Sedan, a Brunswick Phonograph and many other valuable prizes—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash. This offer is open to anyone living in the U. S. A. outside of Chicago.

Solve This Puzzle

There are 7 cars in the circle. By drawing 3 straight lines you can put each one in a space by itself. When you do this send me your answer right away.

$750.00 Extra for Promptness

In addition to the many valuable prizes and Hundreds of Dollars in Cash, we are also giving a Special Prize of $750.00 in Cash for Promptness. First prize winner will receive $2,750.00 in cash, or the Nash Sedan and $750.00 in cash. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded each one tying. Solve the puzzle right away and send me your answer together with your name and address plainly written. $4,500.00 in prizes—EVERYBODY REWARDED.

John T. Adams, Mgr. Dept. 2832 323 S. Peoria St., Chicago, Ill.

"Every 3,000 Miles This Amazing Little Device Buys Me a New Tire...FREE"

"THE money I save on gasoline more than keeps me in new tires. Figure it out... I was getting 13 miles per gallon on my Nash. With gas at 18c plus 2c tax it cost me $46 to drive 3,000 miles. Now I'm getting better than 26 miles per gallon. It takes just half the gas and I save $23 to $25 every 3,000 miles—more than the price of a new tire."

No matter what make of car you drive, the Stransky Vaporizer is unconditionally guaranteed to give you 50% to 100% more miles per gallon or it costs you nothing. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon for the Stransky Vaporizer to more than double gasoline mileage!

Note These Records

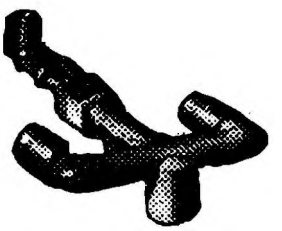
Forty-three miles per gallon from a Chevrolet, reported by F. S. Carroll. Fifty-seven miles on one gallon in a Ford, reported by J. T. Jackson, Michigan. Forty miles per gallon in a Dodge from Brownsville, Tex., to Tampico, Mex., reported by T. L. Brown.

Proved by Two Million Owners

Records like these are reported in every mail for every make and model car . . . from 72 different countries . . . the world over. More than two million Stransky Vaporizers have been installed.

43.8 Miles Per Gallon

Mr. M. E. Miller, Kansas City, writes: "You people claim a saving of 25 to 50% of Gasoline. I have subjected the Vaporizer to a severe and thorough test. After installing one on a Chevrolet, I found I was obtaining 43.8 miles to a gallon whereas formerly I had been getting only 19.5. That is not a saving of 25 or 50%, but 124%, so you see that the actual test surpasses your claim."



FITS ANY CAR IN 5 MINUTES

Anyone can install this device in 5 minutes. Simply loosen one connection to the intake manifold with a wrench. You can do the rest with your fingers!

Easily Installed

No bigger than a dollar coin—no more expensive than a good wrench—no more trouble to attach than a fan belt! Attaches to the intake manifold of any car in five minutes. Anyone can do it.

Less Gasoline— More Power

The vaporizer supercharges your gasoline after it leaves the carburetor. Completely vaporizes the gasoline. Under this ideal condition you get more compression out of less gasoline and a more complete explosion. Both power, pickup and speed are noticeably increased. Starting is not interfered with as the Vaporizer automatically shuts itself off when the motor is idle.

Make This Test

Test the Stransky Vaporizer on your car—and expect results that will amaze you! Double your mileage—get flashing pickup and power—forget carbon troubles, sluggish motor and fouled spark plugs from over-rich mixture—and save enough on your gasoline to more than keep you in tires. These results are guaranteed or the test costs you nothing.

Mail the coupon below for full details, guarantee, and amazing trial offer, which is even more remarkable than we can tell you here. There is no obligation whatever.

$4 an Hour for Salesmen, Agents, and Spare Time Workers

Men are making wonderful earnings showing the Stransky Vaporizer to car owners in spare time and full time. Sells fast under our guarantee. Foster made $357 in two weeks. G. F. Fuller earned $114 in 5 days. Eberlein sold 23 Vaporizers in 35 minutes! J. W. Cronk actually earned $51 in an hour. You should be able to earn at least $3 every hour you put in. We offer demonstrators one Vaporizer FREE, under our unusual offer. Get full details. Simply mail coupon at once.

J. A. STRANSKY MFG. CO.

A-1330 Stransky Block, Pukwana, So. Dakota

J. A. Stransky Mfg. Co., A-1330 Stransky Block, Pukwana, So. Dakota.

Without obligation send me full details of your free trial offer.

Name.....

Address.....

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

( ) Check here for Distributor's Sample Offer and the selling plan.

ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 201 SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, 1929 NUMBER 1

"Oh! He'll be killed!" cried Justine

Uncle Foster was eccentric—but not half as queer as the amazing events that embroiled his niece Justine and Ben Camp on the wide-flung Ball Bar ranch

The Mystery of Ball Bar Ranch

By ARTHUR PRESTON HANKINS

Author of "The Magic Keys," "Unhearing Ears," etc.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE FOSTER'S BOMBSHELL.

EVERYBODY in the San Anselmo Mountains, and on the stretch of desert that sprawled at their feet, knew that old Foster Ballard, if not an out-and-out lunatic, was at least eccentric. His aged sister, Aradne Ballard, spinster, was also considered "a little queer." And the Ball Bar Ranch, owned by Foster Ballard, was a strange place, too, as was almost everything connected with this withered pair of time-nicked mountaineers.

The Ball Bar Ranch was seven thou-

sand feet above the sea. Here the Ball Bar cattle roamed the lush mountain meadows from June till October, when they were driven down to the eighty-mile desert range to eke out a living on bunchgrass and filaree through the blustery winter months.

The Ballards were old-timers in the country, among the oldest of the early settlers. And they were forever in

conflict with Giles Rebble and Carey Backus, his cousin, two bachelors, whose mountain property—Hazy Valley Ranch—adjoined theirs on the west. Grazing rights and water rights formed the nucleus of the dissension, and for years Foster Ballard and the cousins rode past each other without speaking when they met in dim forest trails.

Justine Davant, Foster and Aradne Ballard's niece, however, did not seriously concern herself with the feud. There was too much to be happy about in these glorious mountains for one of her calm nature to be bothered with petty wranglings.

It was breakfast time in the great log house that stood among the lofty pines near the center of the Ball Bar Ranch. The steaming biscuits were on their first hasty round when Uncle Foster asked for the attention of the entire assemblage. His cocked gray eyes were darting bright, expectant glances about the board, and his hairy lips were quivering. A wizened, knotty little man of seventy, with a strange, almost lunatic, light in his peculiarly angled eyes.

His sister, Aradne Ballard, stared at him from the foot of the table. Her eyes were similar to Foster's, and a stranger would have guessed at a glance that the same mother had borne these two.

"Listen, everybody," said old Foster in his cracked, jerky voice.

THE cow hands suppressed their snickers. Justine Davant tried to look solemn. These little flights were no exceptional thing at Ball Bar Ranch. They always afforded Justine some amusement, for she never knew

what amazing turn they might take before the climax.

"Justine," he finally said, "Ball Bar Ranch will soon be yours."

"Not very soon, I hope, Uncle Foster," said the girl lightly. "You and Aunt Aradne are going to live for fifty years more. I hope so, anyway." She sneaked a bite and waited, smiling surreptitiously at Lambert Abbie, who was head over heels in love with her.

"Fifty years, eh!" snorted old Foster. "Shows how much yeh know about it. Three weeks from to-day yeh'll be th' owner o' Ball Bar Ranch. Yer Aunt Aradne will still be with yeh, and yeh'll have to take keer of her, accordin' to my will. But I'll be dead. Dead and gone three weeks from to-day. Yeah!"

He glanced about defiantly, his chin whiskers trembling, his odd eyes defying somebody to contradict him.

"Yeh all think I'm nutty, I know," the ranch owner continued. "P'r'aps I am. Folks thought th' same about my father—Aunt Aradne's father and mine. Anyway, I'm goin' to drive to Earlybird this mornin' an' buy my coffin, an' make arrangements fer my funeral. An' my funeral's gonta be a week from Wednesday, rain or shine. Yeh c'n all go on with yer eatin', now. I jest wanted to prepare yeh."

Lambert Abbie, foreman of the Ball Bar, took a few mouthfuls; then, winking at one of the hands, he asked:

"What's th' big idee, Uncle Foster?"

The owner of Ball Bar looked up from his plate. His weird face proclaimed that he had forgotten the matter entirely.

"Eh?" he asked. "What's what big idee, Bert?"

"This here funeral a week come Wednesday?" returned the foreman.

"Oh, that! Well, seein's I'm gonta die in about three weeks from to-day, Bert, I 'lowed I'd have my funeral beforehand, so's I could be there to see how things went."

Aunt Aradne continued to eat her breakfast, as if what her brother was saying were the most commonplace statement in the world. But Justine and the cow hands stared at one another in consternation.

BERT ABBIE cleared his throat at last. "How yeh know yeh're gonta die three weeks from to-day, Uncle Foster?" was his question.

"I ain't gonta die," replied Foster Ballard simply. "I'm gonta be murdered. It was told to me in a dream last night."

"Oh! Who's gonta do th' job?"

Foster Ballard raised his head and looked witheringly at his foreman. "Yeh oughta know," he told him.

"Was the—ah—picture clear, Uncle Foster?" asked Justine Davant, her brown eyes more troubled-looking than they had ever been before over her uncle's eccentricities.

"No, 'twan't," replied the old man. "I jest saw my dead body layin' on th' ground, with a certain party standin' over it, his six-shooter in his hand. Shet up, now, an' finish yer breakfusts. I don't wanta talk about it any more."

An hour later he was on his way to Earlybird, the nearest town down on the desert, to make arrangements for his novel funeral.

Several days later the mountain dwellers and the desert rats for miles about Ball Bar Ranch, and the inhabitants of the miserable little town known as Earlybird, were startled when they read of Foster Ballard's sudden death. For old Foster did not exactly let it be generally known that his funeral was to be a preliminary affair. The notices that he sent out—printed in large and small type—ran as follows:

COME ONE! COME ALL!
BIG BARBECUE AND FUNERAL AT BALL BAR RANCH
DANCING, MUSIC, MISCELLANEOUS ENTERTAINMENTS!

Mr. Foster E. Ballard, of Ball Bar Ranch, hereby announces that his

funeral will take place on his mountain property on Wednesday, July 15, following a round of pleasure and good-fellowship.

The festivities will begin at eight o'clock in the morning and continue until midnight, or after. Funeral at three o'clock in the afternoon. Sermon by the Rev. J. Cummins, pastor of Earlybird Presbyterian Church. Music by the Earlybird Presbyterian Church Choir.

Flowers, speeches, horse racing, bronco busting, barbecued steer, lemonade.

Bring wives, children, and sweethearts and have a good time. Admission *free*.

COME ONE! COME ALL!
FLOWERS!

CHAPTER II.

THE FUNERAL.

ONE came, all came. And they brought flowers. Curiosity had drawn them as a magnet draws steel filings. They knew, several days before the unique event, that old Foster E. Ballard had not passed away. Therefore they were on fire to find out what it was all about. If it were a huge hoax, they were willing to be the victims so long as the phenomenon was explained.

On the morning of the eventful fifteenth buckboards, buggies, wagons, Fords, automobiles, saddle horses, burros, and shank's mares began depositing the surrounding neighborhood at Ball Bar Ranch. Uncle Foster, grave of mien and dressed in appalling black, met every comer at the ranch house gates and made arrangements for parking vehicles and corralling steeds. He shook his gray head sadly when his funeral was mentioned, but the questions that he answered were few indeed.

The sporting events of the morning moved off smoothly, or roughly, according to their character. They were thoroughly enjoyed by all excepting, perhaps, Uncle Foster and his sister. Uncle Foster, at least, considering the grave rites that lay ahead of him, looked on morosely and with the dignity becoming a dead man.

The barbecue, at noon, was a decided success, and Uncle Foster perked up a little, for he loved good food. After dinner the young people danced on a hastily erected dance floor, their feet keeping time to the strains of a violin and an accordion.

And then came three o'clock, when the throng was hazed to the wide veranda of the old log house, where the funeral was to take place.

The benches had been carried thither, and when the assemblage was seated and silent, Uncle Foster arose and made a few explanatory remarks.

"Friends an' neighbors," came his melancholy croak, "we are gathered together to-day to solemnize the last rites of Foster E. Ballard, known to all o' yeh fer a spell o' years. I wanta thank yeh all fer turnin' out th' way yeh've done. It warms th' cockles o' my heart. When I'm really dead, in maybe a week from now, they'll be no funeral, 'cause it 'll be all over."

He faced the flower-smothered casket, wiped a tear from an ancient eye, and once more faced the twitching faces of his acquaintances.

"That's all I got to say, folks," he continued. "And now my lifelong friend, Jedge Whitmore, Jestice o' th' Peace at Earlybird, will make a few remarks an' read th' will. After which th' funeral services will proceed."

HE seated himself beside the coffin. A man leaning against a tree in the yard started to clap his hands, then blushed furiously as a companion grabbed his wrists.

Judge Whitmore rose to his feet, almost lost his balance, and bore himself up by grasping the back of his chair. He blushed with embarrassment as the gathering snickered. The worthy judge had sampled many a hip flask before and after the barbecue.

He assumed a frowning attitude, and thrust a hand, Napoleonlike, into the opening of his rusty Prince Albert coat, taken from the mothballs only on auspicious occasions.

He cleared his throat, looked solemn, attempted to blink the dizziness out of his brain, and spoke huskily:

"Friends an' fella-citizens, I am here to-day at the request of my client—"

"Your *late* client," prompted Uncle Foster.

Judge Whitmore bowed his snow-white head. "I stand corrected," he said gravely. "I am here, friends and fella-citizens, at the behest o' my late client, Foster E. Ballard, than whom no man in this beautiful, healthy, and enterprisin' country is better known to me—"

"*Was* better known to yeh," came Uncle Foster's second interruption. "Yeh ain't gettin' anywhere at all!"

"My heart is too full to proceed with th' eulogy of my dear friend that I had in mind," the judge wriggled out of the dilemma. "So I'll proceed to th' readin' o' th' will."

"Huh! Not so good," Uncle Foster whispered to Justine. "I was dependin' on th' jedge to kinda boost me up a little, but he's hit too many flasks."

Judge Whitmore had taken from the Prince Albert an official-looking document.

"I, Foster E. Ballard, of Ball Bar Ranch, in Earlybird Township, Jeffries County, State of California, being of sound mind and memory—"

"Huh!" interposed Aunt Aradne.

"—do now make and publish this, my last will and testament; that is to say, I do give, devise, and bequeath all of my property, real, personal, and mixed, to my niece, Justine Davant, on condition that she will maintain my sister, Aradne Louisa Ballard, in comfort on Ball Bar Ranch for the remainder of her days; and upon the further condition that, within one year from the date of my death, she become the wife of Lambert Abbie, now foreman of Ball Bar Ranch.

"In the event that these two provisions of my last will and testament are not conformed to, Ball Bar Ranch and all of its appurtenances shall become the property of my sister, Aradne Louisa Ballard, of Ball Bar Ranch, Earlybird Township, Jeffries County, State of California. I constitute and appoint Henry Whitmore, my legal adviser, as executor, and request that he be not required to give bond.

"FOSTER E. BALLARD."

Justine Davant was on her feet. "Why, Uncle Foster!" she cried indignantly. "What do you mean, dictating to me whom I shall marry? I protest! I won't be driven—"

"Justine," gently interposed Uncle Foster, closing his eyes peacefully, "I can't hear a word yeh say. I'm dead!"

CHAPTER III.

BEN CAMP.

THE choir of the Earlybird Presbyterian Church sang a befitting selection. After which the Rev. Cummins became the chief figure in the ceremonies.

Rather apologetically the reverend made the statement that, while the proceedings were unusual, even bizarre, he could see no reason why a man should not attend his own funeral if he saw fit to do so.

It was whispered that Uncle Foster had given the minister five hundred dollars toward the erection of a new church at Earlybird. But that may have been mere idle gossip.

However, the ceremony went ahead according to the usual routine. The speaker dwelt feelingly on Uncle Foster's benefit to the scattered community.

At last the casket was lowered into its grave in the little family plot, and the flowers distributed over it. Uncle Foster sniffed a little. Aunt Aradne fell under the spell of the thing and wiped her aged eyes. Justine Davant bit her lips and looked embarrassed.

After which the mourners became invited guests once more, and returned to their merry-making.

A stranger, smiling doubtfully, approached Justine after the final scene. He lifted a new Stetson hat, so that Justine could see his curly brown hair, trimmed city fashion. He seemed muscular, and certainly was graceful and well knit. Decidedly good looking, too, in a frank, boyish way. He was dressed in an olive-drab shirt, with riding breeches of the same color, and new leather puttees.

"Permit me to introduce myself, Miss Davant," he said, his smile increasing in confidence as he looked into the steady, brown eyes. "I am Benjamin Camp — ordinarily called Ben Camp."

Justine bowed wonderingly.

"My appearance here at this momentous time is an accident," Mr. Camp continued. "Nothing was told me about the—er—funeral by the people from whom I heard about this region, and it was a complete surprise to me when I arrived this morning and found myself one of the—er—spectators. A rather unusual proceeding, Miss Davant."

"Utterly asinine," said Justine somewhat snappishly.

Ben Camp smiled. "Unique," he modified. "I suppose, now, that any business a person may have to transact here should be placed before you, Miss Davant. I heard the reading of the will."

"Well-l-l," Justine looked thoughtful, "I don't know about that, Mr. Camp. I haven't consented yet to comply with the provisions of my uncle's will. I hardly know where I stand, you see. What is it that you want, Mr. Camp?"

"I UNDERSTAND that there is a little cow camp somewhere on Ball Bar Ranch called Faraway. An abandoned camp."

"Yes. It was abandoned about two years ago. We don't let the cattle range over that way now because of difficulties between Uncle Foster and Giles Rebble, who, in partnership with his cousin, Carey Backus, owns Hazy Valley Ranch.

"It's not very good range, anyway, so Faraway has been abandoned, perhaps for good."

"So I was led to believe. Miss Davant, I'd like to rent Faraway, get permission to fix up the cabin and spend the summer there. Would there be any objection, do you think?"

"I can't see why there should be. The cabin is of no use to Uncle Foster. Speak to him about it, Mr. Camp."

"You don't imagine it would—er—disturb his rest?" Ben Camp smiled whimsically.

"Try him, anyway," suggested Justine.

Ben Camp returned to the girl within the minute. "He refused to consider the matter," he reported. "He says that you may as well consider him dead and assume all responsibility at once."

Justine Davant's pretty face reddened. Her brown eyes flashed indignation. But she made no comment on Uncle Foster's suggestion.

"What do you plan to do at Faraway, Mr. Camp?" she questioned.

"I just want to loaf and rest and enjoy nature," Ben Camp told her. "I've a hobby, too, that I mean to follow as an excuse for living there. Might one be allowed to cut trails through the chaparral—if there is any chaparral?"

"There is a great deal of it. All of one hillside is covered with it. Of course you could cut trails. The more the better, I should say, since the chaparral is all but impenetrable."

"Fine! Just what I want, Miss Davant. And the rent?"

"Well-l-l—ordinarily I should say nothing. But as the cabin really belongs to Uncle Foster—to Ball Bar Ranch—I should like to know what

you're going to do there before telling you to go ahead. Your reference to trail-cutting sounds very mysterious to me."

"I can promise you that no damage will be done. I'm an experienced camper and outlander, Miss Davant. I'll not set the forest afire. And your cattle won't be endangered by my mistaking them for game. While I have a gun and know how to use it, I seldom do. I'm a camera hunter, Miss Davant."

"Oh!" Justine was both interested and puzzled. "That's the hobby you mentioned, then?"

"Yes, Miss Davant. And it's even more than a hobby, though I started the business as a hobby. Now, however, I've worked it up to a profession. I even draw a salary from the Western Museum of Natural History."

"And you make your living by photographing wild animals and birds?" she asked incredulously.

"Exactly."

"How do you go about your work, Mr. Camp?"

"That's a rather long story," he laughed. "I suggest that you ride over to Faraway and see me at work—that is, provided you're going to rent me the cabin."

"Just trail over there and move in," said Justine. "Then, if you insist, we can come to terms later on. I'm interested. I think I might get enough entertainment out of nosing into your strange affairs to reimburse me for the use of Faraway. But I must beg to be excused now, Mr. Camp. Really, I'm a little fussed up over the—over the will.

"Won't you stay here at the ranch to-night? We'd be glad to have you, I'm sure. It is a long ride to Faraway."

Ben Camp bowed. "I shall be delighted to stay."

He seemed very thoughtful as he walked toward the dancers. It would be decidedly pleasant, he mused, to have Justine Davant interested in his unusual calling.

NOT many of Uncle Foster Ballard's funeral guests had elected to remain far into the night, as invited to. For most of them homes were far away, since this was a country of seemingly unlimited stretches.

By seven o'clock a few of the young and reckless generation remained, not yet satiated with dancing. By nine o'clock the ranch was once more quiet. Uncle Foster and Aunt Aradne had gone to bed. The weary cow hands had sought the bunk house. But Justine Davant and her new friend, Benjamin Camp, sat talking on a bench beneath the trees. Above them the flickering candles of the Japanese lanterns were nearing the end of their brief trip through life.

Justine was saying: "Tell me, Mr. Camp—you're an educated man, a scientist—what do you think of hereditary insanity?"

"Hereditary insanity, eh? I think you'll find that it's a mooted question among alienists to-day."

"My mother was, of course, a Ballard," Justine went on musingly. "Sister of Aunt Aradne and Uncle Foster. My father was James F. Davant, a business man of San Francisco. He met my mother during a hunting trip on Ball Bar Ranch, fell in love with her, and married her. I've spent about half of my life in San Francisco and half at Ball Bar. There's no question but that my father was sane, of course. And I'm positive that mother was too. But insanity, or eccentricity, certainly runs in the Ballard family. I've heard that Grandfather Ballard was as queer, or queerer, than Uncle Foster and Aunt Aradne. And I guess you're willing to admit that Uncle Foster, at least, is a little touched in the upper story."

"He certainly has some original ideas," Ben Camp laughed.

"This latest stunt worries me," said

the girl. "He's never done anything half so crazy before. There was always some sense to his eccentricity before. I'm desperately worried, Mr. Camp. I *know* I'm sound of mind, and yet—"

"Forget that," he chided her. "If I were as confident of always being as sane as you are, I'd be content. If there is insanity in your family, it's due to skip a generation or two."

"I thank you, I'm sure," she told him, with just a trace of nervousness in her laugh. "And I'll not brood over such a thing. I'll just go on and run the ranch, as Uncle Foster expects me to. He told me long ago that he meant to will the ranch to me when he died. But he never before hinted at the other condition to the will—that I marry Bert Abbie within a year. Couldn't I have that stricken out on the ground that uncle wasn't himself when he made the will?"

"YOU don't want to marry this Abbie, then?"

Camp's face seemed to brighten immediately.

"Why, I've never given the matter a thought, Mr. Camp. I was nearly knocked flat when I heard of it."

"Do you like Abbie?"

"Immensely. We've always been the best of friends. But that has nothing to do with it."

"Of course not. But I doubt if you can have that condition stricken from the will, Miss Davant."

"But what am I to do if Uncle Foster dies without changing his will? Aunt Aradne can't run the ranch. And now I can't have the property unless I marry Bert. It's absurd!"

"Perhaps you may be able to make your uncle understand your feeling in the matter, so that he'll change the will."

"Uncle Foster never changes anything. Oh, dear me, let's talk about something pleasant. Tell me about your animal pictures. Do you know everything about wild things?" she asked admiringly.

"Hardly," Camp returned. "I learn something new every day. It's an absorbing study."

Justine Davant sighed pensively. "It must be so," she said. "Will you teach me? I've always been interested in the animals about here."

The minutes slipped by swiftly, with the two enthusiasts exchanging experiences. They were sitting quite close together now, and they didn't seem to realize that, in their eagerness, they had been edging toward each other along the bench. The bullbats zoomed through the night air, now and then adding their peculiar cry to the sound of their wings.

And now Justine was telling Ben Camp about a traditional hoard of Spanish pesos that was supposed to be hidden somewhere close to Ball Bar Ranch.

CHAPTER IV.

SPANISH GOLD.

"AS the story goes," Justine began, "a party of Spanish emigrants were on their way up from Mexico. That was about 1830, so far as is known. They were religious enthusiasts and were planning to form a colony near one of the Spanish missions that the old Franciscan Fathers had established in California. They became lost in these mountains, while trying to find a passage through them to the Pacific Coast. Then they were set upon by Indians and slaughtered. They fought for days, withstanding a fierce siege, until they were all wiped out, with the exception of one man, who feigned death and later escaped.

"In some manner he managed to get through the mountains to a mission on the coast. He told the padre in charge of the mission that the leader of the party had hidden a great amount of gold and silver coins when they were

first attacked. But this leader had been killed, and the survivor didn't know how he had disposed of the treasure. The padre returned with him into the mountains, accompanied by a number of Spanish soldiers and Indians. The place where the battle took place was located, and we think it was what later became Ball Bar Ranch. But no trace of the treasure was found, though it must have been hidden close to the battle ground. That is," she finished, "if there is any truth at all to the story. It may be just a myth."

"Of course you people have searched for the cache?" asked Camp.

"I'll say we have! Uncle Foster has devoted many years to it, and I'm guilty, too, of digging around and searching for signs. Besides, other people have searched for it—the Rebbles, for instance. But nothing's ever been found, so far as we know. Not even the precise location of the battlefield. Personally, I've about decided it's a back-country story, with little or no foundation of truth."

Just then a dark figure loomed up beside them, and a voice said gruffly:

"Settin' out pretty late, ain't yeh, Justine? It's after 'leven o'clock."

The owner of the voice was Bert Abbie, foreman of Ball Bar Ranch, and Justine gasped at the new proprietary tone that he had used.

"Well, Bert," she asked calmly, "what's the idea? I didn't know that you ever interested yourself in the hours I stay awake. Have you met Mr. Camp?"

"Yeah, I met 'im," growled the foreman, his tone implying that the remembrance was distasteful. "I think yeh oughta be abed, Justine. These here nights are cold, and yeh ain't wrapped up sufficient."

"I'M quite comfortable, thank you," she said.

"It's entirely my fault," said Ben Camp, rising hastily. "I did realize that it was growing late, but I was too selfish to bring it to Miss Davant's attention. In fact, I was enjoying the conversation so much that I was afraid she would realize how time has slipped away and leave me. Can you blame me, Mr. Abbie?"

Mr. Abbie didn't answer. "Them candles are jest barely splutterin'," he complained. "Yeh'd been in th' dark soon. Then I reckon yeh'd got wise."

"Come, Mr. Camp," said the girl, ignoring Abbie. And mischievously, perhaps even a little flirtatiously, Justine linked her arm in Camp's and led him toward the house. Bert Abbie scowled after them, then sulkily went about extinguishing the candles.

A night's sleep did not serve to erase the foreman's sulkiness. He was unusually silent at breakfast, and, for the most part, kept his dark, brooding eyes fixed on his plate.

Justine was amazed. She had known, of course, that Abbie considered himself more or less in love with her, for women are seldom unaware of such matters. But she had had no idea that he would aspire to become her husband. He was somewhat uncouth, almost illiterate, and she doubted if he ever would have considered himself good enough for her had not this strange situation developed.

Well, she'd show him!

"I'm going to guide you to Faraway," she told Ben Camp, as they rose from the breakfast table.

"You're sure it won't be inconveniencing you?" Camp asked.

"I'm sure I want to do it," Justine retorted, in a voice loud enough for Bert Abbie to hear.

The foreman's rather low brow showed a decided scowl as he left the kitchen to continue the ranch work for the day.

Chapped and spurred, Justine joined Ben Camp at the horse corral. She noted his dexterity in throwing the one-man diamond-hitch on his burro's pack. Then, her saddle mare, Mus-

tard, refusing to be caught by hand and bridled, Camp efficiently tossed a gentle loop over her neck with a lariat.

"I guess I don't need to worry about your being able to take care of yourself in the mountains," Justine said, as he drew her latigo strap through the cinch-ring.

IT was a long ride to Faraway. They rode across luxuriant mountain meadows, followed twisting creeks that sparkled in the sun, searched out trails through dim stands of timber, traversed many a rocky cañon. They emerged from one forest into open, irregular country—a smiling little valley between two ridges of rock, a valley where the timothy and redtop brushed the bellies of grazing Ball Bar cattle.

Ben Camp pointed to the northern wall of the valley.

"Remarkable rubble slide," he said. "Don't know that I've ever seen a bigger one."

"It's dangerous, too," Justine told him. "If one were to start sliding from the crest, it looks as if the whole hillside would go down with him, or on top of him."

The rubble slide was indeed a freak of nature. The steep slope was composed of millions of loose, red, roundish stones, from the size of a baseball to that of an enormous pumpkin.

A coyote, slinking along the crest, might have started the stones to roll and slide; and the movement would have become greater and greater as more stones joined the avalanche, until perhaps thousands of tons would have come rumbling down into the pretty valley. And afterward there would have been no appreciable change in the appearance of the slope, for nobody could guess how deep the rubble was.

Even as they looked there was a slight movement, and a dozen or more round stones came bounding down over their neighbors to thud on the valley's floor. What started them, the watchers could not guess.

"Uncanny, isn't it?" said Ben Camp. "Hate to get caught there when a big slide was taking place."

"Cattle and horses avoid it," Justine told him. "Uncle Foster built a trail across it once," she pointed upward, "but it didn't hold. He reënforced it with logs all along, but a big slide occurred above it and buried it completely. There may be a few traces of it left up there. It saved a lot of time between the ranch house and the Faraway district, too. Now we are obliged almost to circle the slide, by way of this little valley."

Rounding the western end of the rubble slide, they set off into the north once more. An hour later they were threading Faraway Creek and nearing the abandoned cow camp and the lake.

THE cabin was set in the edge of a belt of bull pines that towered above it toward the skies. The creek ran by its door. The land virtually was level, sloping by gentle degrees to the lake that lay stretched between scattering pine trees. Beyond it the mountains rose abruptly, heavily timbered, and guttered by many a lonely cañon.

"Ideal!" cried Ben Camp, drinking in the tranquillity of the scene.

They lunched beside the creek. Then they looked over the cabin, and found that a little repairing of the roof was all that was necessary to make it livable.

Justine's lips twitched with amusement when, as they entered, she saw Ben Camp stop short and gaze at the little cookstove with which the cabin was supplied.

"What in the mischief is reason for that?" he asked.

His amazement concerned the peculiar manner in which the stove had been set up. It was on a solid base of dried blue clay about three and a half feet high. This brought the top of the stove about on a level with his chin.

"You see before you ample proof

of the old adage that necessity is the mother of invention," the girl explained. "When the boys were bringing that stovepipe over here they lost two lengths of it on the rubble slide. The rocks at once covered them, and the boys couldn't locate 'em anywhere. They were too busy to return for more pipe, so they simply elevated their stove so that the two remaining joints were sufficient to reach up through the roof. I call that stove Mohammed. The mountain wouldn't come to Mohammed, you remember, so Mohammed went to the mountain. You stand on that box to cook."

Ben Camp laughed cheerfully.

Justine decided that she ought not to stay and help him put things to rights, for there was housework to be done at home. She held out her hand when she was ready to set foot to stirrup.

Ben Camp looked deep into the serene brown eyes of the future owner of Ball Bar Ranch. For the first time since meeting her he felt a strange embarrassment. This untrammeled, untarnished girl of the mountains had taken a strong hold upon his imagination. He wanted to hold that brown little hand indefinitely.

"I'm not deserting you," she laughed. "I'll be riding over this way as soon as I can. You're going to make a naturalist out of me, you know. Can I bring you anything when I come? A couple of joints of stovepipe, for instance?"

"I wouldn't lower Mohammed from his throne for anything," Ben told her. "No, I think I want nothing, thank you. And if you should need me for anything, ride over after me, or send some one."

"Why, I don't know that I shall need you," she said hesitatingly, and her long lashes covered her eyes.

"I don't like the way Abbie is acting," Ben Camp told her.

"Oh, that!" she scoffed. "I'll put an end to that soon—when I get Uncle Foster alone and persuade him to strike out that stupid clause in his will. He's perhaps forgotten even now that he's supposed to die next week. Poor old Uncle Foster! Good-by, now!"

And her hand slipped out of his and grasped the saddle horn.

Next moment Mustard's hoofs were thudding along Faraway Creek.

CHAPTER V.

AN ENCOUNTER ON THE TRAIL.

IT was only natural that Justine Davant should be deeply interested in a man like Benjamin Camp. Her years at Ball Bar Ranch had been a period of intellectual starvation. Uncle Foster Ballard and Aunt Aradne were uneducated people. The orphan girl, city bred, had been lonely, living with them.

It was the same with the Ball Bar cow-punchers. Such girl friends as she had, lived far away, for Ball Bar was remote. The girl loved the big outdoors, ranch life, and the wilderness of the West. But she craved other elements in her life that Ball Bar and vicinity could not supply, some one with whom she could talk about things that did not have their sole foundation in ranch life. At last, it seemed, she had trapped a fellow human with whom she could form a sympathetic companionship. And the fact that he was a man and good looking, did not lessen her degree of satisfaction in her find.

As she left the rubble slide behind her and passed out at the head of the little valley, a horseman rode into the trail before her from the timber. Instantly she recognized the big cutting horse that Lambert Abbie rode. Abbie himself was astride the animal, lolling bonelessly in the big, high-cantled saddle.

Justine's brown eyes flashed and her red lips formed a straight, defensive line. But when she addressed the fore-

man her tones were gentle and friendly.

"Hello, Bert," she greeted him. "Whither away?"

"Didn't see a bunch o' old muley cows with their calves over toward Faraway, did yeh, Justine?" he asked.

"Not a sign of 'em," she replied. "There are a hundred or more two-year-olds grazing in Rubble Slide Valley, though."

"Yeah — I ain't bothered about them. It's them old cows I'm after. Git that fella fixed up over at Faraway?"

"Yes. The cabin's in fairly good shape, Bert. A few shakes on the roof will be all that's necessary in the way of repairs. I'm going to take that short crosscut saw and a froe to him to-morrow. He's going to fell a sugar pine and make some shakes."

Justine wondered why she had told this half lie. She had not mentioned to Ben Camp the matter of the froe and the crosscut, and he had said nothing about felling a sugar pine. The idea had popped into her fertile brain a moment before she spoke.

"TAKIN' pretty good care of 'im, ain't yeh, Justine?"

"Why not? He's our guest, isn't he? Why shouldn't I be hospitable?"

"How much rent yeh chargin' 'im fer Faraway cabin?"

"None at all, Bert. It isn't worth anything."

"Not to us, but it is to him. Hadn't he oughta pay fer somethin' that he wants and c'n use?"

Justine did not fail to note the use of the word "us." Her lips were straight again.

"I consider," she said, well aware that her words were cruel, "that association with him will amply repay me for the use of Faraway."

"Oh, so yeh like to 'sociate with 'im, eh?"

"I do, indeed. He's educated, refined, companionable. I've longed to know an educated man like Ben Camp all of my life at Ball Bar. I intend to see him often. We have a great deal in common."

Bert Abbie's rugged face had turned beet red. His brooding eyes showed sparks of anger. "Yeh oughta be ashamed of yerself, Justine," he rebuked her. "Chasin' round th' country with a man that's a perfect stranger, bein' alone with 'im in that cabin, an'—"

"Stop right there, Lambert Abbie!" Justine interrupted in a dangerous tone. "I never in my life expected to hear such an insulting speech from you. I could kill a stranger for such an insinuation as you've just made. I believe I could kill you if you repeated it. Something's the matter with you, Bert, you're not yourself to-day. I'm riding on now."

She put pressure on Mustard's reins, and the little mare moved forward along the trail, champing the wheel of her half-breed bit.

But Bert did not swing the big sorrel out of the path.

"Listen, Justine," said he. "Don't make a fool out o' yerself. Yeh know yeh gotta marry me in order to inherit Ball Bar Ranch. So why not git used to th' idea an' look at th' thing in a sensible light? Yeh like me, yeh know yeh do.

"Yeh know, I reckon, that I have loved yeh since th' day yeh come from San Francisco, after yer father died. So why act like yeh're doin', Justine? Ain't I good enough fer yeh?"

There was such genuine misery and pleading in the man's husky voice that Justine could not find it in her heart to be cruel now.

"Bert," she told him, "it's not that I don't like you. You know that I do. But I don't love you. I've never thought about you that way at all. I'm too old-fashioned to marry a man that I don't love. I know it's being done every day but none of that for me. I'm really

sorry, Bert. So let's forget the entire matter—I wish you would."

"But th' ranch, Justine?"

"It will have to go to Aunt Aradne, unless I can inherit it without living up to the stipulations of Uncle Foster's will. It's all foolishness on Uncle Foster's part, as you must know. He's as healthy as you are, and has years of usefulness before him."

"How d'yeh know he's got years o' usefulness before 'im?" Bert challenged her statement. "Yeh savvy as well as I do that, if ever him an' Giles Rebble got into an argyment, one of 'em would git smoked up. Giles Rebble's an old-time gunman. I leave it to yeh which o' the two of 'em would turn up his toes."

"Giles and Uncle Foster haven't had a dispute for several years," Justine reminded him.

"Well, jest s'posin' yer uncle was to die, Justine. Yeh could learn to love me in a year, if yeh set yer mind to it."

Justine laughed. "Love doesn't come by willing it, Bert," she told him sagely. "Please let me ride on, now. I've really had enough."

He moved the sorrel out of the trail. "Go on, then, damn yeh!" he gritted through his teeth. "But I c'n tell yeh this ain't th' end."

"Thank you for damning me, Bert," Justine said icily. "I think you'll be ready to apologize to-morrow."

And she lifted Mustard into a lope. Bert Abbie glowered at her darkly as her mare sped past the sorrel.

CHAPTER VI.

NOCTURNAL PROWLERS.

BEN CAMP was seeking obscure deer trails through the chaparral an hour after Justine had left him. He was a mile from the cabin, on a sunny slope covered with dense chaparral.

It was, as Justine had claimed, all but impenetrable. For the most part, the only way that a man could pass through it was on hands and knees, and as often on his belly, working his way under the low-hung branches. Locked chaparral, it was called by Westerners. On the deer trails, he could walk in a stooping position.

Ben Camp carried one of his precious "guns" in his arms. A second he had left at the edge of the chaparral. His guns, as he called them, were nothing more deadly than special cameras, with shutters that could be adjusted to make an exposure of a two-hundredth part of a second.

Ben Camp's cameras "shot" animals in their wild state after dark. For this purpose the naturalist left the six-inch lenses of his guns wide open. A fine wire, called a trip-wire, he stretched across a trail, and thence to a battery which he set up near the camera. He then fastened up a metal cup containing half an ounce of magnesium powder, and connected it with the shutter of the camera. When the animal touched the trip-wire, it set off the magnesium flare, and the recoil of the explosion exposed the plate at the same instant that the illumination took place.

A loud explosion would occur, the scene would be lighted by a blinding white glare, and the thing would be accomplished. A badly frightened quadruped would perhaps go racing back along the trail, hair bristling with terror, but he would have left behind him a distinct photograph of himself before he had been stricken with fear.

His keen eyes told him this afternoon that mountain lions were using a certain deer trail that he discovered, and he was therefore jubilant. But he searched for a long time, studying this and that, before he set up the tripod of his first gun. It was so late in the afternoon when he had finished that he had not time to locate another stand for the second camera.

Late that night, he started from his warm blankets as the forest rang with

a sharp explosion. He sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, grabbed his electric torch and trained the beam on his watch.

"Twenty-three minutes after one," he muttered sleepily. "Don't forget that to-morrow, young fellow."

Next moment he was snuggling into the blankets again.

SHORTLY after dawn, he breakfasted, then crawled, breathless, through the chaparral.

The trap had been sprung.

He removed the plate-holder from the camera and set his trap once more in the same place. Since he had no dark room in which to work, he must wait until night had fallen before developing the plate. But at last, that night, he took the plate from the hypo-clearing solution with trembling fingers.

With a whoop of sheer joy he studied the exposure.

An immense bear was staring him straight in the face. Big-jowled, vicious-looking, his little eyes bored directly into Camp's. There was not the slightest evidence of fright in them, for he had been snapped in the fraction of a second before his senses registered the terrifying explosion.

Suddenly Ben Camp cried out again, louder than before. He had not at first realized the value of this exposure. For by every sign and token, he now knew that he had caught an immense silvertip, or grizzly, a species of bear almost extinct. Never before had Ben Camp gained a picture of a grizzly in his native haunts.

He danced about like a boy, the dripping plate in his hands. "Old Ephraim, by golly!" he yelled in jubilation. "Old Ephraim himself! Oh, I must get more exposures of that bear! I'll dog the life out of him. I'll snap him from every angle. He may not care for publicity, but I'll hound him like a cub reporter!"

It was indeed a big day for the young naturalist. The grizzly bear, the most ferocious of all bears, the largest, the rarest, was an animal that any scientist in Camp's particular line would have been proud to shoot.

No cannonlike explosion disturbed his slumbers that night. He was astir early, cooking his breakfast, chopping wood, feeding his horse and burro. When the sun was bright on the cabin he made a print from the negative, and "fixed" it. It made a wonderful picture, the big bear as natural as life, one huge forepaw thrust forward and planted, his piggish eyes glistening and full of intelligence, his massive shoulders hunched above him like the hump of a buffalo.

The print ready for inspection, he wrote a note to Justine, directing her to fire three revolver shots if she found him absent. He pinned it to the door with a pine splinter, and, taking up his rifle, started toward the chaparral, to visit his "line of traps."

About eleven o'clock, while he was crawling along on hands and knees, he heard a faint revolver shot from far off over the lake.

There came a second and a third, then silence. And Ben Camp knew that Justine Davant was waiting for him down at the cabin on Faraway Creek.

JUSTINE DAVANT'S red lips formed a little O as her unbelieving eyes stared at the photograph of Old Ephraim.

"First rattle out of the box," crowed Ben Camp, delighted at her emotion. "Bet you never saw him in the woods."

"Never," replied Justine, in an awed little voice. "I—I never saw such a bear."

"He's a grizzly! Old Ephraim, to the pioneers who crossed the Great Divide, and who had to deal with him."

"Why, I never knew of one being in this country!"

"That's the wonderful part of this game," Ben Camp told her. "One

never knows what he's going to catch in a camera trap. We don't know what strange animals are roaming the forests at night, slinking along the little-known trails, attending to their nocturnal business."

"Oh, may I have this print to show to Uncle Foster and the boys?"

"Certainly. As many as you want. I'm going to print more to-morrow. I —er—expected you yesterday."

"I simply couldn't come—there was so much housework that needed doing. But I've made up for my remissness; I've brought you a short one-man crosscut saw and a froe. Can you make shakes?"

"I've seen them made many times. Guess I could manage it."

"I'll help you. I know all about it." Justine laughed at her own presumption. "Let's fell a sugar pine and get at it right away."

"You tempt me," said Ben Camp. "But I really must be getting back into the chaparral. I don't know when Old Ephraim may take it into his head to leave this neck of the woods."

"Then let's let the roofing go for to-day," the girl suggested promptly. "I'd rather hunt bears than make shakes, anyway. Wait till I picket Mustard beside the creek, and I'll be with you."

"That's fine!" Ben Camp said, in elation. "You'll find it difficult traveling," he remarked, glancing at her worn, fringed *chaparejos*. "But so long as you're not trammelled with a skirt, I guess you can make it."

"Watch me!" she boasted. "I can go anywhere you can, and maybe then some."

"Then some" it proved to be. The girl of the mountains was as agile as an eel. Crawling, wriggling along in a prone position, breasting through the dense, prickly bushes, she soon showed Ben Camp just how to do it.

"I give up," he puffed, after half an hour of slow, torturing progress. "Le's rest. You've got the advantage over me. You're smaller, and therefore miss more obstacles than I do. Besides, you're showing off."

JUSTINE laughed, lay flat on her back under the dense branches, and wiped her fiery red face with her handkerchief. The sun beat down mercilessly. There seemed to be not a breath of air in that vast sea of locked chaparral. Her young bosom heaved as she lay there as naturally as if she were in her snug little bed at Ball Bar Ranch.

Ben Camp watched her. Her utter disregard of stupid conventions pleased him. He admired her confident manner, her poise, her freedom from prudery. In fact, he liked almost everything about Justine Davant.

An hour later they had penetrated the chaparral, and came out, panting, at the western end of the rubble slide.

They were clear of the chaparral now. The slide, with its peculiar, roundish stones stretched before them to the forest beyond. They had passed completely around the eastern end of the lake.

"If you crawl through here a bit and then come out to the edge of the slide again," she told her companion, "you'll see the remains of Uncle Foster's trail across it. And I think, too, that we'll find easier traveling."

THE girl's estimate of distance proved correct. They were exactly abreast the western end of the rubble slide when they finally emerged from the tall chaparral. Justine pointed to a string of rotting logs that thrust their butts out from the mass of round stones.

"That's what's left of the trail," she announced. "If the rubble were pitched off it, it would still be a trail for a considerable distance. It's near the middle that the big slides occurred."

Ben Camp stepped close. Then of a sudden he threw himself on his knees and stared at the ground. It was bare

here, and the wind had whipped away the tiny leaves of the chaparral.

He sat back on his heels after a short scrutiny and pointed dramatically at the earth.

Justine hurried to his side; and there in the fine dirt was what she at first mistook to be the imprint of an enormous human hand.

"There you are," said Ben Camp in an unsteady voice. "Only a grizzly or an Alaskan Kadiak could make a track like that. And, of course, there are no Kadiaks in this climate. Old Eph has been in this country before, a long time ago. He remembers the trail across the rubble slide; it was being used when he was here before. He was making for it when I shot him. The explosion turned him back. He's come around the other way—over the ridge—looking for the old trail across the slide. He's even been out on the slide a way. How long has the trail been abandoned, Justine?"

He didn't even realize that he had addressed her by her given name. Neither did Justine take note of it until remembrance afterward brought it to her mind. At the moment, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to do, under the spur of this new excitement.

"We haven't used it for over three years," she answered his question.

"Then Old Ephraim hasn't been here for over three years," Ben Camp said positively. "It's certain that he expected to find the old trail here, for he was making straight for it. For some reason he wanted to get beyond the slide, and was disappointed when he couldn't go this way. He's been here twice, apparently puzzled over the difficulty."

"I can name that reason," Justine said. "Beef. I believe I won't take that photograph to show Uncle Foster and the boys. Once they know that a grizzly is stalking the timber, they'll be out in force with rifles to hunt him down. That would spoil your research work, for they'd surely get him in time."

"Yes, yes." Ben Camp was still musing and spoke thoughtlessly. "D'ye know what I'm going to do, Justine?" (There it came again!) "I'm going to rebuild at least a part of this trail across the rubble slide, just to give the old boy a chance to investigate it, and get himself photographed again."

"I'll help you," offered Justine promptly and in a matter-of-fact tone.

Ben Camp looked at her studiously until her glance fell. He liked that ready, unconditional "I'll help you" of hers. In his mind he built up a fleeting picture—a rapturous picture—of a pretty girl always at his side, always ready with her stanch "I'll help you."

The picture glowed.

"Thank you," he answered simply. "Now let's become practical and hustle down for grub."

CHAPTER VII.

MAROONED.

"I DON'T like the looks of that sky a little bit," Justine Davant remarked as they worked their way down the hillside toward the cabin.

Ben Camp looked up. It was indeed growing blacker every minute, and the wind was rising.

"A storm is coming, all right," he said. "I think that perhaps you'd better hurry home as soon as you've eaten something."

"I'm not much afraid of a July storm," she replied. "They're usually short-lived this time of year."

Thunder was r o l l i n g overhead, growling portentously, by the time they reached the cabin. Now and then a ragged sword of lightning slashed across the blue-black heavens. The air was growing colder, too.

They had barely entered the cabin when the heavens burst. Almost at once streams of water were pouring

through the curled-up shakes of the neglected roof. Mohammed was getting a thorough wetting and was steaming furiously. Pools of water formed on the floor and drained off through the cracks. Ben Camp left the table and hustled his belongings into a dry corner, covering them with his canvas *manta*.

Justine continued to eat placidly and maintained cheerily that the deluge would not last.

Just after Camp had resumed his seat, however, the heavens seemed to be torn asunder with a mighty, reverberating clap.

"Struck a tree that time, I'll bet," Ben Camp observed. "Close to us, too."

Then for a time they ate in silence.

Suddenly Justine leaned back.

"What's that terrific, steady roaring?" she demanded sharply. "The storm was making enough noise before, but now— Why, it's Faraway Creek!" she added in some alarm at last. "What on earth—"

They left their seats and hastened to a window.

An unexpected sight met their eyes. Tiny Faraway Creek, which a horse could leap ordinarily, had overflowed its banks, and the water was spread out for twenty feet on either side. It was spreading still. The water was yellow with mud, and dirty white foam boiled in tufts of half-submerged grass.

"A cloudburst!" exclaimed Justine. "That was the terrific noise we heard a little while ago. And the rain is pouring still. Oh, dear! I might have known better, having lived in these mountains so long!"

"I shouldn't worry," soothed Camp. "The creek will subside shortly. We'll see the water begin to go down any minute now."

"That's not the point," the girl returned. "The difficulty is that, when Faraway Creek rises to any extent, the water spreads out farther up the valley and covers it like a lake. The soil of Rubble Slide Valley is so spongy that a bog forms immediately. No horse could cross the valley without miring. I do hope no cattle were over there when the cloudburst happened. No, there'll be no crossing of Rubble Slide Valley for many hours to come."

"Then how can you get home?" he asked, swinging about.

SHE turned out the palms of her hands, hanging at her sides. "I can't," she told him simply. "You see, this is one reason why Uncle Foster made the trail across the rubble slide. But, as you have seen, that trail is no more."

"How about crossing the ridge to the other side of the slide, and making it east that way?"

"Not a chance. That's a trackless wilderness over there. Cañon after cañon, processions of rocky ridges, layer after layer of straight-up-and-down hills, deep forests, sweeps of locked chaparral. Honestly, I believe it would take two solid days to reach Ball Bar headquarters by traveling that way. Oh, dear! I'm so stupid!"

"What can we do about it?"

"Nothing whatever. I'm trapped—that's all. And look! The rain is turning to snow! A snowstorm in July is not at all common up here, but it's always a possibility to be reckoned with."

"Well," Ben said hesitatingly, "Mohammed can keep us warm, I guess."

"He'd better," she laughed shortly, as she turned back to the table.

Half an hour later the rain had ceased entirely, and the ground was covered with a growing mantle of white. The effects of the cloudburst on the little creek were wearing off, and the waters were retreating rapidly to their banks. But the snow continued to sift down steadily, and the boggy soil of Rubble Slide Valley remained as treacherous as before.

"This is the limit!" lamented the

exasperated girl. But immediately she was her old serene self again. "But what's the use in worrying? What must be must. You'll have me on your hands for at least two days, even if it stops snowing and raining. Longer if the storm continues. So what do you say we make the best of it?"

"Of course. There's plenty of grub. Plenty of blankets, too, so long as we keep the fire going. We'll be snug as bugs in a rug. But—"

"Yes, I know. Men are so puritanical. The best of 'em are," she added, as a sort of present-company-excepted apology to him. "Lambert Abbie will be raving at my immodesty. Aunt Aradne won't say much, but her doleful look will convey volumes. Uncle Foster will nearly jerk his chin whiskers out, but he'll forget all about it an hour after I've returned. But I don't care!"

She tossed her head in a girlish gesture. "It can't be helped. So we're just going to forget it and make the best of a bad situation. And, so long as snow is falling instead of rain, we needn't sit here in this stuffy cabin. Let's get out and scout up a lot of firewood and pile it in a dry corner. Then we'll get at rebuilding Rubble Slide Trail for Old Ephraim to investigate."

"Perhaps we even may be able to reconstruct it so that you can cross," he suggested.

"Anxious to be rid of me already, eh?" she laughed. "No, Mr. Camp, there's not a chance. The slides in the middle are too big for us. Come—let's get busy. I'm atingle to be accomplishing something."

BEN CAMP smiled grimly. He was quitè aware that Justine Davant knew he was not anxious to be rid of her. In fact, a delicious thrill was coursing through him. The idea of being in close companionship with this adorable girl for at least two days gave a rosy color to his leaping thoughts. And his face must have mirrored the delightful turmoil in his mind, for Justine accused:

"You like it, don't you—even though you don't approve?"

"I'm glad that you realize I like it," was his straightforward answer.

Then Justine, realizing that the trend of conversation was bordering on dangerous ground, blushed as she remembered that it was she who had directed it that way.

Ben Camp's pack seemed to contain everything necessary to wilderness use and comfort. Soon, carrying a pick and shovel and an ax, the two were toilsomely working their way up to the western end of the rubble slide. They reached the beginning of the trail and set to work at sending the accumulated stones rolling down into the soggy valley, and rearranging the logs that had once formed a solid pathway across the treacherous slide.

Ben Camp was watching the girl ahead of him as he labored. She was using the pick to displace the larger stones, and her movements thrilled him. She worked like a "shovel stiff," with no hesitancy, no feminine awkwardness such as most women display when handling tools designed for men, and with a free play of her muscles that was pretty to see.

Suddenly he heard an unfamiliar ring from the point of her pick. She stood motionless a moment, then wielded the pick once more, whereupon the metallic sound was repeated.

Then the girl stooped swiftly and tugged at something with her hands. She turned in his direction a face suddenly flushed, and there was a strange little squeak of excitement in her voice as she called:

"Ben! Ben! Come here, quick!"

He ran along the rehabilitated trail and stood over her, his blood pounding because she had called him Ben.

"Look!" she cried, wide eyes fixed on him. "What is it? I found it among the round stones in the trail. I

—I thought it was only a stone that was almost perfectly round, but—it's so much heavier. And it rings when I hit it with the pick. Ben, it's iron!"

He dropped on his knees beside her. Before he had touched the perfectly rounded ball he realized that it was not one of the niggerheads that covered the hillside. With difficulty, because of its exceptional weight, he rolled it over.

There was a perfectly round hole in it about the size of a twenty-five-cent piece.

"Oooh!" gasped Justine. "What can it be?"

Ben's voice shook as he replied:

"It's a cannon ball, Justine. You've stumbled onto a clew to the old battle-ground of the Spanish emigrants—and the hiding place of the Spanish pesos!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A SHOT IN THE NIGHT.

THEY were in Faraway Cabin, and night was swiftly swooping down. The heavy cannon ball, badly eaten with rust, lay in the center of the floor. Ben Camp had rolled it down the hillside ahead of them. They sat and looked at it while waiting for the supper water to boil.

Justine was pensive. Chin in hand, she sat dreaming of the bygone conflict, picturing the beleagured caravan, the old flintlock rifles spitting fire, the "d a g s," as the Spaniards' long-barreled pistols were called, popping continuously, the occasional roaring of the little cannon, the bloodthirsty yells of the arrow-shooting Indians.

"But where can the treasure be?" she asked presently. "I'm thinking, Ben, that we don't know much more about that cache than we did before finding the cannon ball."

"That's true," he agreed. "It might have been fired from the other side of the valley, or it may never have been fired from a cannon at all. Perhaps the caravan was wiped out before they had a chance to fire this one."

"Then that would mean that their stand was on the ridge above the rubble slide. They would naturally take to such a place when attacked, don't you think?"

The naturalist nodded. "If they could."

"And perhaps," the girl went on, "the cannon ball lay up on the ridge for many years, and was finally dislodged in one of the innumerable slides that have occurred since the battle. It kept working down the slide as the stones kept shifting. Until finally it rolled into the old trail, and was held there on the level."

"Your theory is sound," said Camp. "And I think we'd better work on it first."

The snow was still falling, and the night was calm and cold. The forest about them gave out not a sound. Not even the murmuring of Faraway Creek, which was running almost normally again, disturbed the quietude of the wilderness.

The sharp noise which suddenly broke the stillness startled the silent pair. They looked at each other with round, wondering eyes.

Then a hammering on the door, smart, unmuffled, apparently caused by the butt of somebody's six-shooter.

Justine Davant looked helplessly about, as if seeking a place to hide. Then her lips straightened, and a courageous look settled in her eyes.

Ben Camp had risen. With characteristic presence of mind, he had set the sole of his foot against the cannon ball and bowled it noisily into a dark corner. Now, without a word, he crossed to the door. He threw it open and peered out into the night.

"Hello, pilgrim!" she heard him ejaculate. "Where in the mischief did you drop from?"

There was an unintelligible reply, and then the door swung farther in, and there entered a good-looking,

middle-aged man, dressed in cowboy costume.

Justine sprang to her feet. "Giles Rebble!" she cried.

THE cattleman came to a dead stop just beyond the door and stared at her. Finally he smiled.

"Why, hello, Miss Davant," he returned. "This here's an unexpected pleasure. I reckon I ain't seen you for a couple o' years. How 'bout it?"

"It may be that long," replied Justine. "How have you been?"

"Oh, so-so. I got caught out this afternoon in the storm. I was tryin' to haze out a little bunch from th' other side o' th' lake. Had no idea she was gonta blow when I left Hazy Valley, so I drifted out late. I got caught, miles from th' ranch house. Seein' a light in Faraway Cabin, I thinks I'll see what's goin' on in here, and maybe get a shakedown for th' night. But I didn't expect to find—er—you."

"No, I suppose not," the girl said stiffly. "Mr. Camp, allow me to present Mr. Giles Rebble, of Hazy Valley Ranch—Uncle Foster's most dearly beloved enemy. Mr. Camp is—is stopping here for a time, Giles."

The cowman shook hands with Ben, grinning broadly. "Yer uncle's most dearly beloved enemy, eh?" he chuckled. "That's good."

"I want you to make yourself at home here, Mr. Rebble," Camp said. "It'll be a matter of sitting up all night, I guess, since sleeping accommodations are limited. But, thank heaven, I've a deck of cards. Of course, being thorough Westerners, you both play?"

Both the girl and Rebble nodded.

When the meal was over, and the aluminium dishes washed, they gathered round the rickety table and played casino till the small hours of the morning. Then Justine, worn out, curled up in Ben Camp's blankets, and the men talked in lowered voices till dawn was close at hand.

Then suddenly, from the chaparral beyond the lake, there came a smart explosion.

Giles Rebble rose from his cracker box seat in surprise. "What the devil?" he barked.

Justine stirred in the blankets, turned over, and made no further move.

"Funny," said Ben Camp; and as he walked to the door to peer out, he glanced surreptitiously at his watch.

It was seventeen minutes after five. Had Old Ephraim fired a flash up there in the chaparral?

Rebble looked at him keenly as Camp, shaking his head, returned from the door. Then his glance coasted to a corner, where the yellow legs of a spare camera tripod protruded from under an upended packbag which Ben had thrown over it to protect it from the drip.

"Mighty strange—mighty strange!" the cowman mused, still studying the naturalist's face. "Can you imagine who fired that shot, Mr. Camp?"

"It may have been only a limb snapping off from the weight of the snow," suggested Ben.

Giles Rebble shook his head solemnly. "No, it wasn't that," he stated confidently. "There was powder behind that shot, Mr. Camp."

CHAPTER IX.

THE RUBBLE SLIDE.

THE storm had abated when morning came. Giles Rebble was free to ride on to Hazy Valley, to the west, but Justine Davant was still held prisoner by the bog.

She and Ben Camp waved good-by to the cattleman as he rode off through the grim, black trees, balls of snow shooting backward from the hoofs of his galloping bay. When he had disappeared the girl faced her companion.

"Well," she remarked, "he seemed suspicious, didn't he?"

"About what?"

"Us—and the explosion early this morning." She smiled at his astonishment. "Yes, it wakened me, but I played dead. Rebble made a mistake in stating that he had been trying to *haze* a bunch of cows out of this neck of the woods. He should have said he had been hunting for a bunch of cows. If he was driving them toward Hazy Valley, where did he leave 'em last night?"

She gave her shapely shoulders an expressive shrug. "He was well-heeled, too," she pointed out. "Packing a pair. Giles Rebble isn't a two-gun man—why the heavy hardware?"

"Let's don't manufacture mysteries," Camp laughed. "We've work to do. I think it was number one gun that was fired this morning. Let's get up there and see if the trap is sprung."

"And then for the treasure hunt? Dear, dear! We've so much to do that—"

"Yes?"

"That it will be unfortunate if the storm is over for good, so I won't have an excuse to stay and help you." Her guilty laughter rang on the frosty air.

Merrily they started out from under the snow-laden branches of the pines, off across the flat to the lake, up to the fringe of the chaparral that covered the steep hillside beyond.

"You'd better stick here," he suggested, as they reached the edge of the jungle. "You're wearing riding boots in competition with my hobnailed hikers. It 'll be wet and slippery under that chaparral. You'll get soaked."

Despite her reckless mood, she realized that he was talking sense. Sighing with disappointment, she seated herself on a stone.

"Go on," she said gloomily. "Have all the fun. And come back and tell me about it as soon as possible. But say—before you go, gi'me those binoculars. I'll look for Giles Rebble's cows—if any."

He unslung the leather case from his shoulder and passed it to her.

AN hour later, panting out steaming breath, he crawled from the chaparral to find Justine missing from the stone on which he had left her seated. He called once, then raised his voice and called again.

Her response came from the left. "I'm over here," she announced. "Crawl back in the chaparral and work around to me under cover."

Wonderingly he obeyed, and came out presently behind her.

She handed him the binoculars. "See that tall bull pine across the lake? Follow a line straight west from it along the ground. Tell me when you pick up something unusual."

He moved the glasses slowly as she had directed, and presently his lips parted in amazement.

"Giles Rebble!" he cried.

"Sure. What's he doing now, Ben?"

"Sitting on a log close to the butt of a tree. Seems to have a telescope trained in our direction. Resting it in the crotch of a limb to steady it."

"Yes. I should think he'd be getting tired. He's been up to that ever since I discovered him."

"Has he seen us?"

"You, perhaps. But I don't think he knows I'm here."

She crooked a finger before her lips, resting her elbow on a knee. "Thunder!" she muttered in exasperation. "What's the answer, anyway?"

Ben Camp raised the binoculars again. Then quickly he gasped:

"Another one, by golly!"

"Another what?"

"Man. He just rode up to Rebble. Now he's getting off his horse."

In her excitement Justine rather impolitely wrested the glasses from his hands.

"Carey Backus, Giles Rebble's cousin and partner. The plot thickens! Carey must have camped out in the forest last night. He couldn't have

ridden from Hazy Valley this morning. That means they've an outfit with 'em, and—"

"And what?"

"And are here for an indefinite stay. Hunting for something, I'd say—not cattle. Maybe cannon balls."

"I think you're getting close to the truth," Camp praised her. "Yeah, you're getting hot."

For perhaps twenty minutes the young adventurers kept in hiding, occasionally watching the strange pair across the lake. Then the cousins mounted their horses and rode off through the woods.

THEY scoured the other side of the lake with the binoculars once more, and seeing nothing of the cousins, they set out along the edge of the chaparral toward the rubble slide. Before long they were once more plying pick and shovel, but now they studied every stone carefully in the hope that it might turn out to be a cannon ball, shaggy with red rust.

They had been at work about an hour when, from far off over the slide, there came a long-drawn "Who-hoo!"

They straightened their aching backs and listened.

"What now?" asked Justine of the surrounding silence.

The call was presently repeated, and, on impulse, Justine answered it. "It may be some one in difficulty," she explained.

Her cry brought an immediate response, and for a long time there was silence.

Then a figure hove in sight, approaching across the slide. It was the figure of a man, and he was afoot and walking with vast difficulty. He was crossing the slide on what remained of the old trail, and his task was dangerous and exasperating.

As the two watched him they saw him slip several times, as the round stones rolled beneath his feet. Twice he went down entirely, and on one occasion he sprawled flat, clutching wildly upward, while an avalanche of stones went bowling down into the valley from under his body.

"He's taking a desperate chance," the girl commented grimly as she watched the man's slow, precarious progress toward her.

"Turn the binocs on him," suggested Camp.

"No need," she replied shortly. "It's Bert Abbie."

"Coming to rescue you, of course."

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt. And isn't it nice of him! However, I certainly admire his c o u r a g e. I wouldn't attempt to cross this slide for anything. Look! There he goes!"

And going he was. He was shooting feet first down the steep slide, and below him and above him the stones were bounding down, some of them leaping into the air like tennis balls, threatening to crush his skull. They saw his clawing hands—clawing at nothing that would hold. They saw his desperate efforts to plant his feet where there was no solid thing to plant them on.

"Oh! Oh! He'll be killed!" wailed Justine.

Then miraculously the sliding body stopped short. Over it poured the round stones, their smart clacking, as they struck one another, reaching the watchers' ears. They fairly boiled over him in their mad race for the valley, and he was lost to sight.

Justine's face was as white as paper. She threw an arm before her eyes as if to shut out the cruel spectacle. Ben Camp's lips were set in a firm, straight line, and the sight made him sick.

But suddenly he cried: "Look! Look, Justine! He's getting up!"

THE cow-puncher had indeed made a superhuman effort, and his head and shoulders came up from the mass of rocks, reminding Ben Camp of a gopher emerging from his burrow. Buried waist-deep in the

niggerheads, he reached forth his hands in an effort to stem the deadly tide.

Justine turned away her head again.

"He's making it!" Ben Camp cried suddenly. "The slide has stopped above him and is tending toward his left. He's all right."

Justine looked then. Something, perhaps one of the larger stones which was embedded deep, was holding in its place, and had turned the tide away from the unfortunate man. The roaring of the rushing stones now filled the air, as literally thousands of them went bounding downward; but, temporarily at least, Lambert Abbie was safe.

Presently they saw him lifting stones away from his body. One after the other he drew forth his imprisoned legs. Then, deliberately seating himself on the slide, he as deliberately went shooting to the valley floor below, riding on the crest of the new slide that this created.

They saw him pitch headlong on the snow at the foot, leap to his feet, and, limping, stumble away from the avalanche with all speed possible.

"Thank heaven!" cried the girl. "He can't be badly hurt."

The two left their tools and hastened along the trail to the hillside spot that was covered with the new growth of chaparral. As speedily as possible, they made it down the hill to the foot of the slide. And as they hurried on they saw Abbie limping toward them across the snow-covered grass of the valley, his feet now and then sinking in the boggy soil so that he extricated them with difficulty. They faced one another finally at the foot of the hill.

"Bert!" panted Justine Davant. "Why did you try it?"

THE foreman of Ball Bar Ranch looked a little sheepish as he grinned at them. But he immediately forgot his embarrassment and the throbbing pain in his leg, and launched forth upon the matter that had caused him to take such a risk.

"Justine, what does this mean?" he demanded harshly.

Justine withdrew her sympathy at once. "What does *what* mean?" she countered coolly.

"You know. What're you doin' here with this fella?"

"Bert, I warned you once regarding such insinuations!"

"But you was here all night!"

"I couldn't cross Rubble Slide Valley because a cloudburst overflowed Faraway Creek and made the valley an impassable bog. You know, as well as I do, that a horse—"

"Yes, I know all that. You needn't tell me. But why didn't you start home before the storm?"

"Simply because I didn't choose to. And that'll be enough of your impertinent questions, Bert. My stay here was unavoidable. I'm not such a fool as to try and cross that slide, as you did, and I didn't care to walk in the mire, even if I could. That's all, thank you. Except that I think you are utterly stupid to make my affairs yours to the extent that you thought you ought to come for me despite all risks."

Lambert Abbie glared at Benjamin Camp, who returned the venomous look with a cool, indifferent stare.

Then Abbie swung about on the girl again. "If you knew what's happened," he said, "you wouldn't wonder at my comin', and wouldn't try to be so smart."

"And what is this momentous event?" she demanded.

"Yer Uncle Foster has flew th' coop," the man replied. "Gone—vanished. It was yesterday. His horse come home alone, all lathered up and trailin' his reins, and th' saddle was splattered with blood! All splattered with blood—and there was a bullet lodged in th' back o' th' cantle. A .45! Maybe you feel like laughin' *that* off, Justine Davant!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Whirlwind Walsh

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Pagan Ruby," "Twenty-Stick Island," etc.

Whirlwind Walsh wore the red coat of the Mounted—the red badge of courage and relentless pursuit in the great North Woods.

They were flung forward as if from a catapult

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

RAPIDS OF DEATH.

AT Haute Terre portage, just before the Brulée River makes its wide, swift sweep and straightens out for its entry into Treaty Lake, the voice of the rapids, which has been a mere murmur, almost to be confused with the wind in the trees, changes swiftly from its warning whisper to a hissing, sibilant, menacing slap and rush. Some trick of echo flings it back up river and bids the *voyageur* beware.

In the midst of the rapids is the Cauldron, ever boiling. Further down are the two rocks called by the *habitants* "*Les Deux Femmes*"—"The Two Women"—between which it is hard to steer safely. Then comes the cascade where the bank on each side narrows and heightens to a gloomy gorge, where green-black waters, streaked with foam, like liquid marble, fall to a wild pool in which eddies lash and savage billows climb, spouting spray, flinging spume.

After that it is not so bad—if one gets through to talk about it. There are few, even of the hardiest liars, who brag that they have shot Brulée Rapids. Liars do not like to be laughed at.

Joe Walsh, of the Mounted, had always wanted to try it. It challenged him, appealed to the spirit ever rampant in him to pit his youth, his strength, his nerve and coördination, the very quality of his soul, against the hissing surges, the chances of the whirlpool and the fall. He had looked them over

more than once. He took desperate risks often and enjoyed them, but he was not entirely foolhardy.

He decided it might be done with two men and you had to be just as sure of the other as of yourself. Now, as Jean Paquet steered the canoe out of the main current toward the landing, Walsh wondered if he would do. If he had a fault it was that of personal initiative and he itched to tackle the wild white water. Haute Terre portage was long and hard, a narrow, scrambling, rocky trail that wound up over a high ridge, the way beset with thrusting bowlders and stumps, trees so close that it took clever maneuvering to swing pack or canoe between them. Hard and slow but safe.

There were men at the landing. Five had disembarked from two canoes. One of the up-ended craft was just visible among the trees, going up the trail on the back of a carrier, followed by two others with duffel. On the little beach, waiting for the rest to get a fair start there stood a big, heavy-set, bearded man, his fists on hips with hairy bare arms to the elbow. He spoke to his companion, pointedly addressing his remarks so that they would be overheard by the Mounty and his companion.

"One time we got ahead of the Mounties, Lenoir. They hate to lose the right of way. Figger them red jackets make 'em cock-of-the-woods."

"Black Baldwin," said Paquet in a low voice as he backed his paddle, his tone so charged with bitter dislike that Walsh looked at him in surprise. He had heard of Baldwin and been expecting to see him sooner or later. Some said he was head of the gang that had stolen furs from many trappers when absent on their trap lines. Two had been found murdered, long after all sign of evidence had become useless.

"Look who's here," Baldwin went on jeeringly. "Jean Paquet. You joined the police? You ought to stay closer to home, stick around more if you want to keep thet gal you've bin sparkin'. She's too pritty to be left alone. She ain't bin. I'll tell her you're trailin' me in."

Walsh could see Paquet trembling with rage and set a hand on his knee for caution.

"Go ahead with your portage," he said to Baldwin crisply, "or let us through. This is government business." Baldwin spat in the water.

"Yah!" he jeered. "I know who you are—Whirlwind Walsh. You'll hev to whirl some to get ahead of me. I've no use fer you or the redcoat you stall with. I'm takin' my turn an' time on this portage an' you an' all the government can't hurry me. Any message for Rose, Paquet?"

"Let's go, Jean," said Walsh quietly. "We're wasting time. The rapids have never been run, but I've a notion you and me can tackle them. How about it?"

Paquet's dark eyes glowed, met the blue, sparkling gaze of the Mounty. He wanted to beat Baldwin in. He was not afraid of him, any more than he was afraid of the rapids. Now, with Walsh along, he was in just the mood for trouble.

Baldwin could not hear what was said, but he saw their intention as they swung out, into the downstream current.

"GOOD-BY," he mocked. "An' a damned good riddance, redcoat. I'll comfort Rose, Paquet."

Jean took out his rage in a few boiling strokes, then settled down to work. There was Gascon blood in Paquet. In Walsh's forbears, born in turbulent Ireland, it was hard to tell what viking blood ran swift and strong. They were well paired.

Walsh set his paddle deep over the curving bow, Paquet turned his blade at the curving stern and the graceful, light canoe with its skin of bark that a rock would rip as a knife rips paper, swung out again away from the land-

ing and the beginning of the blazed trail.

They said no more. It was action they wanted, a gamble, a test of strength and skill, and already they were in the grip of the central current, gliding fast to the beginning of the curve with the chant of the white water welcoming them in what might be a tribute of victory or a dirge.

They had need of all they possessed of prowess, both physical and mental. A faulty stroke, a miscalculation of pace and space and they would never get out of the rapids alive. Eye, hand, brain and heart had to work together in perfect accord and judgment at the right moment. Sinews of steel, muscles of rubber, the perfect eyes of men which, when perfect, are far better than animal eyes, more adjustable, more sensitive to reaction. The two were dependent on each other.

Their eyes were bright with hope as they rounded the bend and picked their way through that maze of water. Green undulations shouldered over hidden rocks. Gleams of white hinted at reefs and spoke of swirling eddies, angry flashes of white foam showed where death lurked as they went sweeping on, born on a flow of the powerful current. Quick paddle dips alone saved to swerve them aside from the quick, deadly thrust of a surging leap of water, uncoiling, striking like a serpent.

White water as far as they could see. White water spotted with the backs of bowlders that no age of flow could render smooth, carving out the softer parts, leaving sharp fins and ridges where the stubborn granite stood whetted to keen-edged fangs.

An Indian, standing at gaze, close to an illegal trapline, out of the man-decreed season that he, as the natural heir of this wild kingdom, disregarded, was still as a tree trunk in shadow. His eyes became luminous as he looked at the two madmen careering down the shouting river. He knew both, and he deemed them both mad. Risk like that, for the sheer love of daring, was not in his nature. They would die.

THE bed of the river began to narrow, to coop up the waters, to enrage them, pile them up in a wild protest against the obstacles that held them back from the lake with which the laws of nature compelled them to mingle.

The spray was slightly tinged by the green twilight from the towering overhanging trees. The coils of current were sable, flecked with malachite. By them, their shape, their speed, the men had to judge, without mistake, the contour of the river bed. A giant's broken stairway over which the torrent poured, impetuous and unrestrained, fighting every fathom of the way with tremendous force compressed by the narrow gorge, the deep rifts and the gullies in the bottom.

The dip of their blades was swift, strong and precise as the swoop of a gull or a kingfisher. They were not for speed, the river gave them that as it fled like a stampede of wild horses, stamping, rearing, shrieking with upflung manes. A wave of water soared and a stroke sent the frail craft clear of the rock as the curving billow sank and showed the ledge that seemed to leap up at them and then retreat.

Jean, watching Walsh, his back, the play of his shoulder muscles, made helm and they leaped clear, the light craft turned like a living thing. Every second was packed with danger. Their jaws were tight clamped, little muscles bulged out, cords and knots played under their skins as sinew and tendon responded. Their eyes gleamed with excitement. They were gambling with death, but they were living and reveling in the play.

The Cauldron showed, a seething maelstrom, the voice of the river deeper, louder, the gloom intensified. Spray leaped up in a wild slaver. The canoe slewed and swerved, bucked, leaped high, fought and struggled in all

its lithe length. It seemed to undulate as, guided by the deft strokes, it writhed its way over the boiling pot. Now came the two rocks, twin pillars, broken, water-lathed stubs of columns barely ten feet apart. Between them, submerged, was a sort of saddle, misshapen, that caused the spout of water that broke over it to twist dangerously.

Walsh's blade touched one pillar, grated against it, almost had it torn from his hands by the violence of the erratic pull of the current. The stern was tossed by a rush of solid water and Paquet barely held it free of the opposing rock.

Now the gorge loomed in high, mossy walls on either side. They had to leap true, and dart out at right angles to the cascade, to land fairly on even keel, ready to plunge in their paddles and guide the canoe beyond the wild pool below.

The sweat poured off them, yet they were cool, calculating every hazard, their keen glances searching the dusk of the deep ravine, noting every curl, every break of the furious tide. Walsh stroked and set the bow straight as a rider puts his steed to the hedge. Paquet's blade, sidewise for rudder leverage, held the canoe so as its prow shot clear and, for a quivering pulse-beat, they seemed poised on the brink, then were flung forward as if from a catapult.

They came down, to be instantly seized by the savage jumble of swirling eddies. Breaking pyramids of water, tossed and hurled them about. The canoe shuddered through its length as its rounded keel barely missed a hump and they dug with all their might to keep away. A blind billow slogged the bows. Another came and the canoe tipped over, went whirling along upside down like a leaf as they fought in the turmoil. Walsh came to the surface, swimming powerfully, but battling without progress. He saw Jean's head appear, blood showed and his eyes closed as he sank. Walsh dived after him, knowing the other had struck a rock. He could not see in the tumultuous seething madness of the pool, but his groping fingers touched cloth and dug in. Up to the surface again, pounded, swept here and there, bruised but making desperately for an eddy that led to slack water.

Almost exhausted he dragged Paquet, already regaining consciousness, with him. It was fortunate that Paquet had kept senseless. A limp tow was far better than a man half realizing what he was doing, thinking himself drowning.

IT was not a bad blow, for a man like Paquet. He sat up, grinned ruefully and retched, while Walsh hurried to where the canoe had been flung ashore. Jean joined him as he lifted it and together they examined closely the beautifully joined seams. Means of mending were close at hand, bark and spruce gum. But first they gripped hands.

The friendship of men forgives faults, but when it is based upon respect it is built upon a rock, enduring. Paquet, admiring Walsh's strength, loved him for his spontaneous grin in the face of odds, the acceptance of a challenge. He respected him for his official position.

A man had to have nerve to be a Mounty, but he needed tact, intelligence and a knowledge of human nature to be successful. Walsh felt his own judgment vindicated. It was good to find a friend who stood the test. Friendship, he knew, was like a sword; unless it was used in conflict one was never sure of the weapon. He was sure of Paquet. He would do to take along. Breed he might be, but it takes mixed blood to make a thoroughbred.

Their mission had been a simple one. This was a trapping country, but there had been rumors of a strike of gold in the hills beyond Lac St. Pierre and Walsh had been sent to investigate, with Paquet as guide.

There was a trading post at Treaty Landing on the other side of Treaty Lake. Fur traders were there, a clustering village, a mission and a mounted post. A sergeant named Garvey; Walsh, already with his corporal's stripe, and a private—Avery. There was coöperation with the Forest Service, that included government rangers and amphibian airplanes that helped in the great survey from the air that Canada was making of her empire.

There was the enforcement of the trapping and hunting laws, with due discretion that permitted Indians and all those who actually needed the game for subsistence, to kill out of season, but which must be administered wisely for due protection. There was also the grave question of missing trappers who had been staked by the Fur Trading store and who had not come in.

Paquet, Walsh believed, would be a useful man. This was a land of lakes and river. The Mounty often had to exchange his horse for canoe, for snowshoes and skis. Paquet had once been a trapper. He knew the craft and the country. Walsh was minded to recommend him highly to Garvey, outside of the fact that he had made a friend, he liked the other's disposition.

Gayety was a characteristic of Paquet, for all his Indian blood. And, like Walsh, he loved the bright face of danger, he worshiped what the *habitants* called *La Princesse Lointaine,* the lure of the faraway. That handshake was the grip to the brotherhood of the "adventurous elect," whose initiation is no easy one, that has no spoken passwords.

There was only one leaky seam, soon mended. While it dried they lay down and smoked their pipes. Presently Paquet knocked his out and sang softly the *chanson* of the Three Ducks and the King's Son. Walsh, knowing a little *patois,* joined in the refrain.

"En roulant, ma boule, en roulant ma boule."

Presently Paquet spoke, as to a brother. Not as to a mounted policeman.

"I think I may have trouble at the Landing," he said.

Walsh said nothing, but relit his pipe, a sign that he was ready to listen.

"Last season I trap many tree-marten," said Jean. "They are very good an' dark skeen. Worth much." Walsh grunted. He knew that the arboreal marten of British Columbia was almost equal to Russian sable, alone of its kind.

"I find those marten. It is March an' I am on trap line. I return to my *cabane* an' some one has been there. They take all my skeen. All those good fur. I think I know who. It is the same man, who has other men with heem, Black Baldwin; he, they say, has try to steal my girl, Rose Belleau. She not say much, but I know he has annoy her. He will annoy her no more. Eef he is at the Landing, I, Jean Paquet, will speak with heem. *Oui."*

It was spoken softly, but Walsh, through his smoke-wreaths, saw Paquet fiddling with his knife. His pulse went up a beat. He knew of Black Baldwin. They believed him the head of the fur hi-jackers, who waited for the trappers to catch, stretch, and flesh their pelts, then robbed them as the eagle robs the fishbank. If a man resisted he was heard of no more. But there was no proof.

"You must do nothing outside the law, Jean," he said. "If you can prove anything we will help you."

"*Merci, mon ami.* But much of this is my own affair. For the rest, if I can aid you, I will do so. The gun is dry. Shall we go on?"

CHAPTER II.

A WHIRLWIND BATTLE.

SOON they saw ahead the placid vista of the lake, mellowing in twilight. On the opposite shore the bells of the Mission sounded soft-

ly. An amphibian plane was heading south to Fort George. The shadows of the wooded islands stabbed the lake with deep reflections. Fish leaped. But they did not notice these things. They saw only the two canoes, one of which held Baldwin, a quarter of a mile from shore.

"How's the head?" asked Walsh. Their delay had lost them the advantage of the swift passage, but it was not over yet.

"It weel be cure' as soon as we pass him," said Jean, and they bent to their work. They had lost their duffel in the pool, and it gave them the lighter craft, but Baldwin had two men with him, and it was a hard-fought race. For almost a mile they stroked on even terms, beam to beam, first one and then the other gained a little. Two hundred yards from shore Paquet gave a grunt and Walsh started the spurt. Their blades flew in the overhead stroke of the voyageur, the water seemed to boil at every surging lift of the paddles. They shot ahead and held the lead, grounding on the shelving beach. Walsh left Paquet to stow the canoe and went to the Post.

"So there was nothing to the strike," said Sergeant Garvey. "I thought so. I've got war talk straight from Ottawa, Walsh. We've got to clean up the gang that's stealing pelts an' making away with the trappers. Got to make good.

Walsh nodded. He did not talk about his hunches.

"I've a bit of a lead," he said, thinking of Paquet. "I'll follow it up."

Garvey nodded. He knew his corporal and did not cramp him, though he felt that, like a young blood horse, he sometimes needed a curb. By the time a man is a sergeant in the Mounties he has learned many things in the way of handling men.

"Hop to it," he said. "Means promotion for all of us."

Promotion, to Walsh, meant a good deal. Self-justification meant more than increase of pay and importance. Black Baldwin, whether he was guilty or not, was the sort of swaggering bully he disliked. But his hunch, the needle of the corporal's mental compass, pointed to him unerringly. He saluted and went to the trading store, which was also saloon and dance hall, designed to bring all profits to the company.

A bright scheme to keep good trappers in the service and hold a debt over their heads, while providing them amusement at their own expense.

It was supper time. Walsh meant to eat later at the Post, but he knew that many men would be at the bar in the trading store. It was probable that both Paquet and Baldwin would be there. Rose Belleau he had seen. Girls to Walsh had meant little. He was not woman shy, he liked to talk to them, admire them, dance with them, and jest with them, but his own life lay ahead, clear of what he felt might be a limiting alliance.

This was essentially a man's life with little for a woman to share. A Mounty's pay was sufficient for one; it was the service attracted him, not wages. It would be too small for two, and he had not the nature of Paquet in that respect. Not yet, at all events.

But he knew Rose Belleau for a girl who fascinated many, though not deliberately. She would not have much use for Baldwin, he fancied, a big, swaggering, boasting bully of a man, almost a giant, uncouth in his cups, wanting to be cock of the walk, and take all he coveted.

BALDWIN outmatched Paquet in stature, but not in spirit. Yet, if there was a clash, and if Baldwin, as usual, was surrounded with the rascals that made up his camp and helped to bring in the furs he sold every spring, furs that might or might not be stolen, it was likely to go hard with Paquet. The victory did not always go to the fearless.

The store itself was empty save for a stolid buck and his chaffering squaw, fingering fineries that would cost the buck ten times their true value. Some one was playing an accordion in the bar. Half drunken voices tried to blend in harmony to the tune. Suddenly it stopped as the Mounty strode to the door between the two rooms and looked in.

Paquet was facing the bearded Baldwin, black as the knave of spades. The latter was leaning against the bar, while Jean Paquet, like a bantam cockerel plumed and spurred against a great rooster, with hands on his hips, looked up at the grinning face of Baldwin. Their tense attitude had stopped the music and brought a swift hush on the assembly. Some stepped back from the bar, others lounged there, with Paquet between them and their own leader. Part of Baldwin's gang they were; camped on the lake shore, in no hurry to go into the woods as long as their money held out; roisterers and rascals all.

For the moment Walsh was unnoticed, all eyes centering on the leading characters in what promised to develop into tragedy.

"So, I think you like to steal too much, Black Baldween," said Paquet in a clear voice. "Of some theengs I will not now speak, but, as to my girl, you leave her alone."

Baldwin shook with laughter that seemed real enough.

"*Yore* girl?" he bellowed. "What girl would look at a runt like you? If you mean Rose—"

Paquet launched himself from the floor and his fist streaked upward, full to Baldwin's mouth, to keep from it the name of Rose Belleau. It was a shrewd, hard blow and blood spurted from the big man's lips. He swung, and Paquet ducked as one of Baldwin's followers kicked him viciously. Another struck as Baldwin did, so that he staggered and then went down before the concerted, cowardly attack.

They had him on the floor, ready to boot him when Walsh leaped forward and yanked a man away by the collar of his mackinaw. The tough weave tore and the man went spinning. Another turned with an oath that died as Walsh smashed him with a jolting left and stood over Paquet, who was slowly getting to his feet, dazed from a kick near his temple.

The crowd stood back. The scarlet tunic might not be exactly sacrosanct; there was those there who hated it, yet they respected it. It was a symbol of authority that was convincing, not lightly to be challenged. Even Baldwin's men stood off, leaving the issue to their leader.

Baldwin spat blood, cursing.

"What in hell are *you* interferin' fer, you snoopin' redcoat?" he demanded. "This is none of yore affair."

"No? I'll make it mine when a lot of cowards jump one man. And that goes outside of the redcoat, Baldwin. I'll take that off and forget it, if you're man enough to go ahead. The rest of you lay off or I'll figure I'm still wearing it. This is man to man. Paquet is my friend. You've nearly knocked him out between you, but I'll take his place. You've got the weight of me, Baldwin," he added coolly as he swiftly stripped off his tunic and belt and laid them on the bar with his gun and hat, "but you might be in better shape. You've got too much belly. You've been living too high. I'm going to trim some of the fat off you. Take care of those things of mine, Gaspard," he added to the man behind the bar, a son-in-law of the storekeeper. "Put up your gun, Baldwin, and peel."

THERE was murderous intent in Baldwin's features, as they congested with rage. He dared not use his weapon. Savage as he was, he was not going to shoot a Mounty in a public place. There were too many witnesses who were not his own men. The

trader might suspect where he got all his furs, but he was protected by actual lack of knowledge. He was not going to fall foul of the police.

He had been drinking, he was confident of his own strength, and he had thirty pounds the best of the trooper, now tightening his belt and rolling up his sleeves. But not all was brawn. He was conscious of his girth, a bit too flabby, too ponderous; but he had been bearded before his own men and he meant to take advantage of the corporal's offer.

"Man to man, is it?" he sneered as he tossed belt and gun on the counter. "I'll smash the daylight out of you."

He had no coat, wearing a checked mackinaw which he turned back on his hairy arms, swelling with muscle. He hated a redcoat as a bull hates the cloak of the *toreador*. Whether Walsh wore his or not, he was still a trooper. his enemy, and that of all his following. He glanced at them meaningly and they formed the inner ring of the circle that hemmed in the rough floor.

Paquet, still shaken and dizzy, tried to interfere.

"This is my job, Jean," said Walsh. He knew that Baldwin would fight foul, if he could, but the joy of combat was in him. He did not fear blows, but he meant to be wary of a rush, wary of the same treachery that had downed Paquet. There would be no rounds, save as they parted mutually; no quarter. He was off duty, so far as he ever considered himself off. He had set aside his uniform with his tunic and his gun.

Paquet, who had shot the rapids with him, had been hurt. It was man to man and would be a good fight. His eagerness shone in his eyes as he stepped back alertly from Baldwin's rush and the ring gave way while Paquet, hand on the haft of his knife, watched weakly to see that others kept clear from his comrade. He could still sting and he so warned those who crowded too closely.

Paquet knew what they had tried to do to him, and what they would do to Walsh if they got him down. Walsh had stepped outside his official position, and all who looked on would testify to his direct challenge.

Walsh ducked the two wild swings. His straight left went home to Baldwin's hair-cushioned jaw, already stained with blood from Paquet's blow. His right drummed hard to Baldwin's middle, a knuckle cut on the belt buckle, which brought a grunt as he sent in his left to the same place and flung off Baldwin's clutch with a hook to the chin for full measure.

There were muscles underneath that fat, though; Baldwin was stung but not winded. He came on like a bear, bludgeoning blows that Walsh took on his shoulders, the top of his rolling head. One was heavy enough to jar badly and the next second Baldwin had him in a clinch, wrestling, trying to trip him, to get him back against the bar, using his weight. His eyes glared as he ripped out oaths, while Walsh strove coolly to pinion those arms, tough as oaken boughs. Baldwin got his right free and drove it in the small of the other's back to see him wince as the blow hurt his kidneys.

For the moment he was off his balance, and in that second Walsh wrenched free and swung the other man back to the counter, while he smashed him twice, cutting open the flesh over Baldwin's cheekbone, bruising his eye. He sprang back from Baldwin's upthrust knee.

Bloody and bellowing, Baldwin came with a rush that was not to be denied. His great fist caught Walsh below the ear, the other, aimed low for the groin, hit the hip as Walsh squirmed away and, dazed a little, lashed out for his bearded target. He got clear and stood panting opposite Baldwin, rallying himself, his brain clearing. It was a hard slog. He had to be wary. Play for the wind. Now, before Baldwin got full breath again.

He feinted, crouching, felt the wind of Baldwin's swing as it grazed his shoulder and then he was inside the other's guard, planting hard jolts to the belly, driving his man back, circling about him. He saw Baldwin's outfit shift to keep back of him, he glimpsed Paquet's blade, free from its sheath, and shouted to him:

"Keep out of it, Jean. This is my fight. No knife-play!"

TWO men, outsiders, caught hold of Paquet and forced him backward. They wanted fair play, and they themselves meant to interfere if Baldwin's crowd played rough. There must be no bloodshed, save from fists. It was a good fight.

But they were slow, being occupied with Paquet, when the trouble came.

Baldwin, half blinded, furious, laboring for breath, but with strength enough to hurl himself at the lighter man, was willing to kick and gouge to bear him down. He took a straight left that rocked his head, but did not stop him, and then Walsh, sidestepping, pivoted and brought up a ripping smash from the belt that caught Baldwin on the point.

He reeled, his knees sagged and he slumped against the bar, clawing at the rim of the counter, sinking until the back of his head brought up against the hard wood with a thud that might well have stunned a lighter man. His thick skull and heavy hair saved him that. His eyes rolled, but the blow seemed to restore his faculties, though his legs were failing him; he was slipping.

Walsh stood back. He meant to finish him if he stayed on his feet. He had the fight won. Baldwin's face was a mask of raw and bleeding flesh. His left eye was closed and he had shown himself vulnerable. He hooked an elbow to the bar, heaved himself erect and grabbed his gun that Gaspard, watching the fight, had left unguarded.

Paquet tore himself away. They had got his knife from him, but he flung himself at Baldwin, diving for his knees while the bully lifted his weapon, out of control, seeing none too well with his right eye. His men closed in.

A knee struck Paquet and sent him stumbling while Walsh seized another henchman of Baldwin and hurled him against his leader. Then the Mounty jumped away and seized a chair from a card-table, leaping back to the fray with it held in front of him as a shield. The pack was on him, but the lust of facing great odds swept through him, as a bullet struck the thick seat of the homemade piece of furniture and stayed there.

The impact did not stop Walsh. He was on them, among them, jabbing with the legs, swinging the chair and beating down Baldwin in the mêlée. Rungs broke over Baldwin's head, the tough wood of the seat sent him down like a length of chain. Walsh, with a shout, charged the rest who broke as he flung the broken chair at them and retrieved his own gun. The long Colt swung back and forth in his hand as he menaced them. He was an officer again and they shrunk before him, conscious that they had left themselves open to his authority. His voice rang clear, lashing them. None dared move a hand toward his own weapon, knowing a bullet would end that attempt.

"You would, you cowardly pack of skunks?" he said. "Clear out. Take this scum with you. Don't come back. Clean out. Get out of Treaty Landing."

He was himself a little out of hand. But thought of what he might or might not be able to prove against them with Paquet's aid was not clear. He was still filled with the glory of the battle, a cold madness that he was mastering in the thought that he had deliberately stepped outside his authority in the beginning. This had been his own affair to start with; now the issue was a little confused.

Baldwin was still out, breathing

heavily where he sprawled on the floor. Paquet had come back and picked up his gun, standing beside his friend, his own man again, ready to prove himself.

"Break that gun, Jean," ordered Walsh. "This fight is over. Give it to them."

He was right. The pack was through. The courage had gone out of them with their leader's fall, though they glowered with a sullen resentment that the trooper ignored. He was beginning to think of what Garvey might say. He had had a good time, he had downed his man and the blood still was swift in his veins from the fight—but, for all that the men were scoundrels, the sergeant had his own ideas about such matters. He had been known as "Get-'em" Garvey in his youth, and he still possessed most of his energy, but his impetuosity had been curbed by his growing authority, the dignity of the Mounted.

Walsh slipped on his tunic again as two of them stooped over Baldwin, and, handling him none too gently, dragged him backward by the shoulders until the other two picked up his feet and they shuffled out with him. Walsh borrowed a bar-towel, wiped his damaged hand, poured some whisky on the cut and buttoned up his tunic, adjusting his belt and setting his service sombrero on his head.

Gaspard was obsequious. The others had nothing to say, still a trifle awed by the fight and its whirlwind finish. Walsh, though he did not realize it at the moment, had played a good card for the Mounties. Their prestige did not need bolstering, but an object lesson was never amiss in the wilderness.

"It wasn't your turn this time, Jean," he said, slipping an arm over the other's shoulders. "They got you foul. But I think he'll leave your affairs alone."

"*Mon Dieu!* I agree, weeth you, *mon ami*," said Jean. "As for me, I do not forget." He spoke earnestly, the emotional Latin in him showing strongly. Walsh laughed and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Your turn next time, Jean. What's a fight among friends?"

Paquet laughed with him, a little wistfully. He felt that he had cut a rather sorry figure.

"I go to see Rose before some gossip tells her I was fighting about her in the store. She weel not like that. She is wonderful, is Rose, but she is what you call spitfire. *Oui?*"

CHAPTER III.

MURDER!

HE turned off and Walsh started to walk back to the post in the twilight. He glimpsed Baldwin, on his own feet now, walking groggily back to his camp on the lake shore. Walsh sensed that Jean was right, that news of the brawl would spread fast through the settlement and reach Garvey as well as Rose Belleau.

He did not regret so much the ordering of Baldwin out of Treaty Landing. He felt that Garvey would be apt to approve that, though he might not appreciate what led up to it. As long as they had nothing definite on Black Baldwin and his outfit they could not hold them. Walsh was already trying to work out some plan by which pelts might be privately marked, a sort of brand that robbers would not notice, by which they might ultimately be trapped. He had not yet mentioned this half-formulated scheme to Garvey.

Garvey heard his account of the battle in silence, did not speak for a minute or two.

"Eat your chow," he said. "Stay in barracks to-night. I don't blame you, Walsh. I don't know that we could have got anything on Baldwin while he stays here, and the Landing 'll be better off when he's gone. But he's not gone yet. Your order was unofficial. I'll take a turn myself and maybe have a word

with him. Your blood heats a bit too much, lad, when there's a fight in sight. It's not a bad fault and you'll grow out of it, as I did. Make out your report and then turn in. You'll be needin' sleep."

That was a true prediction. Walsh fell asleep as soon as he struck the bunk. He was awakened by Avery shaking him. The room was lit up. Back of Avery was Renard, the storekeeper.

Garvey had been killed! Renard had found him back of the store with a knife between his shoulders stiff and cold—dead for some time. It was after midnight now.

Walsh leaped from his bunk fully awake, alert, dressing swiftly. He felt that he was in a measure responsible for this. Garvey's service tunic, the scarlet which was dark in the gloom, but unmistakably a Mounty's uniform, the fact that he and Garvey were about the same build, gave him a hunch that Baldwin had mistaken the sergeant for him. He sent Avery for the priest at the mission, doctor as well as carer for souls. Two men were bringing Garvey up, though Walsh would rather he had not been touched until he saw him. He was laid in his bunk. Two hours dead, the missionary said. Walsh's face set grimly.

"I'm leaving you in charge," he said to Avery. "You'll send a runner to Fort George; Grison can go, with a report I'll write as soon as I've looked round a little. You'll have to run the post while I go after the men who did this. Get Garvey's things together. Father Roche will help you. Garvey 'll have to be buried. Keep a stiff upper lip."

"You think you know who did it?" asked Avery.

"I've got a damned good idea," answered Walsh. His natural buoyancy had crystallized to stern resolve. He felt a certain responsibility for the disaster. "I'll not come back until I get him," he added.

Just as he was leaving, he ran into Paquet, who was breathless.

"I go to see my girl," panted Jean. "We quarrel because she say I hav' no right to breeng up her name when I fight weeth Baldween, when I tell heem he mus' leave my girl alone. Rose say, 'I am *not* your girl.' It is no good to try explain. Those women talk too fast an' too much. So I am go away, mad; I walk in the wood by Baldween's camp. He is gone. You drive heem out. I see those two canoe, far off, in the moon which have jus' come up. They make toward Mouche River. They go beyond the beeg woods to the barrens. I watch an' smoke, long time. Then I come back an' jus' hear the news. It is Baldween who do thees theeng. He look for you, an' keel the sergeant before he go. Now we go after heem!"

Paquet's promise was good news to Walsh. He could find no better man for tracking, for wood knowledge, for some experience of the district into which Baldwin had gone—always presupposing Baldwin guilty. But he could not start without some proof. The Government did not recognize hunches.

"Fine!" he said. "Now come with me."

IN the guarded alley they found a sign in the soft dirt. It was the trail of a moccasined foot, the shoepack of a man who travels much on woodland trails, in canoes and on snowshoes; but it had its characteristics of size and impression, and both men studied the marks closely by lantern light until they had the sign photographed upon their sensitized minds. They would know it anywhere, recognize even a part of it. It was largely a matter of length and the fact that the knife-thrower trod a little heavily on the outside of his right sole. Neither could attribute this to Baldwin, or to any other man; but it might well have escaped casual observation. Walsh made two or three

measurements with a cord, and then they went into the store's back room and living quarters.

Renard the storekeeper was there and his son-in-law, Gaspard, the man who had tended bar and taken over the weapons of Walsh and Baldwin—as far as guns were concerned. He had done a poor job of guarding them and Walsh had not forgotten it. Gaspard was cunning rather than stupid, Walsh surmised. Jean came with him. There were others there, including Gaspard's wife, and Walsh sent them away.

"I want to talk to you two," he said crisply. "I'm going to talk straight and you'll do the same, if you know what's the best thing for you. Renard, a lot of things are going to be cleared up in the next few days. If you want the benefit of any doubt that may come up concerning pelts you've bought, you'll come through; and I'd strongly advise you to do the same, Gaspard."

He set down on the table the knife that had killed Garvey. There were stains on the broad blade that curved at the bottom of one edge, with the top of the other flattened toward the hilt. All about the fitting of the haft, blood showed dark and sticky. The two men looked at it fascinated.

"How many of these knives did you buy; how many have you sold; how many have you got in stock? This is the law talking, Renard. Come, out with it!"

He was not sure, but there were ninety chances in a hundred, at least, that the knife had come from this store. Renard answered, slowly and huskily, as if he saw some faint handwriting on the wall and wondered if its translation would involve him.

The sergeant's death had shocked him. He was, like his son-in-law, cunning and crafty and it had seemed a smart thing to deal in pelts he knew well enough were not honestly come by, to buy them cheap because of that knowledge, to shield the sellers—all under the very nose of the law, as one might sneak a bone away from beneath the jaws of a sleeping mastiff. But the law aroused was a different matter.

He knew all that lay back of the symbol of Walsh's red tunic, his set lips, and eyes often dancing and merry, but now hard as flakes of mica.

Renard was still inclined to be tricky, to say no more than he had to. That was one lesson he had learned long ago—to keep quiet. But he would have to show his books, his stock. This probing corporal might know more than he appeared to, might be trying to trap him.

"I hide nothing. I buy one dozen of these knives. I have sold maybe one, two. How many, I do not know. To whom I cannot say. Gaspard also has sold them—is it not so?" He gave his son-in-law a meaning glance. They looked like a couple of foxes caught in a chicken yard, not quite in the coop, but too close to be innocent.

"Jean, you go with Gaspard, and bring back the package, whatever it is, that holds the rest of 'em," ordered Walsh. "I'd like to see your bill book, Renard."

Walsh's brain worked swiftly and smoothly. Gaspard might try to hide some of the unsold stock. If they had sold only two or three it would narrow down the search. There was no time to lose. He ached to be out on the lake speeding after the two canoes he was convinced held the criminals. That would be hazardous, but it would be clean action. Not detective work with two crafty *habitants*. Renard fumbled among invoice files and Gaspard and Paquet came back with nine of the knives. Paquet made a quick motion that Walsh understood.

"You sold the sheaths with the knives, part of the regular purchase?" he asked. The blade would not fit every ordinary sheath. Some one had an empty one, or had craftily got rid of it—and it might turn up.

"Now, then, Renard, how many of the three did you sell?"

"I don't remember."

"How about you, Gaspard?"

"I sold none." His tone was sullen. Walsh strode suddenly toward him, his eyes blazing, his hand on the butt of his gun.

"You'll talk," he said. "You let Baldwin get his gun. I'm not overlooking that. Talk!"

GASPARD quailed before the hot will that emanated from the Mounty. He shrank against the wall.

"I sold one to Paquet," he said.

"I have it here," answered the latter. Walsh whirled on Renard. He glanced at the trader's sales-bill, noted the date. The knives had been purchased to retail for the spring trading.

"I remember selling one," said Renard. "It was to Harvey Young."

"I want to see your trade book," demanded Walsh. He knew that Renard kept carbon copies of the bills he made against the trappers who, when they had discharged their previous debt, seldom paid cash for anything in the store.

"Baldwin's account is the one I want to see," he said. Renard produced it unwillingly, and Walsh ran down the items until he came to the one that read: One R & M knife and sheath.

The R & M trade-mark was on the murder knife's blade. He had what he wanted. Young was out of it, a man who lived twenty miles in, stolid breeder of silver foxes.

Baldwin was his man!

He left the room and two confused and alarmed traders, Jean following him back to the post, where he wrote his report in short, but precise language, telling what had happened, his suspicions, the proof and motive, the fact that Baldwin and his men had at least three hours' start, headed for the north—and that he was after them.

"If I do not catch him before he gets through the forest," he said, "it will be a long job. I suggest coöperation with Forest and Survey Service and their planes."

He added more as to his probable route, signed it, handed it to Avery, with Grison waiting to ride to Fort George, anxious to assist. Then he turned to Jean:

"You'll come with me?"

Paquet did not need to speak words; his glance answered for him. Walsh gathered rations and ammunition, duffel for the trail, and they were down at the landing where Paquet's canoe was hauled out.

Without a word, linked together in the adventure, they loaded, paddled out, moving with an even sweep that drove them fast. They kept in the shadow, though Walsh saw that they would have to cross the moon path heading in to Mouche River. He was not much worried about the immediate trail. Mouche River was the only route.

The woods were dense. If their quarry left the stream it must be by the blazed and hewn portages, but Walsh believed they would keep straight on, trying to hold their lead to the barrens. There the trail would be harder to follow. Once they won through to the hills it might take weeks to locate them He did not care, personally, if it took months. He would get his man. And Paquet would be with him, expert in the wilderness, fired not only by the desire to even matters with Baldwin. but imbued with the same spirit that possessed Walsh.

In this they were kindred. Nothing else mattered but their quest. Even Rose was set aside in Jean's thoughts. Walsh knew it in every swirling powerful stroke from Paquet's paddle, timed to his as they judged the wind and surged on. Over all his own grimness, his feeling of duty, of responsibility, his spirit was charged with exultation. This was no easy

task. Baldwin would not meekly surrender; once he knew he was trailed he might fight back.

Walsh did not underestimate him, putting himself in Baldwin's place, the gallows ever looming like a shadow across his path. If he was Baldwin he would set a watch to see if he was followed. It was Baldwin who was wanted; there was nothing definite against the rest. Once they entered Mouche River the pursuers would be in constant peril, and Walsh loved it, as the blooded horse loves the water-jump and the high fence.

His manhood thrilled to it, inspired by worthy cause. He did not speak to Jean. Lighter though he was, Paquet's skill matched Walsh's strength. They balanced their efforts, and the light canoe seemed to dance across the water. The few lights in Treaty Landing were left far behind. Star reflections twinkled to the dip of their blades, a loon called and dived and called again in a jeering note they did not heed.

At last they were forced to glide for a space in the silver of the mirrored moon as they neared the dark gap where Mouche River came in. They felt the strength of its current and dug their paddles deep, with muscles tensing willingly to the test.

CHAPTER IV.

AMBUSH.

THERE was no challenge, though every moment Walsh expected to see the brilliant flower of a gun-flare show in the blackness, to hear the shot ringing over the water; or not to hear it—to be deaf forever to all things. This was the risk of the game, the chance that spiced it.

Then they were in the tunnel, beneath overhanging boughs. Ahead, white water showed in pallid gleams, and they heard the sound of its hurry. They dared not go too far. They had to halt at the first portage and search for signs of a landing by their prey. Walsh was glad he had Paquet with him. Good as Walsh was, he did not have the local familiarity that gave Paquet instinctive knowledge of where they were as they fought against the tide of the swift stream. Their eyes were used to the darkness, the rapids were not dangerous, and Walsh saw every swirl in time, conscious of Jean's ready rudder-blade back of him.

Had it not been for the death of the sergeant he would have been jubilant. They were at grips with fate; life and death hung on the throw of a dice. It was their wits pitted against those of the men who, the moment they knew they were pursued, would plan relentlessly to outwit or destroy them. His sheer joy in the job in hand was leavened with hate, seasoned with recklessness and anticipation.

"*Psst!*" came from beside him as they neared a curve. He withheld his stroke and Paquet steered the canoe into slack water. They were at the first portage. There was a two-foot bank of dirt. The flash of Walsh's torch showed no sign of a prow mark, of any landing, but they painstakingly made sure. Nothing.

The next portage was seven miles on, leading to a chain of lakes. It would be close to dawn when they made it. It had been a long day for them, what with traveling the Brulée, the excitement of the night, and lack of rest. Walsh had eaten at the wedding feast and Paquet was also fed, but both knew the handicap of tired men in a stern chase. Jean knew a spot by a small inlet, a mile ahead, where they could get a little sleep. The others had to rest eventually. Baldwin was not much use in one canoe, and all had been carousing. They would not go very far. Walsh wanted to find out if he and Jean had been sighted in the brief space they had driven the canoe through the moonlight paths.

They swung their craft to the inlet,

lifted it from the water, made a fire from birchbark and deadfall. Soon its flickering light showed two forms muffled in blankets. Dawn was coming, an hour away yet, but manifesting itself in many ways. A fresh fragrance stole from the forest, the tang of balsam and hemlock and pine, of herbs. The stars were still steady, the moon rode overhead, screened by the trees. Little by little the deep purple of the night bleached out. The still, swathed forms showed no sign of movement.

The silence was rudely shattered by the vicious bark of guns. Red and blue and yellow stabs of exploding powder-gas stabbed through the trees, the reports rang through the quiet woods, awakening the birds. Bullets thudded into the blanketed bundles, shot after shot, until cylinders were emptied.

Then the vague, elusive shape of a man darted to where the canoe showed dimly by the fire and kicked at it, only to crumple and fall headlong as other shots came from the trees in a swift fusillade. There was the sound of scrambling, stumbling men crashing through the undergrowth, sought out by leaden messengers. Silence again while gray light filtered through the foliage.

Walsh and Paquet met by the fire, reloading their weapons, looking at the limp body that sprawled over the canoe. They had made dummy sleepers and had hidden themselves to the bracken, half expecting some such rally. So the fugitives were warned. Three had remained behind to attack while Baldwin forged ahead or lay concealed, hoping to hear that the pursuit had been wiped out.

The man groaned once, but he was beyond speech, riddled. Walsh flashed his torch in his face and recognized him as Jeffries, one of Baldwin's men. They went through his pockets and found only a pipe, some tobacco, a greasy pack of cards and a few coins. Walsh took off his belt with its cartridges, and Paquet picked up his empty gun. The light was seeping through the forest, enough to show the damage done to the canoe. Jeffries must have been told off for that purpose, leaping in when they thought the sleeping figures were dead men.

One gone out of four. Three still to reckon with, and the hunters' canoe, their steed, was damaged. It meant more hours of advantage to the murderer and his fellows. Paquet examined it carefully.

"I HAVE seen worse," Jean said philosophically. "I go an' look for bark."

Walsh kicked the fire together, to get breakfast. There was no immediate fear of further attack. They had shown themselves ready against surprise and killed one man out of the four they were pursuing. That there were more men than these connected with Baldwin, however, Walsh firmly believed. It was probable that they had a headquarters to which Baldwin was heading, as he would have done in any event after he was through with his trip to the landing to sell the furs and bring back supplies. If Baldwin once joined them the odds would be more than merely formidable. Walsh did not worry over them, the thought was only stimulating, stiffening.

He hauled the dead man away from the canoe he had tried to wreck. There was no time to bury him. He must pay his penalties. If the larger woods scavengers did not get rid of the body before it was discovered, the ants and beetles must do their work. His death would not hearten Black Baldwin, nor would the total failure of his first coup.

It would take the messenger Grison twelve hours to reach Fort George. Walsh could not tell what action might be started there to aid him. In the meantime he had to play the hand as the cards fell, make every effort to overhaul Baldwin before he got too

far away. And Baldwin might decide to try again to wipe out the two of them.

It was so easy for men to die, to disappear in the wilderness; hard to prove murder without actual witnesses. Walsh had the evidence of Baldwin's crime with him, in the knife. Without it little could be done toward a conviction. A dozen men had heard Walsh order Baldwin to leave. He would not be the only guilty man walking free in British Columbia.

Paquet returned, bringing selected strips of bark which he set down carefully and weighted with stones to iron out the curl. They ate before they set to work, talking between bites, talking again as Paquet removed the damaged spot, trimmed the patch and Walsh heated the pitch and gum, then helped him put the new bark in place. It was not gossip, but the terse conversation of two men intent upon dangerous business.

"I theenk they make for Lac Platte," said Paquet. "They maybe go up P'tite Rivière to Lac Vert. It is somewhere there that they stay when they are in the woods. Beyond Lac Vert is the theek forest."

"They won't travel very fast for awhile," Walsh said. "There will be only one man for one of the canoes, and they've got a lot of stuff with them. Heavy, most of it. I saw the bill at Renard's. Ammunition enough for a dozen men."

"Perhaps there are one douzaine," suggested Paquet, with a grin that Walsh returned. "They weel have hard work on the portages."

The sun was high when they put out into the stream once more. The rib of the canoe by the damaged place was sound; the repairing had not been a very hard job, but it took time. They set themselves to their task with strenuous muscles, bucking the stream, spurting at every chance in smooth or slack water, reaching the second portage. Here they found plain signs of landing. Walsh studied the tracks. Paquet quested about, following other indications that led to where they had hidden one canoe in the brush, caching part of their supplies in a spot Walsh did not bother to disturb. They were on the trail, and were probably gaining on their quarry—but they were at least six precious hours behind.

Walsh took the duffel pack with a tumpline strap about his forehead and climbed the steep pitch first, carrying his carbine at trail. Paquet had his rifle slung over his shoulder as he came after the Mounty, looking like some strange creature of the woods with his head, arms and torso hidden in the canoe he bore.

It was hot and the sweat rolled off them as they traversed pitch after pitch, ridge after ridge, crossing swampy places where they sank to their calves, plagued by the flies that, inured though they were to such things, took vicious toll; black flies, mosquitoes, "no-see-ums," as the Indians called the tiny sandflies, and the savage deer flies that, when they bit, took with them their morsels of flesh instead of merely stinging. Walsh fought them off with a green bough as a fan, and Paquet had some protection beneath the canoe, but it was an ordeal not slightly to be gone through.

AHEAD, showing clearly in the moist places and softer spots, were the tracks of Baldwin and his two followers. The print of the man who had stood in the alley between the store and warehouse was unmistakable. Walsh stooped and measured it, though it was not necessary; both he and Paquet knew it well. There was the suggestion of heaviness on the outside of the right foot. It was the print of Baldwin, the man who had killed Garvey, thinking perhaps it was Walsh, but at any rate knowing it was a Mounty.

Lac Platte was finally in sight, long, narrow, winding and shallow, its water

green as emerald. The trail led to the weedy margin. Water held no sign, but it was shown wherever landing was made, and so thick was the tangle of the woods, the jumble of deadfall, punk-logs, vines and undergrowth, that progress, save by the blazed trails, was as difficult as in a tropical jungle.

At the far end of the lake the narrow beach again revealed the tracks, this time under water where the little stream called Petite Rivière had formed a bar over which a laden canoe could not pass unless the men waded and helped it over the obstruction. It was so even with Walsh and Paquet, traveling light and with only two of them to an eighteen-foot birchbark. The quiet water had not washed away the prints.

There were no rapids here. This stream was the connection between the two lakes, with its source in the slightly higher one, Lac Vert; but there was barely fall enough between the two to give it steady flow so that they paddled swiftly up its lily-set reaches in the late afternoon.

All about Lac Vert the trees of the primeval forest were massed in solid regiments. The sun, too low, could not penetrate them. The surface of the lake, unriffled, was like a dull expanse of metal, unmarked by rise of fish or dive of loon, silent and sinister, the air chilly, the sky overcast with a scud that was tinged by the sunset to a somber, smoldering crimson that swiftly faded into purple, then murky gray that darkened and shut off the light.

There was no sound of life of any kind, but to both of them the atmosphere was charged with something definite; a baleful suggestion of evil brooded over the spot. They could not tell, for the time, where the canoe had gone, unless landing had been made on a little promontory that jutted out into the lake to their right, a place bereft of trees, partly covered with grass and bushes.

Halfway between lake and mainland stood a log cabin, its roof sagging, an unglazed window a black gap. No smoke issued from the tottering chimney. It appeared utterly deserted, and yet both men looked at it with much the same instinctive suspicion that a lynx regards a deadfall. It suggested a trap, even though it seemed absurd that a trap should be set or used in such an apparent place.

Paquet had not been to Lac Vert before. The territory was thick sown with such bodies of water, usually preempted by some trapper whose unwritten rights were tacitly respected by wilderness custom. So Paquet had purposely avoided the spot, though he knew well enough its relation to the surrounding country. There were no lakes north for many scores of miles; only the dense forest, the barrens, and the rugged hills.

The cabin had been that of Old Bill Lawlor, dean of the fur-trappers of that region. Lawlor had been found dead—what was left of him—on the floor of this cabin whose logs he had hewed and morticed with his own hands. It was hard to tell what had killed him, because of the condition of the corpse. The door was open, and wild beasts had come at will; but his catch was gone, and Old Bill had been a good trapper.

Paquet told Walsh this as they held the canoe close to some willows, peering at the rapidly fading landscape blending with the shades of night. The chilly air was stirring at last. A deep sigh came from the forest as the tree tops bowed in a gust of wind that was followed by another and another until the noise was like that of surf on a lee shore.

An owl hooted solemnly, almost in deliberate warning. Three times it called, and they saw it flit out from a dark avenue of the trees, passing in ghostly fashion along the open until it disappeared.

"I do not like that," said Jean

Paquet. "Why, I do not know, but it make my flesh creep, it breeng to mind all the silly tale, an' for a moment they seem true."

"WE can't help those things," Walsh told him. "They're instinctive, handed down from old times, they say. I've kin in Ireland who believe in banshees, and there are plenty to-day who go by omens and warnings.

"I've got a tickling scalp myself right now, that has got nothing to do with my will. It's just the sort of night to suit a killing; there's the cabin where one was brought off; the owl looked like a ghost trying to tip us off; we've got men who'd like to get rid of us; the whole thing ties up in a bundle.

"Just the same I'm going to take a look at that cabin, mainly because I've a notion I'm just a little afraid of it. We won't find anything. But it's going to be a wild night before long, and it's starting to rain already. A roof will be handy. It's better than camping in the open, and there's no sense at all in trying to follow trail to-night.

"It took me a long time to learn the other man tires just about the time you do. It isn't going to be simple to trail them through the forest, and that is likely where they are this minute. Taking it easy. We'll need a fire to-night, and it's less likely to be seen in the cabin. It's not the killing of a man in a house that makes it spooky—it's the knowledge of it. There are few houses in the big towns where some one hasn't died."

"Not murdered," said Paquet. "*Moi*, I go where you go, *camarade*. But I do not like that owl."

The rain began to come down in earnest. The tree tops were beginning to lash angrily. Little waves were growing steadily on the lake with curls of white that revealed their crests. They shipped water more than once as they paddled to the promontory and made a landing, carrying up their craft some distance, transporting their duffel to the deserted cabin where wood rats scuttled at their entry.

There was wind-drift against the door, but at least it closed, though the latch was broken, as if the place had once been stormed. It was of heavy planks, and at first it stayed in place, while they hung up the lantern they had brought with them and started to make themselves as comfortable as they could.

The window had a shutter which they shut and barred. There was some rough furniture, a built-in bunk, a sheet-iron stove, old clothing and blankets of the dead trapper that had been moth and mouse eaten, cooking utensils, traps and stretchers. There was wood enough to cook with. They had their own bedding, though it had been drilled with bullets.

Walsh saw Paquet's eyes bulging as they sat at the table to eat. Jean was facing the door, which began to slowly open a short way and close. The owl hooted again.

"By gar, I have what you call hunch!" he said. "Thees is not a good place for us. There is sometheeng outside that wants to get in." And the rising wind howled round the shack like a banshee, while a torrent of rain flung itself against the walls and roof, and lightning winked blue and vivid through the cracks in the shutter. Then came a roll of thunder, far off but ominous of storm.

Walsh's Gaelic blood curdled, but he controlled it with his reason. Nevertheless, the situation was eerie, the air full of static, and he did not blame Paquet, whom he knew to be stanch enough when it came to action.

"If there's any one outside, we'll soon find out," he said, getting up from the table and throwing the door open, intending to seek some means of keeping it closed. There came a livid blue flare of lightning that turned the dark

lake into a sheet of troubled mercury, thrust the pines into sharp relief, and, through the silver wiring of the rain, showed two canoes deep in the water, filled with men, paddling fast for the promontory.

The light of the lantern made a silhouette of Walsh, and almost at once a bullet thudded into the door jamb beside his head, while the flame of the shot showed at the head of the promontory.

Two shots came from the leading canoe, going wild as Walsh leaped back, thrusting the telltale lantern back of the stove and muffling it with a robe from the bunk. He told Jean to shove the table against the door, then flung open the shutter that commanded the lake and the canoes he had seen, and, rifle ready, waited for the next flare.

It came, and, in the blinking duration of that lavender glow, he emptied his magazine at the leading craft, almost broadside on, finding the range with his first bullet in the fierce, merciless light spraying the length of the canoe with lead along the water line of its scanty freeboard.

THROUGH the wailing of the tempest, that rose and fell in sudden, shrieking gusts of augmenting fury, he heard faint cries. The thunder cannonaded, and, as Walsh thrust in shells by feel through the loading gate of his weapon, the lightning came again, as all revealing as the flash of magnesium powder in a photographer's gallery.

The canoe was laboring, wallowing, sinking; it was leaking all along the water line where his lead had perforated the bark, and without doubt had scored hits on the kneeling men. They were huddled in confusion. He saw the second canoe making for them when the blackness closed down like a shutter and there was only the roar of the wind and the hiss of the rain.

In the dim light given by the screened lantern he saw that Paquet had slipped through the door. It was a brave move and might be a strategic one. Better to cope with the enemy in the open, in a dodging skirmish, than to be besieged in that cabin whose door would not hold for a second against a ramming tree-trunk.

He resolved to follow suit, to seek cover between flashes, changing from time to time. He would oppose their landing, break up their attack with an offensive of his own. They meant to wipe him out, to get back the evidence against Baldwin, but, he muttered as he slid through the door and felt the wet lash and hard pelting of the rain, the beat of the wind, they were going to have one hell of a time doing it! Just that: a foretaste of the place to which they were all bound, while Walsh—Jean Paquet too—would be in a little fighters' heaven of their own.

There came two sharp cracks like the noise of cane-strokes on rugs set out to be beaten; then another. Pistol shots, all of them. He saw the sharp bursts of fire, wiped out instantly, and then there came a discharge of electricity that covered the whole horizon, flinging everything into sharp and painful relief. Whipped waters, writhing trees, a scurry of black cloud, from which the thunder came, nearer, louder, crashing overhead and seeming to flatten the world with its tremendous roar, like the firing of seventy-fives, while a bolt came javelining zigzag down to the forest.

The shots had come from the promontory end. Walsh had a vague sense of one figure crouching and one falling as he raced forward, carbine in one hand, his right hand on the butt of his service revolver. Jean was in action. No more shots came from the lake. That fusillade of Walsh's, the whirlwind play of it, had crippled and demoralized them.

As he ran, he saw to the left the disappearing prow of one canoe, that was sucked down into the lake in the same second. He saw struggling figures, a

head that vanished, two arms upflung.

The second canoe was making for the forest shore. The men who had been forced into the lake and who could swim, swarmed about it, clutching at paddles, at the frail gunwales, and there was the faint sound of babel, like high notes from a muted violin as those in the canoe cursed the swimmers, fought them off, prevented them from clambering in and swamping them.

The craft fairly crawled along, dragging weight, tipping perilously, the blades hampered.

Walsh now gave them his second magazine, kneeling, the target blotted out before his second trigger pull. He fancied he was a trifle short and elevated slightly, blazing away through the darkness and then leaving his rifle to go leaping on to see what had happened to Paquet.

Now everything else but sheer exhilaration had vanished. His brain was leaping in physical joy that excluded all motive, responsibility. It was the fight that counted, the challenge of such odds as sent the red blood racing to throb in his pulses and tingle in his fingertips. A hail came to him. It was Jean!

"Jus' two of them, *mon ami.* One is een the lake. I have the other. By Gar, we ween!"

It wasn't over yet, but they had assuredly scored again. Lightning bathed sky and land and lake in vivid light. The canoe was heading close to shore now, making for a spot where a blighted or blasted tree stood out like a gaunt phantom of the forest. Walsh marked that spot even as he saw Jean standing over the prone body of a man who tried to raise himself on one elbow, groaning, falling.

He saw the face, stricken with terror, horror and pain, and it was the face of Gaspard, Renard's son-in-law. They had been followed! Renard's guilty conscience, and Gaspard's, had sent the latter, with another man who was now in the lake, a bullet in his brain and his lungs filled with water, destined to be food for carnivorous fish—sent them to wipe out the Mounty and his aid, in case Baldwin had not, or to coöperate with the trail-robber as they had done. The first delay had given them their chance—and now they had lost it, forever.

TOGETHER they carried the badly hurt man to the cabin, closing the door and shutter, unveiling the lantern. There was no danger any longer, for that night. Half of Baldwin's hi-jacking crowd had been wiped out, by lead or water, or both.

They laid Gaspard down on the floor close to the bunk before they cleared away for him the huddled mass of furs and blankets. He was shot through the lungs; his breath wheezed and his eyes rolled hideously. Crimson froth was oozing from his lips. Death's cold hand was already on his sweaty forehead. He glared about the cabin, his face working.

"*Dieu!* Not here! Not here, I beg you! It was here he died."

"You mean Lawlor?" Walsh's brain was working fast now, shuttling to deductions, conclusion. Gaspard had not many words to speak before he faced ultimate judgment.

"*Oui.*"

"You killed him? You're dying, Gaspard. Clean your soul."

"I keel. *Mea culpa.* I confess. A priest—a pri—"

The broken syllable was his last. He gave a convulsive shudder, the froth changed to an awful gush of blood, and his feet drummed the floor as he flung out arm and hand that lost all vigor suddenly. He was no longer a man, but a limp, lifeless body. His hand rested against the bunk of Old Bill Lawlor, whom Gaspard had slain two years ago. Then later he had married Renard's daughter and lived at Treaty Landing, aiding his father-in-law to handle the stolen peltry. Paquet

crossed himself. To his mind, Gaspard's guilty, unshrived soul was already in Purgatory.

Walsh looked on coldly, without sympathy for the murderer and thief. His broken confession would involve Renard, but insufficiently. He took up the lantern and swung it over the dead face and body. Suddenly he stiffened. The lifeless finger pointed to some marks on the sideboard of the bunk, a scrawl of pencil that faded out after a few words, the lead scoring the soft pine of the slab. Words that might have gone unnoticed, that had passed observation so far, until the dead hand revealed them.

"Where did they find Lawlor, do you know?" he demanded of Paquet.

"I heard," said Jean. "It was right here, where Gaspard lies. That was what make heem so affright. They theenk Lawlor try to crawl to his bunk after they leave heem here for dead."

"Look here. He tried to tell who did it. He died trying."

The lantern light showed the painfully set down words of the robbed trapper who must have got the pencil he carried to score his skin-tally, kept on a pine board on the wall of his cabin. They read the record:

BALDWIN LENOIR GASP—

"We'll cache this plank," said Walsh. "We'll bury Gaspard. You're witness, Jean."

Paquet stared and nodded, a little bewildered at the find, the swift deduction of the Mounty.

"By Gar, you get them," he said.

"We haven't got all of them yet, but we will—Baldwin and Lenoir. But you're hit, Jean!"

He saw blood on the other's sleeve, high up. Paquet grinned.

"It was not Gaspard, but the other," he said. "It is nothing. Jus' in the flesh."

He stripped off his coat, rolled up the sleeve of his shirt, still grinning. The bullet, answered by Jean's deadlier shot, had gone through the brown flesh of his arm above the biceps. The wound had closed and was no longer bleeding. At the back of Jean's arm Walsh found the bullet, bulging a little through the skin. He made an incision with Jean's own knife, squeezed out the chunk of lead. Paquet flexed his arm. The muscle was undamaged.

"Spruce gum will feex," said Paquet.

Walsh went out into the storm, that now was close to its height. He carried the lantern, blurred by the downpour; fought forward, bent against the wind, to their canoe. Finding what he wanted under the tarpaulin, he returned and dressed the arm. He threw blankets over Gaspard; when the storm lessened they would bury him, for later exhumation.

It was impossible for them to cross the lake now. The furious squalls broke on it with such fury that no canoe could make the trip. The lightning and thunder still persisted, solid waves of wind seemed to make the cabin rock, blowing through every crevice.

CHAPTER V.

RED DEATH STALKS.

THEY listened to the howling of the storm, hoping for it to abate, impatient at the renewed start the others must be getting. Three times they tried to launch the canoe and were beaten back by the fury of the wind, the choppy, savage seas, the stinging downpour. Between times they brewed coffee, went over their weapons, and made up their rations into two packs since, once across the lake, there would be no more canoeing. They tried to relax, but the tension of the chase could not be shaken off. They were like hounds at fault, impatient, quivering to get on the scent once more. They had more respect for Gaspard's body than for the man living, and they left his corpse inside, to be later retrieved.

Close to dawn Walsh opened the door and found the storm leaving, blown south. The thunder merely muttered in the far distance, the lightning faintly winked. They managed to get the canoe in the lake despite the still angry waters of the storm-flogged lake, and put out.

Halfway across, the wind that headed them faltered a bit. There came a gray and yellow sunrise. The sky turned blue, the air was clear as crystal.

They made for the skeleton tree that Walsh had marked. There was eloquent sign there of a hurried landing. The outlaws had not taken many pains to cache the canoe, but had hastily set out through the dense woods, guided by the lightning, seeking to make the most of their regained start.

But they had gone stumbling. As light had come they had grown more careful, but the two hunters still read their sign without much trouble. At first there had been prints where feet had broken through rotting logs, broken-off snags and twigs and moss as the men clambered over deadfall; crushed bushes that showed bruised stems and leaves. Later the quarry had tried to select less tell-tale going, but even on carpets of needles, disturbance betrayed them, though now and then both Walsh and Paquet were temporarily at fault, casting about in circles until they picked up the trail again, and then went on at a steady pace that seldom slowed from a dog-trot save when the tracks grew dim or fallen tree trunks checked their progress.

Once, long ago, the floor of the forest had been glacier ground, riven by eruption, grooved deep by waterflow. Now, long centuries after, these inequalities prevailed despite the depth of leaf-mold, the carpet of needles, of moss; ravines crossed the path, ridges opposed it.

The pair held on until noon when Walsh called a brief halt for food and rest, and a smoke. He believed they had been steadily gaining. What wind there was blew against them. He had hardly hoped to get any indication from it unless the men ahead lit a fire for a meal; and they probably had not.

While they rested Paquet drew a rough map of their surroundings. It was the custom of friendly trappers to show each other similar maps of territory they had explored and Paquet never forgot such charts. They were not accurate as to distances or locations, but there were always a few bearings and general directions.

He calculated that they were about a third of the way through the forest belt north of the lake. Sunset should find them almost as far again. Travel after dark, even with Walsh's electric torch, was impracticable. They could not hope to sight their men before they were well into the barrens. In the ridges beyond it, lived a dwindling tribe of Indians with whom, Jean thought, Baldwin and his men would try to obtain refuge.

Baldwin had once had a squaw from the main village, a daughter of a subchief, paying for her liberally in a wanton moment. Before he had got tired of her she had sickened and he had sent her back where the treatments of the *shaman,* the medicine man, probably comforted, but did not save her. So Baldwin was still in good standing, which would hardly have been the case if she had lived to experience his inevitable though delayed cruelty.

The Indians, if they received the refugees at all, would hide them, erase their trail, and lie about them even to a Mounty.

Paquet had his doubts about finding their quarry in time, but he did not voice them. It made no difference to Walsh; he would carry on until he caught them; and, too, he had certain hopes he did not as yet mention to Paquet, disliking to suggest means that might never materialize. Ultimately, he would land his man. If he had to fight his way through odds to get him,

it was all in the day's work, and even added zest to it.

Jean's arm was not bothering him, but Walsh renewed the bandage and the treatment. Their canteens were filled with water from a spring. Before long they would have to subsist upon the country, but there was always game. Their worst deprivation would be tobacco and they already started to hoard it, drying the dottels from their pipes for future use, husbanding matches though Walsh carried flint and steel.

The year was young, they would not suffer from cold for many weeks. But it was Walsh's intense desire to get his man quickly. These were modern days with modern methods sometimes available. New inventions often did away with the old ways when a Mounty trailed his man for months, even years, through spring and summer, fall and the long, hard winter.

THEY started out again, advancing deeper and deeper among the great tree trunks that towered about them, over monarchs fallen from decay or from the tornadoes that sometimes bred in the barrens and swept twisting through the woods, crashing down, uprooting. Still the trail held.

There was a little lake not far away, to the east and their right. Not much more than an uncharted pond, known as Lac Perdu, the resort of moose and caribou in the spring and fall. They could not tell yet whether the fugitives were heading for it. Bearings in the thick forest were not possible. If they hunted for the lake they might discover it by the general trend of the ground, but many had looked for it without success, as the name indicated.

The light was slanting, the sun throwing vivid patches upon the trees when they climbed out of a ravine and both halted, standing tense as pointing hounds. A puff of wind had brought the reek of wood smoke. They knew, as the acrid odor strengthened, that this was no camp fire. It was free flame that sent out that vapor. Glancing keenly ahead, they saw blue smoke drifting between the great boles, wreathing at varying levels, far to right and left.

They were at the limit to which the approaching peril might give warning. And it had come too late for them to retreat. Swiftly now the signals of their danger multiplied. The smoke grew thicker, more pungent, they could hear the crackling advance of a conflagration. Now and then a dull explosion. The breeze was steadier, a draft born of the fire itself, fanned constantly. There was heat in it and they caught glimpses of a fitful glow.

Baldwin had played another card, dealt off the bottom of his crooked deck. He had fired the forest, judging them well in it. They could not hope to race before it. It was on its way with savage leaps and bounds, devouring, devastating. Long before they were near the lake they had crossed it would be upon them, scorching them, searing their laboring lungs even before it reached them.

A caribou came charging along, crashing through the undergrowth, leaping it, unmindful of them, head up with its horns, fresh from the velvet, held back as it plunged frantic into the ravine, its eyes bulging and its nostrils wide. It headed the wild flight of the beasts, big and small, the birds, the snakes, all the terrified life of the forest. They rushed and flew and writhed on, seeking safety somewhere, herded by the increasing heat and noise.

A pall of dense brown smoke shrouded the sky. In it, like meteors, there appeared flakes of fire, incendiary brands of blazing boughs. The voice of the fire changed to a roar and the flames came on in red waves with loud reports as pitchy branches and saplings burst from the swollen, tortured veins that held the inflammable stuff that was their life blood.

Trees flamed like torches. On the left the two men were already outflanked. A charging mass of flame, a moving furnace, was annihilating the forest, hurling ahead fire bombs that caught trees that had instantly dried to kindling in its withering breath.

There was but the one hope, to reach Lac Perdu, to trust it was not already behind the zone of fire. If it was, or if they failed to locate it, they were doomed to the frightful death that Baldwin had planned, deliberately and with fiendish craft. He had set behind him a barrier that would be hard to cross. There was little likelihood of another storm. Aside from the timber he had so willfully destroyed, the fire would burn long in the woods mold before it got down to mineral soil.

The Ranger Service was inadequate to cope with such a fire in so remote a region. Forces were hard to gather and transport. They could report it, survey the damage, and do little more. Baldwin would be across the barrens unless the help that Walsh still trusted might come from Fort George should find them still safe. Unless the pair were sighted they would be given up for lost, the evidence consumed with them. Renard would lie, and keep his store, though he had lost his son-in-law and his illicit trade. Baldwin would escape trial and conviction.

THESE things raced through Walsh's mind as without words, they started in what they guessed was the direction of the little lake. Something delayed the fire on the right —ridges it had not yet hurdled, places where the driving wind was less. Now the two men must show what stuff they were made of. They kept their minds cool while, all about them, the heat increased until they seemed to be traveling close to the open maws of furious furnaces.

Panic such as seized the unreasoning creatures that still passed them was not for them, if they hoped to escape. They strode surely, swiftly, while the sweat rolled out of them and dried, slowly and surely sapping the energy they sought to reserve.

Paquet led, though his knowledge was now no greater than that of Walsh. But he had drawn the map; the responsibility was his, and Walsh followed. They kept along the side of a ridge, fearing every moment to see the angry billows of flame, crested with sparkling smoke, surge over it. They were slowly mounting to higher ground which Walsh trusted might be the rim of a basin in which lay the little lake.

Back of them, the place where they had stood, was wrapped in a whirl of shouting, smoking fire. Pillars of red and yellow, with spurts of blue gaseous vapor, rose there. Ahead, Paquet cast aside his coat and pack. Weight must be discarded. Reluctantly Walsh threw away the carbine he was carrying, then his own pack, but clung to his red tunic that already smoldered from sparks that buzzed and stung like fiery bees. He tossed away his carbine shells, keeping ammunition for his pistol.

They did not know where they were going. Smoke half choked them as they labored on, panting always upward on a slant. Paquet made for the crest and then they saw, on higher ridges beyond, an inferno of blazing trees, the raging crimson of the very heart of the fire. It roared now like a volcano. Charred fragments and red-hot tinder drove by them. Little rivulets of fire spouted from the undergrowth on the next ridge as they bore on, already in torment, their skin almost crackling.

Now the terrain began to dip, and this gave them a faint hope. Walsh beat out burning holes in his clothing. His hat was smoking, afire. A coal dropped through to his scalp. Paquet threw away his canteen, but Walsh retained his, though he emptied it. Every ounce counted. And every breath was painful. Smoke hid all ahead, save

when a gust of hot wind cleared it and they plunged ahead. Down.

It was an unfair fight. His soul protested against it while it rallied with his will to keep him going. His legs were leaden. There was no more energy left in him, he felt, but he kept on, on, on, until that avalanche of flame should rush down upon them, shrivel them in one blast.

A mammoth, blundering moose passed him, floundering with great splay feet, its palmated spread of antlers plowing through the smoke. It was making for somewhere with a definite plan, not rushing blindly away from the fire as the other beasts had done. Its cow followed.

Perhaps they were bound for the lake their instinct told them might be their refuge. Now there were more brutes, their tongues lolling, lynx, timber wolves like shaggy dogs, hares; enmity forgotten, going with broken, faltering gait until they dropped or found the sheltering water and a chance for life.

Suddenly he saw Paquet pitch forward, lie with outspread arms, his shirt showing a ring of spreading black edged with fire between his shoulders. Walsh was almost done, but he gathered strength from somewhere.

As he stooped over his collapsed comrade he saw a cliff of flame rise behind the next ridge. Its top was forked, sable clouds hovered over it, backed it. Trees were black silhouettes for a moment before they collapsed or shot upward in the dazzling light.

The breath of the ravening element seemed to scorch the life out of him as he caught Jean under the crotch, heaved him up, clutching his blistering wrists with his own tortured hand and went staggering on, bitten by flecks of flame he barely noticed, lunging on down the hill to where he saw—or thought he saw—the gleam of water between curling, pluming wreaths of smoke. The ground smoked, the bracken crumpled, crisp before the assault of the fire fiend. All about him was the shouting, shrieking voice of the unleashed element, sometimes man's servant, now a demon of destruction.

THERE was no breath for his tormented lungs. He was in the anteroom of hell. Paquet was the burden that was bound to him, through humanity, through friendship. He seemed to be in a vacuum surcharged with heat. He could not gasp, he did not know he breathed. The water, if it was water, was unseen now, a vision of Tantalus. Then it showed again, reflecting the fire, sending up spouts of vapor as burning brands rocketed into it.

A hundred yards more—eighty—lunging on, tripping but not quite falling, bending lower and lower, his knees sagging.

Somewhere in his flagging brain a voice was whispering, insistently:

"Drop him, you fool. You can make it alone. It's your duty. You can still get Baldwin."

He seemed to hear himself answer, the reply of his soul:

"We'll get through or go down together."

Fifty yards now. It looked like a mile, though he automatically gauged the distance. Beside him a tree caught in its upper branches and was instantly a flambeau. He dodged another, sensed one more falling and leaped it, feeling the heat of it as he hurtled on, down to the water.

He felt the water about his feet, his ankles, his calves; and then the weeds entangled him and he fell headlong, under water, Jean with him. Somehow he got to his knees, still clasping Paquet, holding him up. The shock of immersion restored the half-breed and he struggled feebly, croaking in a hoarse voice to be set down. Walsh did so, keeping an arm about the other's waist as they waded in, hip deep, armpit deep.

There were beasts swimming all

about them, their eyes shining, paddling for dear life, brushing against them.

It was a little lake, was Lac Perdu, but it was deep. They fell off a shelf, floundering. Striking out, they reached a ledge of rock on which they stood in water up to their necks. The fire swept around the lake's banks, enraged, but checked, showering down red comets and stars, stripes and streaks of flaming fragments that spat viciously and died.

With a bellow, a sheet of flame rushed over the surface and they ducked deep. When they were forced to emerge with bursting lungs, some of the battling beasts had vanished; others yelped or blatted, beating the water feebly, dying. All over and around them the howling inferno raged, passed on, to leave the little lake smutted, filmed, strewn with char and death.

The light rose high. Back of it dusk was coming fast as they waded out, scorched, weak, but safe. They lay exhausted on the shingle of a tiny cove, two sodden wolves beside them.

Presently Walsh stirred. Paquet was in a sort of swoon. Every move was quick pain, but Walsh knew that he was not fatally burned. He needed food, grease for his burns. His clothes were stained, charred, falling from him in places; but he drew his gun and, as best he could, wiped it clean in the starlight. The cartridges were well greased, the oil had resisted the rust. He pulled trigger finally and the shot barked out across the lake, rousing a feeble echo from the remnants of the forest, still blazing fitfully with the main conflagration sweeping on to Lac Vert. A wolf roused at the sound, looked about it, and slunk off, its mate crawling after it, wincing on the hot soil, both going into the shallows. Paquet lifted himself on one elbow and groaned. Then he managed a cackle.

"By Gar, we made eet!" he said. "I owe you life once more, *camarade.*"

Walsh answered with his arm about the other. Paquet's went about him. The momentary embrace tightened, dropped away. But they understood.

"We get that Baldween yet," said Paquet as he staggered painfully to his feet. "I stay weeth you until hell go cold. An' you an' me, we have seen hell to-night." Walsh knew now that not even Rose could come between them and the object of their chase.

"I have a great hunger," said Jean. "Here is water, there are feesh, half cook'. We need no matches."

There were trout, floating belly-up in the shallows. Jean limped down to the margin and brought back a supply. Both men were singed and worse; but not crippled. Their blood was pure and their flesh sound, and they had knowledge of alleviating their worst burns, once they could find a strip of wood and brush the fire had spared. Paquet had cheering words for that, though their hope could not be realized till later.

A spur ran out from the barrens, rocky about the base, but with some growth on it that might have been isolated. Also, it would give them a road to win through the rest of the forest, once they reached it. They could not stay where they were. The dead fish would spoil, the rest would not bite; and as if by magic the beasts that had escaped had already vanished, bound for far regions. But they had present food, which, if far from a banquet, was not to be despised. Presently they slept, sprawled on the shingle. The heat that still pervaded the forest dried them as they lay, recouping, their reserves slowly coming back, the machinery of their bodies functioning.

THE dawn showed desolation, smoldering trees, smoking earth. They looked like tramps, clothed in cast-off remnants; their footgear—Paquet wore moccasins—twisted and wrinkled, but serviceable.

They could carry on, though they were a sorry pair as they picked their way toward the spur, forced to detours, checked time after time, but making

slow progress. They saw the hogback at last, looming up through smoke that rose sluggishly. On top of it the verdure was scorched, but the trees would struggle through, enough foliage left to feed them. There the burned men got milk-juice and balm and anointed the worst places before they headed on. Walsh shot a brace of rabbits. The place was swarming with still bewildered game that had found refuge there. Jean knocked over some ptarmigan to take with them into the barrens, though they ought to find more birds there feeding on the berries that were beginning to ripen. There would be easy shooting for them with pistols. Paquet's guns were serviceable, if they wanted to risk their being heard.

Walsh had a theory that Baldwin and his gang would be taking it easily, in the belief that nothing could have escaped the flaming forest. As they worked along the hogback, on toward the upland plateau of the barrens, they saw that a thin strip of trees to windward of the spot where the fire had been started was still standing.

This they reached at last and rested in it, a pair of objects looking far more like scarecrows than men resolved upon the capture of criminals. Walsh's tunic was red only in patches, Jean's shirt was charred shreds, they were burned and smutted; but their faces were resolute, their eyes steadfast as they consulted on the best thing to do.

There was not much choice in the matter, it seemed, except their determination to carry on. But Walsh still rode his hunch that their enemies might not be far away, might be gloating over the smoldering, smoking scene which they thought held the incinerated remains of the Mounty and Paquet or, at the very least, had checked them effectually. The fugitives would cross to the ridges at their leisure; so Walsh selected a tall tree for an observation tower and climbed it. It was not an easy job, but the task held its reward in full measure.

The barrens, at that season, save for the absence of tall growth, seemed to belie their name. There were copses of birch and alder, and patches of shrubby undergrowth, much of which was thick with berries. Between lay uneven stretches of rocky land, surface mineral, scattered bowlders of all sizes in a confusion that suggested they had been left there by the final melting of a glacier. These bowlders ranged from the size of a man's head to blocks as large as average houses. Occasionally they were piled up high, and some were on natural slopes and hillocks. Wherever there was soil the early summer growth of bushes and bunch grass flourished.

Walsh surveyed all the expanse with the field glasses he had almost unconsciously retained during the flight through the fire, even as he had saved the canteen which, refilled, they now shared between them. His rifle had hampered him too much, but the rest was essential equipment to which he had clung as if to life itself.

He saw, far away, twenty miles or more, the blue curves of the hills where Baldwin's Indian friends were encamped and he scanned them in vain for any sign of men on the march in that direction. That was not a good locality for sky sign to show. There was little dust, little loose, dry soil to fling up; but he felt that if they were moving he would sight them, and he ranged the landscape with the powerful lenses carefully, section by section.

CHAPTER VI.

BLOODY KNOLL.

IT was noon and the shadows were at their shortest, the visibility excellent. The haze that hung over the burned area did not affect the view, for a light wind was still blowing from the north. Lac Vert would have helped to halt the flames, but, in one swift glance to the south, he saw rolling

masses of smoke that proclaimed the conflagration not yet under control. By now scores of men would be fighting it for their own protection, digging trenches, scraping the topsoil down to mineral, backfiring, dynamiting. Some who knew that he had gone north, and why, might guess how the fire had started.

He looked south again, but quivering, heated air, steamy vapors, and the more distant smoke limited his efforts. He swung the glasses back to the barrens from his tree post, saddling a crotch, one arm linked about a branch, rocking slightly in the breeze, like a sailor at a masthead.

Here was something that was new. The blue, faint vapor of a starting fire on a knoll about half a mile away! The spot was ramparted about with a jumble of rocks, and he could not see the figures he knew must be there, getting ready for a noonday meal, in all their fancied immunity. Walsh took careful survey. All would look different from the ground, and he must not miss his bearings. The fire might, very likely, only last until coffee was made. Half a mile was not far, but he and Jean would have to go under cover every foot, every inch of that distance. They had rifles on the knoll with which they could pick them off, once sighted, or hold the pursuers beyond pistol range until dark masked their flight.

He went down the tree carefully. Any unusual motion might attract attention, even at that distance. Not many things would account for a tree suddenly shaken. With such odds, a surprise attack was vital. He slid down the trunk with new energy flowing through him, his eyes shining. Jean Paquet caught the swift contagion of his mood. Hurts were forgotten, discomfort vanished. Jean looked mute inquiry and Walsh nodded, speaking then in a whisper, as if he feared his very words might carry back against the wind to where those men were watching the preparing of their meal, lounging, smoking, jesting about their escape and dastardly revenge.

"Half a mile. I'll show you where. Got to snake up on 'em. Give each other plenty of time after we separate, before we jump 'em."

"*Bien!*" Paquet's dark orbs glowed. They tested again the cylinders of their guns. A hitch, a faulty cartridge, even a miss, might lose the game for them—and they meant to win it. Had to.

They started out, finding cover easy for the most part, being screened by the bowlders and rock masses. They wriggled through the bushes like Indians on hands and knees, or on their bellies like snakes praying that there would be no alarm, hoping desperately that Baldwin and his crew would be in no hurry to trek in the heat of the day.

The sun poured down, the rocky terrain was heated; but it was cool alongside the torment they had suffered in the forest. Fragments of their charred clothing dropped away, traces of blood began to mark their slow progress. They had emptied the canteen and left it behind lest it might give out some chink of metal against stone. The stiff brush scratched them. Several times they lay with held breath as they started hares and grouse. Thorny briers clutched at them, scratched their flesh. Sweat dripped from them.

From time to time Walsh took careful survey, raising his head, studying the rock masses among which they crept. The taint of the wood smoke helped for a while, but that died out.

They figured Baldwin had four men with him: Lenoir, who had been named an accomplice by the murdered trapper's dying hand; Sayers and Nicholson, all of whom had been at Treaty Landing. One man was unknown, a member of the band left at the Lac Vert rendezvous while the stolen furs were traded in to Renard. The others the lake had accounted for —the lake and Walsh's shooting. The man killed by Paquet — Gaspard's

canoe mate—had probably come up with him from Treaty Landing.

Five to two. Those were men who, finding themselves cornered, would undoubtedly fight to save themselves from prison and the gallows. Bullets would fly. Walsh did not expect to be able to hold them under their two pistols. The case was too desperate.

Baldwin he meant to take alive, if possible. Baldwin and Lenoir.

THEY arrived within fifty yards of the base of the knoll when a vagrant draft of air fanned to them tobacco smoke. Their quarry was still there!

It took long minutes to cover those last hundred and fifty feet, and they reached the foot of the hillock limp with exertion and the heat. They were forced to rest. Their hands must be as steady as possible when they topped the slope and proclaimed themselves.

To make their arrival simultaneous, they agreed that each should make a quarter circuit of the knoll from where they lay and then ascend. There were larks on the barrens. Jean could imitate their song to perfection. It was true that it was unlikely for larks to sing in the heat of midday, but it was not impossible; and they had to have some sort of signal.

Walsh watched Jean start and then himself proceeded to worm and wriggle his way up among the rocks. He had not been able, naturally, to gauge the layout of the slope and, creeping between a nest of bowlders, he found clear, or almost clear, space ahead, rising up to the rocks that ringed the summit.

There was a bearded man there, unknown to the Mounty. He seemed to be standing and leaning forward over the top of a rock, smoking, glancing carelessly about; not, perhaps, any sort of sentry, but certain to notice Walsh if he came out into the open, to give the alarm and ruin the surprise that must be their best card.

Walsh peeped out, like a fox from its den. There were shrubs rather thickly fringing the little cavern in which he lay, screening him while allowing him to see well enough through the twigs. There were other shrubs in the open, clustered here and there, but not close enough together in their groups to let him dart from cover to cover.

The man turned his back, talking to some one. Walsh heard a coarse laugh. They were off guard; but he dared not waste time. He wanted them where they were, on top of the knoll, bunched, lounging.

He took his knife and swiftly dug up a section of the bushes. He then thrust them forward, holding them clumped together by their roots. Inching up back of them, he watched the man, who was now in profile, refilling his pipe. Walsh advanced again, reached the next natural growth and halted just as the outlaw, lighting his tobacco, stared directly at him.

But it was idle scrutiny, and once again the Mounty moved up the hill, wondering if Jean Paquet had found similar trouble. If he had, Walsh knew he would have found some way of overcoming it, even if lack of bushes prevented the same strategy he was employing. It might take longer, but he was sure of Jean.

Suddenly he heard the clear notes of a meadow lark, shrill and sweet. It startled the bearded man, who looked upward and gave Walsh chance for a scramble that brought him close to the summit barricade.

Walsh was in plain sight for the moment, and he saw the outlaw gazing at him in astonishment and dismay at sight of the set, stern face with gray eyes blazing there like sun or polished points of steel, staring with fear at the stained scarlet coat, tattered but still the symbol of authority, and at the uplifted gun that gleamed in its swift movement.

The outlaw's own gun came out. It

spurted pale flame in the sunlight and then fell from his hand, on the top of the bowlder where he had been leaning.

The yell he started died in his throat as he pitched forward, a bullet between his eyes.

Walsh went into whirlwind action, leaping to the top of the natural barricade, catching up the dead outlaw's gun. He stood exposed for a split-second before he leaped down. He glimpsed Jean opposite, heard the bark of his gun. Both Walsh's own weapons discharged at the figures that sprang to their feet and fired back in a savage fusillade.

Two of them frantically hunted cover among the rocks, but Baldwin stood erect, shooting to kill the Mounty as Walsh jumped in and took up the duel.

For a few moments all was flame and sound. The roar of heavy guns, a curse, groans where one man dragged himself away, shot through the belly. Paquet was down but still shooting, partially protected.

Walsh saw Baldwin sway and knew he had scored. He wanted to cripple Baldwin, though he knew the other meant to slay him. He felt a shock in his left forearm that numbed it, tearing through the muscle and rendering it useless. Baldwin was staggering back from a bullet that crippled his right shoulder, his gun shifted to his left hand, as he roared oaths through his black beard.

Baldwin's lead went low. It took Walsh above the left knee, hitting the bone. He pitched forward, to fall on his elbow. Walsh fired to kill now, believing himself gone, meaning to take the murderer with him. Agony shot through him from his crumpled leg that was spurting blood. Baldwin was steadying himself to deliberate aim, sidewise to Walsh, when he suddenly toppled, weak from nerve shock and the wounds that Walsh had unknowingly scored. As he went down, the Mounty's slug crashed through his left wrist.

FILMS of powder gas fouled the quiet air, floated off, merging with it. The outlaw hit in the belly was still moaning and then became suddenly quiet. Walsh fought off the dizziness in his brain, looking desperately about him. They were all down, save for the man who sprawled over the rock.

Baldwin's great bulk was writhing, but he could not raise himself. One outlaw was huddled back of a bowlder where Jean Paquet had dropped him, drilled through the heart. Paquet was down—dead, Walsh feared, as wrath sent energy out from his glands, charging his muscles. The fifth man was moving. Walsh had winged him with his second shot before he faced Baldwin. Now the outlaw squirmed to a half-seated posture, backing against a baulk of stone, weakly trying to lift his gun, aiming at Jean.

Walsh fired and the man collapsed.

The sun, nearly overhead beat down. The shadows slowly began to lengthen. The reek of powder passed, but the smell of blood was strong in the air. Flies gathered. High up, a carrion bird appeared, herald of others who would flock into the feast. Walsh, prostrate, slowly gathering energy, saw it and for a moment there was a gleam in his eyes that quickly faded out.

He had to do something about his wounds before he bled to death. The one in the leg was the most serious. And Jean must be looked to. Baldwin, too. He had his man and he did not want death to interfere.

He could not stand, would not be able to move from the place. Baldwin was hitching himself along on his elbows, arms, hands useless.

"Jean!" There was fear in Walsh's voice and in his heart, fear for his comrade, the first sign or note of it that had manifested itself since they had started out together. "Jean!"

He could not reach him, could not crawl until his leg was bandaged, but even while the very life leaked out of him his first thought was for the gallant Paquet.

"By Gar!"

Never were words more welcome. He saw Paquet gathering himself together, one side of his face covered with blood, his voice hoarse. There was blood on his shirt, drenching his side. But he got to all fours, then to his feet and, gun in hand, came weakly and groggily across to Walsh, stopping to look at Baldwin, who cursed feebly, cursed as he begged for water.

"We get them! *Oui.* I am heet, but only a reeb. This, over the ear, it groove the bone, but when the headache go it weel be cure'. Ah! You are hurt bad, *mon ami.*"

Walsh gritted his teeth against the throbbing torture in his leg.

"Not bad enough. Help me straighten out this damned leg and get a bandage on it."

Between them they made a fair job of it. They had nothing on them that would do for bandages, but Walsh managed a tourniquet that quieted the spouting vein. Jean looted bandannas from the dead outlaws, ripping off the not too dirty sleeve of one man's cotton shirt. They treated Walsh's forearm, bound up Jean's scored ribs where a bullet had glanced along them.

"Look after Baldwin, will you?" asked Walsh. "I don't want to lose him. Give him some water."

There was enough of that in the outlaws' canteens. Walsh and Jean had used it for wounds and thirst, but Paquet grudged it to Baldwin.

"It's an order, Jean," said Walsh. "He's going back. Alive."

Baldwin swore, even as he gulped the water, swore as his wounds were given first aid. Jean came back to where Walsh was propped up in partial shade, a worried look on his face, limping badly.

"I theenk they heet me in the foot, also," he said simply. "I deed not notice, but—"

He sat down, holding his foot. It was not bleeding much, but when he took off his moccasin they saw that a tendon had been hurt. Now it had given way.

"We are all in the same feex now," he said. "And I had theenk jus' now I could go back an' breeng help." He shrugged his shoulders.

"You couldn't have got through the forest, Jean. It wouldn't have been any good."

BALDWIN, revived a little, began suddenly to laugh. The mirth was almost hysterical, but he checked it.

"Looks like we're all meat fer the birds," he croaked out. "But we ain't. There's just one chance. I've got friends in the hills. Injuns. You've got yore hands, Jean Paquet. Yonder's wood. Make a fire an' smoke-signal 'em. I'll tell you what to send. If you do that I'll make a bargain with you. I go clear an' they'll look out fer you."

"The law makes no bargains, Baldwin. You stole Lawlor's furs. You stole Paquet's and plenty more. We know you killed Lawlor. We've got good proof of that. You'll hang for murder."

Baldwin laughed again, less certainly.

"Much good your proof will do you. I'll not hang. Take up the chance I'm givin' you an' you'll live. Otherwise we'll go out the slow way, together. You're a stubborn fool, Walsh, but you've got to see reason."

"A fine chance you're offering, Baldwin," said Walsh. "As good as your word."

"It's the only one. No one knows where we are. No one can cross that burned forest for days."

"Where you tried to burn us alive. You raised hell there, Baldwin, but you'll be in a real one before long.

You're wrong. There is another chance, and a better one. I sent to Fort George. They know you went north. I saw your canoes making for the mouth of the river. They've got a Survey Service plane there. Amphibian. They'd come to the fire anyway. They'll be looking for us. We'll light a smoke—for them. The forest is closed, but the air is open. You overlooked that bet."

Baldwin glared, speechless, gaping through his beard.

Jean crept, collecting wood, making the fire, wetting his fuel for smoke. The steady signal mounted into the clear sky where the birds, as if they sensed what it meant—life still existent—wheeled to the north, winging over the range.

The hours dragged. Fever mounted in them, stiffness and throbbing pain. The bravado went out of Baldwin, facing death one way or the other, with all his false courage dissolved out of him. They stared at the sky over the forest, as Walsh had gazed from the tree-top. There was nothing there. Only the vapors still rising from the trees, the dun smoke beyond. Baldwin begged for water that they all craved, the three of them remaining. Three men on the knoll were beyond thirst. Jean gave him a mouthful from time to time, as much as they dared take themselves. It was liquid life. There was food, if they could swallow it; but the water would not last long. And something might have happened to the plane. Eventually they would be found—but too late?

Baldwin saw it first. Paquet was replenishing the fire. The wood the outlaws had gathered was being used up. To get more meant incredible effort for Jean, only able to crawl.

Walsh, fighting off waves of pain and fever, saw the outlaw's eyes dilate. He turned his head, called to Paquet. The smoke went up in a slightly wavering column.

Over the forest, flying high, dipping and swooping in the faulty air, came the Service amphibian—fast. It had sighted the smoke, was planing down, its shadow brooming the barrens. Paquet grasped a coat at Walsh's order and blanketed the smoke in an S. O. S.

The shadow of the plane swept over them. They saw the pilot's head, the wave of his arm as he passed. He banked and circled, looking for a landing.

"It packs pilot and observer and two passengers," said Walsh. "He probably came alone, expecting to take some one back. He will. There'll be just room for the three of us—including you, Baldwin."

They could hear the murderer grit his teeth, glance at his helpless arms. Then the sound of the motor died down, throttled, as the flier, used to rough landings, found a risky landing space.

Ten minutes more and his still helmeted face appeared as he climbed over the rocks, gun in hand, his eyes bulging as he took in the scene. He spoke to Walsh.

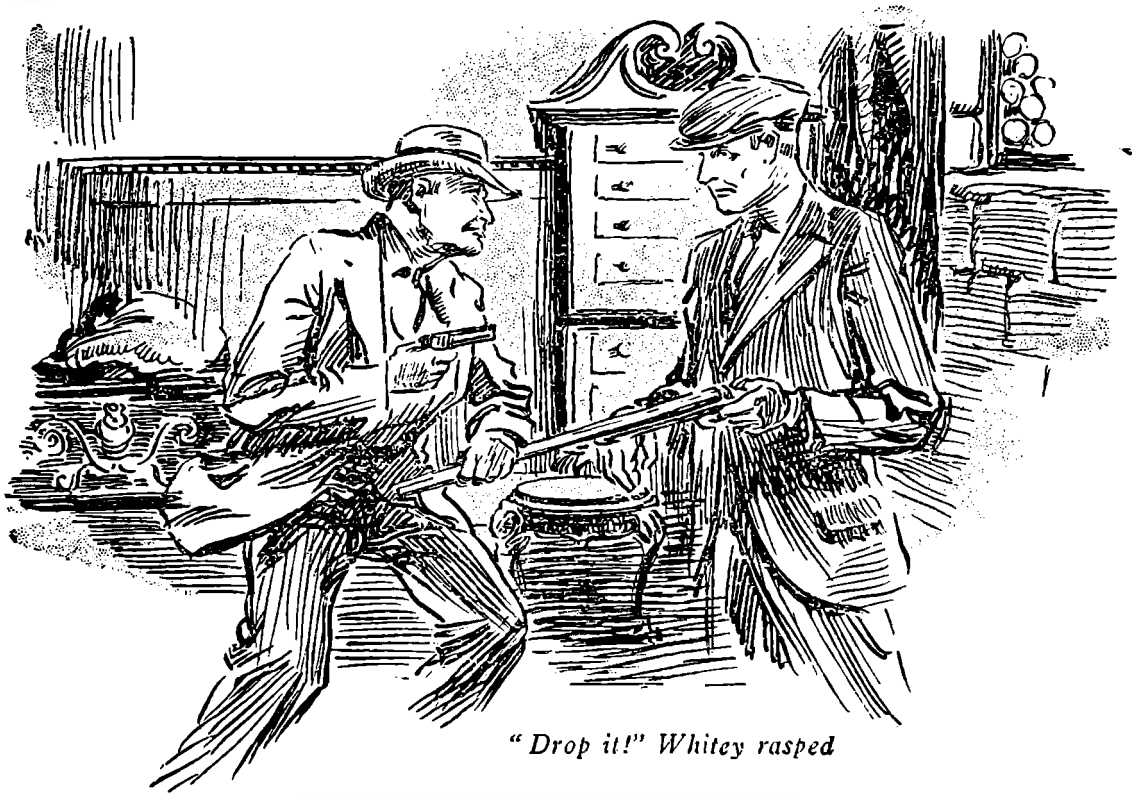
"Looks like I got here just in time, corporal," he said. "I was out map-shooting when your runner got through to Fort George. Had a little trouble to fix after I got in, and I sure had one sweet time getting through that smoke. To say nothing of the air-pockets. You can bet I flew high. What's the orders?"

"You'll have to manage to drag me to the plane," said Walsh. "Paquet can hobble with your help. He can walk," he added dryly, nodding at Baldwin.

"The rest stay here," said the flier soberly. "We've no room for 'em an' I'm not flyin' a hearse, though it's ten to one they'll send me back for 'em. This the man you came after?"

"That's my man," said Walsh, with utter contentment, despite his wounds. "Black Baldwin."

THE END.



"Drop it!" Whitey rasped

Shady Rest

Dodging an assassin's bullets, Bob Stuart battles insidious and corrupt forces in the mad and treacherous little Berkshire village.

By WILL McMORROW

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

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

BOB STUART, irresponsible but likable youth, has run through his uncle's inheritance in Wall Street, but discovers another, later, will by which his uncle Josh left him his estate in the Berkshires. The former will had left it to his housekeeper, Mrs. Barnaby, and she had converted it into a village, Shady Rest.

Bob picks up a decrepit flivver and starts to survey his domain. Entering the village, a sign which reads "The poor and needy are welcome. The drunkard, the blasphemer, the cigarette smoker must not enter here." Jake, the town constable, and two helpers throw Bob outside the gates. As he's returning, with the light of battle in his eyes, a large, oily, mellifluous person intervenes, and, on finding out Bob's identity, introduces himself as Mr. Mortimer, mayor and real estate man.

Bob proceeds up to the big medieval stone castle atop the hill, which had been Uncle Josh's pride. There he finds a beautiful slender blonde, who turns out to be Anne Barnaby, daughter of the housekeeper, who had died the year before. Anne is, as far as she knows, the owner of Shady Rest. Bob hesitates to mention his discovery of the later will, and she invites him to visit her. From the fliv-

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ver, Bob gets his suitcase—which has been opened and thoroughly ransacked. Lang, the Pecksniffian bald-headed butler, is horrified at dishonesty occurring in Shady Rest.

That evening Bob secretly follows Lang down into the village, where there is a fight and shooting at the tramps' retreat, the "Community House"; a mysterious car without lights goes careering down the road, though the village gates are officially closed at night. His suspicions confirmed, Bob returns, catches sight of Lang, and chases him to the castle drawbridge. The portcullis unaccountably falls, grazing Bob's head and knocking him into the dry moat. He comes to, and sees Lang looking down at him.

Mortimer, who acts as Miss Barnaby's agent, and who had suggested many of the peculiar features of Shady Rest's policy, is present the next day, with Constable Jake, when they question Lang; but he has an alibi, claims he was talking with his wife and the garage man, Garner, when the portcullis fell.

Mortimer blames a half-wit named Dan, whom he says he'd ejected from Shady Rest before.

Bob and Anne go swimming the next day, taking a picnic lunch; Bob also carries a shotgun. As they are lunching on the float a bullet whines overhead! Bob, warning Anne to lie flat, grabs the shotgun and jumps ashore.

CHAPTER VIII *(Continued)*.

BOB BUTTS IN.

BOB plunged ahead, regardless of the brambles and rough going for bare feet. Halfway round the lake he caught a swaying of the tall bushes as some one hastily retreated. He threw his gun to his shoulder and let one barrel go with a blast like a three-inch gun. Whatever else it did, it speeded the parting guest, for when Bob reached the place no one was in sight. He continued on, reached Charity Drive again, and almost ran into Jake.

"What's up," the constable inquired. "Heard a shot or two an' came runnin'." Bob explained that he had been fired on.

"Dan all right," Jake chewed calmly. "He seen you stand up an' took a crack at you. Better watch out. They say he was an expert with a gun before he went nutty."

"Don't you think we ought to search around for him—organize a posse or something?"

"Hell, no!" The constable showed a decided lack of interest in the idea. "He's a mile away by this time. I'll lay for him to-night, when he's likely to come snoopin' around again."

Jake turned into the woods, and Bob rejoined Anne, who was standing on the concrete road, looking nervously into the clumps of brush.

"I was afraid you might try to chase that horrible man alone," she said, "and get shot. Has Jake gone after him?"

"In his own time," Bob growled. "For a constable with a wild man on his beat, our Jake doesn't seem very much aroused. If I were a voter here I'd elect a new constable. All this one has is the badge and the make-up."

She laughed. "He isn't elected exactly, any more than Mr. Mortimer is elected mayor. It isn't a regularly incorporated village. Only Mr. Mortimer and I own property—the rest lease from us. Jake was employed by Mr. Mortimer after mother's death to help keep order. He does seem to keep out an undesirable element."

"He's got one peach of an undesirable to work on in that bird Dan," Bob muttered. He felt that it might seem like picking on Mr. Mortimer too much to say that that gentleman seemed to be a poor picker of employees.

They strolled up the path to the castle. Lang met them inside the entrance.

"Mr. Mortimer," he recited, standing at attention, "wishes to see you, miss, when you are at liberty. He is waiting in the keep."

"Oh!" she clapped her hands. "I do hope it's about the sale. Tell him I'll be right down when I'm dressed."

She waved to Bob and skipped off toward the Gray Tower. Lang turned his hairless face slowly, and his fleeting glance took in the shotgun.

"Did you encounter Dan, sir?" he asked. "I heard shooting."

"He got away," Bob explained. "He seems to be quick on the getaway."

Lang looked unblinkingly ahead. "Quite so, sir."

He revolved on his heel, stalked off across the courtyard, chin up, arms rigidly curved, and with a stiff, wooden gait that reminded Bob more than ever of the movie conception of a butler.

In the White Tower, Bob reloaded the empty barrel of the ancient shotgun, and stood it against the wall. He went downstairs to the shower, got rid of the effects of his dusty dash after the elusive Dan, and returned to the upper room, where he dressed carefully and with close attention to the tying of a colorful four-in-hand, as a man should who expects to dine with a good-looking girl.

The mirror above the chest of drawers reflected the puckered brows and serious mouth of one determined on a course of action irrespective of consequences. Twice Bob had it on the tip of his tongue to tell Anne the truth about his visit, and both times he had been interrupted—the last time by the whistle of the shadowy Dan's bullet.

Now, Bob had his mind made up. To declare himself the owner—then, with a large and generous gesture, tear up the will and scatter the pieces at her feet. He could picture the gratitude in her eyes at this evidence of his noble nature. All Mortimer's blah about kindness and good works couldn't match that.

BOB brushed his hair, slammed down the brush and stalked through the "bridge of sighs." As he pushed open the balcony door, Mortimer's rich and sonorous voice floated up to him.

"A coincidence, my dear Miss Barnaby, that at the very moment we were discussing the—ah—possible sale of the property, a letter should await me from the gentleman himself, offering this—ah—rather generous, I might almost say foolhardy offer. This is a contract he sent me for your signature. As your—ah—attorney, in a sense, I have looked it over thoroughly with an eye to your interests, and I must admit it is a most profitable transaction."

Bob looked over the balustrade, at the group gathered about the dark oak table—Anne, wide-eyed and interested, Mortimer standing with a plump finger pressed down on a typewritten contract form, Jake leaning impassively against the wall, and Lang standing like an erect sentry in the middle distance.

"What is his name?" Anne asked.

Mortimer picked up the contract.

"Ezra Deekin," he replied. "He left that blank, however. I might add, the pecuniary — ah — reimbursement being important, he is paying one thousand dollars down on the contract. I have received his certified check for that amount, which I have converted into cash."

Anne looked doubtfully distressed. "It doesn't seem much for all this place, does it? I know mother expected to get more than seven thousand dollars for it. Still, as you say, there isn't any market for a place such as this."

"My dear Miss Barnaby," Mortimer patted her on the shoulder, shaking his head sympathetically. "I grieve to think of the place going for seven

thousand dollars. I would, I do not hesitate to say, regret to see it sold for seventy times seven thousand. There are memories here—kindliness and charity."

He blew his nose in his monogrammed handkerchief, a spirited and rousing trumpet-blast. "I shall continue my work here in my own small holdings.

"But, for you, this money appears like manna from heaven. I think, considering all things, it is an excellent price—excellent!"

He whipped out a fountain pen, made it ready with a deft twirl of plump fingers, and handed it to her with a courtly bow across the table. "Jake, here, will witness it. Your full name, Miss Barnaby. At the bottom of the last paragraph."

Bob leaned on the railing. "Is this a private conversation," he inquired cheerfully, "or can any one butt in?"

Every one looked up, Mortimer with a disapproving frown.

"Because if it's open to argument," Bob continued, "I'd like to say that seven thousand dollars looks like a small price for a place like Shady Rest."

"A matter of opinion, sir," Mortimer puffed. "May I ask—"

"What business is it of mine?" Bob finished for him. "We'll come to that, Mort, old boy. What I'm interested in at the minute is that I don't think you have taken enough trouble to get the best price. Three hundred acres and this house and several others are worth more than that. Even a dumb-bell in business like myself knows that."

"We will leave that"—Mortimer waved a graceful gesture toward Anne—"to the owner. Miss Barnaby is perfectly capable of handling her own affairs, my dear fellow."

Bob shook his head. "That's just what we won't do. Miss Barnaby oughtn't to sell in such a rush. What's more, I won't permit her to sign this paper."

It was unfortunately worded. A girl of Anne's age and independent spirit doesn't like being told what she can or can't do. She flashed Bob a freezing glance and reached for the contract.

"May I inquire," Mortimer said smoothly, "what right you have to—ah—interfere in a business deal of this kind?"

"All the right in the world," Bob snapped. "It's my property you're selling. I'm the owner of Shady Rest!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESERTED CASTLE.

MORTIMER blinked stupidly. For once he seemed incapable of a flow of words. "Your—I must—er—assume you are being— I must say—"

Bob descended the stairs, approached the table, his eyes avoiding Anne Barnaby's startled, unbelieving glance.

He fished out his wallet and displayed the sheet of paper it contained before Mortimer's eyes.

"I didn't intend to go about it just this way, but there's the dope that brought me down here. That's a new will Josh Stuart made after he left the property to Mrs. Barnaby. It makes me the heir. Do you recognize his signature?"

Mortimer nodded. "This is indeed—"

A sudden stir from Anne made Bob turn. She was standing now, her brown eyes larger and darker in her pale face. "You—you had that with you all the time?"

"Yes," Bob said feebly. "I was going to talk it over with you. Of course, I don't really mean to—"

"I don't—understand," she said miserably. "All the time—mother and I—were living in your house—spending your money!"

"Oh, not as bad as that," Bob said hastily. "And even if Josh—"

"And you"—Anne's chin tilted contemptuously—"accepted my hospitality, pretending it was just a friendly visit, while you laid your plans to— Oh!"

She turned away, hurrying swiftly to the door. Bob overtook her in the courtyard.

"Listen, Anne! I only declared myself back there to protect you from selling—"

She turned in the doorway of the Gray Tower in a flash of indignant tears.

"Don't talk to me! I think you are the most contemptible man I've ever met!"

The door slammed violently in Bob's face. He walked slowly back to the keep.

None of the three men had stirred from the room.

Mortimer cleared his throat ponderously. "May I—ah—examine that—ah—extraordinary document, my friend?"

"You'll see it when it's probated," Bob said glumly. "Until then I'll keep my own hands on it. I don't feel much like discussing it now."

The big man picked up the contract and pen, folded the one and adjusted the other, stowed them away in a pocket of the cream-colored flannels, and folded his arms, glowering at Bob.

"This is a highly unusual procedure, my friend—most unusual." It was evident that Mortimer's accustomed flow of oratory had returned with a rush, aided and abetted by an acute dislike for this blunt young man. "To have prevented Miss Barnaby from obtaining the—ah—necessary funds to establish herself in more congenial surroundings away from the constant menace of that unfortunate Dan—to have come here in the guise of an honored guest, to deceive a young and trusting girl, secure in the belief— We will say no more of that, sir. I cannot think that your action was altogether honorable—I might say indecent—"

"Oh, dry up!" Bob pushed by to the stairs.

He had a glimpse of the three men on the floor below, as the door of the bridge closed behind him; three silent, staring men—Mortimer, the statesman, business man, philanthropist, true to type in every detail of manner and make-up; Jake, the constable of fiction, complete even to the silver star inside his coat and the revolver butt parting his coat tails; Lang, the exaggeratedly stiff and wooden-faced butler of the stage and screen—all perfect.

Too perfect—almost. Bob half expected to see a curtain come sliding down across the stage and break up the tableau, sending mayor, constable and butler hurrying to their dressing rooms to become their natural selves again.

BOB sat on the window seat and gazed moodily over at the blank windows of the Gray Tower for the best part of an hour, waiting for Anne to appear so that he could explain that matter of the will and his position.

Things hadn't gone as smoothly as he had intended they should. The noble gesture of renouncing his claim to Shady Rest had not come off. He couldn't blame Anne for it. No one—particularly a young lady accustomed to having her own way and being boss of her environment—would have enjoyed being suddenly told that she was a pauper and a tolerated guest where she had been playing the hostess.

But Bob felt he was right in obstructing that sale. If he intended to keep the place it would have meant legal untangling and a refund of the deposit, and no end of trouble for Anne.

If Bob intended to hand her his heritage, he didn't want to see her sell

it beforehand for perhaps a quarter of its real value.

It seemed to Bob that Mortimer was at fault in not being able to dispose of the place at a better price. "Darned old windbag!" Bob complained bitterly. "If he spent more time looking after her business and less on his bums and boloney signs, he'd be better off."

His course was obvious: to pack up and leave Anne in possession. If he did that, maybe she would believe in his good intentions. On the other hand, he hated to leave her alone in the castle with the madman, Dan, prowling in the vicinity. Lang was as good as nothing, in Bob's estimation, as a protection.

Bob packed his few belongings in the kit-bag, waited around until dusk for Anne to appear in the courtyard, and then went in search of the houseman, leaving the packed bag ready on the bed.

He walked through the covered bridge, ghostly and silent in the light from the colored windows, and through the gloomy keep to the rear door. Smoke curled from the stovepipe on the roof of the kitchen shack upward along the high stone wall of the inclosure.

Bob shoved his head in the open door and looked around. Pots and pans were in orderly row on the wall, plates piled on the table, and the electric refrigerator door was ajar, as if preparations for the evening meal had been interrupted.

The sound of a car starting in the courtyard in front of the keep brought Bob hurrying around the corner of the building. He was in time to see Anne's roadster swing through the gateway underneath the portcullis and vanish over the bridge with a rattle of planks.

Bob looked after it wonderingly.

"Beg pardon, sir." Bob swung about toward Lang, who had approached in his customary soft-footed manner. "Miss Barnaby wishes me to tell you that she is leaving Shady Rest for good, and she hopes you will make yourself quite at home with your inheritance."

"I see." Bob turned away slowly. "Thanks."

"By the way, sir"—Lang looked off into the distance—"Miss Barnaby was good enough to pay my wages for a week in advance instead of giving notice. Mrs. Lang has already left. I am leaving shortly."

"But, look here," Bob objected, "there's no rush about it. Some one ought to stay and keep that nut Dan from burning down the place. I'm going myself—"

"No doubt the constable will be on hand, sir. Sorry, sir, we have made our plans. I must go now. You will find the refrigerator well stocked, sir." He wheeled around and glided stiffly away, leaving Bob abruptly and respectfully to his own devices.

"Well, I'll be darned if that isn't a hot one!"

Bob was conscious of an absurd impulse to follow the houseman and take a running kick at that wooden figure. He was curious to know how that wooden figure would act when properly aroused.

Instead, he wandered through the open door of the Gray Tower. In the lower room the faded red bathing suit was crumpled in a chair by the shower. In the room above that Anne had occupied, Bob caught a glimpse through the stair railings of a disordered bed holding a cardboard hatbox and a litter of paper and ribbons and scraps of clothing.

HE ventured up, feeling like a blundering intruder in this scented sanctuary. The place bore evidence of hasty packing. Another pasteboard hatbox gaped openly on the floor, a heap of torn letters lay on the lace of the dresser top, a tiny, high-heeled slipper of lizard skin peeped from beneath the bed beside a discarded lip stick, the hollow of a dainty pil-

low held a crumpled blue-bordered handkerchief.

Bob's eyes fell on a closely-written paper amid the pile on the dresser top —a fragment of a letter that had evidently been discarded unfinished:

> —would help to while away some of the time, Claire, here in my dreary principality on the hill, so if you can come for even a short visit, I would love to have you. The pool isn't like the one at school, of course, but there's a tennis court—and, oh, I almost forgot. Junior went to Hooper Prep, didn't he? Ask him if he knew Bob Stuart and all about him. Tall and rather good-looking in a kind of athletic way and awfully nice—but you needn't tell Jun—

He turned away quickly, suddenly and guiltily conscious of the social atrocity he was committing. He hadn't intended to read that letter at all. He switched off the light and felt his way downstairs.

It was quite dark in the courtyard—the warm darkness of a summer night, the murky lightness of the sky etching the castellated top of the inclosing wall in stark, black outline. From the woods and fields came the rasping, unending chorus of the crickets. A frog or two added a deeper note at intervals from the weed-grown moat. There were no lights in the dark square of the keep or the kitchen shack behind, and it was apparent that Lang had been as good as his word and had left the place to Bob.

He crossed over to the keep-door, his feet scuffing loudly on the cobbles in the silence of the courtyard, and groped for the switch on the wall inside the entrance. With the click of the button the electric bulbs above the doorway and beside the portcullis gleamed whitely inside their round globes, attracting an immediate flutter of soft-winged moths.

In the instant of the feeble illumination Bob fancied he saw the green postern gate at the east side of the yard quietly thud closed. He walked to it swiftly, swung it open and looked out. He shook his head. Must be he was seeing things, he figured. Unless that fellow Dan—

He closed the heavy door, snapped the bolt in place that locked it from the inside. No sense in leaving an entry and exit ready for that shadowy personage to avail himself of if he were around.

Bob walked to the arched entrance and stood under the light, looking out at the barely visible stretch of lawn and the shadowy clumps of trees beyond. It was too late to consider getting that wretched car of his started for a trip back to New York. Whether he liked it or not, he was destined to spend the remainder of the night in the gloomy loneliness of the castle—doubly gloomy and indescribably lonely to Bob, now that Anne had left.

He stepped out through the archway to the drawbridge—and stepped back more speedily at the flash and report from the blackness of the trees. For the second time that day he heard the menacing spat of a bullet flattening itself against the stone column not two feet from his head.

He jerked the pin from the iron barrel of the windlass on the wall and the portcullis crashed down in front of him with a deafening rattle of chains.

He turned and darted for the White Tower and the loaded shotgun he had left there.

CHAPTER X.

NIGHT HUNTING.

STUMBLING up the curved stairs in the dark, Bob reached the upper room, groped his way to the casement windows and swung them closed before he switched on the lights and looked for the gun in the place he had propped it against the wall.

It was not there. A hurried search of window seats and obscure corners convinced him quickly enough that the

rusty sporting piece was not in the room. Some one—presumably Lang, fearful of venturing forth unarmed with the madman at large—had appropriated the weapon while Bob was in the Gray Tower.

Standing empty-handed in the center of the lighted room, Bob considered the several aspects of the situation. The shotgun had not been the best of firearms for carrying on a long-distance warfare with the armed and murderous Dan, but it was better than nothing, and at close quarters was calculated to do considerable damage. Without it Bob would be the hunted instead of the hunter.

Dan could not break in with the postern and portcullis locked, but at the same time Bob could not reach Mortimer or Jake and notify them that Dan was in the vicinity—not without great risk of being ambushed on the way.

It was a risk he would have to take, banking on the impossibility of one man's being able to beleaguer four sides of the castle. If Dan was watching the front, Bob might slip out the back, if he could scale the wall, and chance a run for it.

He left the light burning behind him and made his way through the dark bridge to the silent keep and out the rear door.

In the kitchen shack, nestling against the rear wall, Bob had seen a household stepladder. Stretched between two low poles close by had been a length of clothesline, thin but reasonably strong. Bob succeeded without showing a light, in finding both stepladder and rope, and climbed to the top of the shack, hauling up the ladder after him.

The roof of the shack brought the top of the wall within eight or ten feet. Bob placed the ladder in position, climbed up and fastened the clothesline to one of the stone merlons that formed the battlements. He slipped through the embrasure and lowered himself — not without burning his palms — to the ground, landing in a clump of berry bushes that fringed the wall.

He picked his way cautiously through the trees and down the slope toward Kindliness Road, paralleling the driveway. He expected at any moment a crash in the underbrush and a charging attack, as he pushed through the swishing bushes or stepped on a rotten twig in the dark.

He came out on Kindliness Road a stone's throw from the lights of the Home. In the other direction there were lights, too—in the distant Community House — but the Home was closer.

Bob turned that way along the concrete road that was a faint white streak in the blackness of a moonless night.

Opposite the dark outline of the cottage, with its single blaze of light from the front room, Bob stopped for a second or two before venturing in. The place was strangely quiet, considering its accustomed activity. In the utter silence he could hear the cricket chorus in full sway, the scraping of the radio that had been let run unattended inside the house, the rhythmic croaking of the frogs in the moat up the hill. He had a queer feeling that everybody had vanished, leaving him alone in this weird village.

He mounted the creaking porch steps and stopped, the exclamation that rose to his lips half an oath and half a prayer.

"Good God!"

He stood frozen in place, his eyes taking in with photographic clearness the details seen through the open door —the bolts of silk in torn wrappings piled to the ceiling, the heaped wooden cases of all shapes and sizes that made the big room look like a warehouse, the litter of broken bottles and glasses, the battered, cheap furniture, now reduced to kindling as if a terrific struggle had taken place—the two men who lay

sprawled in ungainly postures amid the wreck.

ONE lay in an ominously still bundle in a corner where he had fallen, his face hidden against the blood-spattered flooring. The other man's shoulders were propped against a broken chair, his hairless face upturned to the light that gleamed shinily on his smooth baldness. He would have seemed asleep, with his lax hand uncurled from the butt of an automatic, except for the dark stain that was being blotted up by the dusty rug beneath him.

"Lang!" Bob jerked forward in horror. "What has happened?"

As he leaned over Lang, the wounded man's eyelids flickered open.

"Knifed me—swine—for my split—I fooled him, the big dumb-bell—"

"Who did this, Lang?" Bob's hands worked to open the man's coat. "Was it Dan?"

"Dan!" Lang's manner of the perfect butler seemed to have dropped from him like a forgotten language. "There ain't—any Dan—Jake's alibi to keep you indoors—kid you along. That rat—Slippy—done it—over in the corner—got his—"

"Lie still, I'll fetch a doc—" Bob's sentence ended in a horrified silence as he uncovered the man's chest. No doctor, or college of doctors, would call back that fading spark now.

The erstwhile houseman's rattling whisper was urgent. "I'm through—comin' clean—emeralds—Ezra Hale—my old boss—stones—get the shells—or the shotgun—pocket—"

"What do you mean, Lang—the shotgun?"

He caught sight of the rusted barrels of the shotgun in the heap of wreckage, hauled it forth. But Lang's eyes were closed now.

"Shells — pock — pocket—watch—out—Jake—"

His mouth gaped blackly in the light. No other sound came from it.

Bob shivered as he explored the side pockets of the dead man's coat, finding the handful of shells Lang had spoken of, and when Bob stood up and broke open the shotgun to see if it was loaded his hands still trembled slightly. One doesn't step in from a summer evening into the midst of murder, without some effect on the steadiest of nerves.

He picked up the automatic, found it empty, and overcame his reluctance to search that limp figure again. The search brought forth an automatic holster, a roll of bills with a fifty-dollar gold certificate on the outside, a penknife, a scribbled notebook — but no cartridges.

Bob dropped the stuff on the rug, depositing the useless automatic with it. He seemed to feel a chill that was not the chill of the night air stir the roots of his hair.

A butler that worked for almost nothing and carried a loaded automatic and a roll of fifties on his person, a constable that fired from ambush and manufactured a tale of a madman to keep Anne and Bob indoors while the constable went about his nightly activities, a room piled high with merchandise trucked in under cover of darkness, two dead men under the blazing electric lights—there were some decidedly sinister activities afoot in Shady Rest.

The rumble of an approaching car, traveling fast, brought Bob out to the porch. The approaching lights swung around the curve of Kindliness Road, and the brakes shrieked to a stop before the house. Bob vaulted the low porch railing and melted into the shadows, his hands gripping the shotgun tightly, as the heavy tread of hurrying men sounded across the floor.

First a dull silence as the newcomers viewed the scene. Then, in the harsh chorus of voices, Bob recognized Jake's snarling tones.

"Whitey! He was here last! Bumped both of them off, he did! And

he got the stuff, too! See where he frisked Lang? Turn over that guy in the corner an' see if he's got 'em on him, Nick!"

Bob backed slowly toward the roadway, crossed to the far side, keeping to the rear of the car away from the glare of the headlights that made a path of white along the concrete. As he did so, Jake came ranging to the porch, bulky shadows stumbling out the door behind him.

"Snappy now! Get to the north gate, Nick! And you keep them lights steady on the road so he won't slip by on the other side. The rest of you spread out! We'll search this whole patch and get that double crossing—"

Bob didn't wait to hear further.

HE took to the path leading upward to the castle, moving swiftly as he could in the blind darkness under the trees. Judging by the extent of the line that moved his way through the crackling brush, there were at least ten men in the party. One way was barred to him by the headlights that pierced a line of light for a thousand yards. The way out—a retreat to the castle—seemed a safer procedure, especially if it came to a fight, than to remain in the open.

Blundering against the tree trunks and avoiding a fall into the moat by instinct more than judgment, he reached the rear wall again. The rope was harder to find, but eventually, after an eternity of seconds, he grasped it. Quickly he wrapped the free end of the clothesline about the shotgun at the small of the stock, so as to be able to haul it up after him.

Climbing up a clothesline, even with a rough surface of stone wall and a muscular physique to aid, is not the easiest job in the world, as Bob soon discovered. A half-inch rope without knots or hand-holds has a habit of slipping through clutching hands, and a rough wall can play havoc with the knuckles. But the prospect of a shot in the back is a great inducement to gymnastic work of that kind. Bob reached the battlements breathless but intact, and pulled the shotgun up after him, holding the line out from the wall to avoid the clink of steel on stone.

He listened, but the searching party were working in silence. There was no certainty that they were not all around the castle moat at the moment. Only the slightest rustle that might have been the wind in the tree branches came from the foot of the wall.

He swung down on the inner side, felt for the top of the ladder with his feet, and descended to the roof of the shack. The light still burned in the upper room of the White Tower. Bob shifted the ladder, reached the cobblestones of the courtyard and made for the keep, moving in its shadow so that the front door light and portcullis globe would not silhouette his figure.

Almost at the rear door of the keep he stopped in his tracks, staring fixedly at the lighted casement window of his room. A shadow—the head and shoulders of a man—moved across the illuminated square. Bob felt the tiny muscles about his jaws tighten as he stepped softly inside the keep.

Two doors were between him and the room in the White Tower. He tiptoed up the winding stairs to the balcony, opened the first door without a squeak, and groped foot by foot across the bridge to the second. From beyond came the sound of some one moving about the room.

Carefully, Bob twisted the knob of the door, shoved it open inch by inch until he could see in. A man, his back turned to the door, was bent over the compartment under the window seat, his hands rummaging among the books and dusty papers it contained.

Bob shoved the door fully ajar and swung the double-barreled gun to bear on the intruder.

"Hello, Dan!" he called pleasantly. "Up with them quick, now, and watch your step!"

The man, still crouched over, spun around his finger-tips level with his ears below the rakish Panama hat. It was the solitaire player, Whitey.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

THEY faced one another for the space of several breaths, pallid cheek and narrowed eyes confronting the determined young man behind the unwavering barrels in the doorway.

"Well?" Whitey's hand twitched nervously in the air. "You've got me. What's the next move?"

"Find what you were looking for this time?" Bob countered calmly.

Whitey shook his head without removing his eyes from Bob's trigger finger. "You know damned well I didn't, or I wouldn't be here. You've got them on you or 'Baldy' Lang has. They're not here anyway."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Bob motioned with the shotgun, "but I'll find out. Stand up and turn around so I can see what artillery you're carrying. Move slowly, and keep them elevated."

Whitey obeyed to the letter. "I'll save your time," he said, over his shoulder. "The rod is in the right-hand hip pocket."

Bob shifted the shotgun to his left hand and plunged his right into the pocket indicated. But the man in front was as quick as a cat. A twist sidewise, a lightning movement of Whitey's hand to his armpit and out again, and Bob found himself staring blankly into a ring of blued steel, Whitey's other hand gripping the shotgun barrels, holding that weapon away from his body.

"Drop it!" he rasped. Bob's hold relaxed. In this unexpected reversal of positions he detected a menacing note in Whitey's voice that had been lacking in his own. This pale youth was prepared to shoot without question.

"Back up, now, and sit down on the bed there! We'll have that talk, but you'll do the talking."

Bob backed up, did as he was told. He felt both angry and ashamed to have been taken in by so obvious a dodge.

Whitey let the shotgun clatter to the floor and stood safely clear of a sudden rush on Bob's part. "Now, what's your racket?"

"Racket?" Bob scowled. "I don't quite get—"

"Come on," Whitey urged calmly. "Don't play dummy. I'm not a bad guy to be friends with. You may need a good word from me when the pinch comes. I'm askin' a nice, plain question. What's your end of this deal? You're in it with the rest of the mob. Open up. Spill your little tale to old Whitey, the friend of the poor and needy."

"I don't quite—who are you, anyway?"

"I'm the guy behind this gun here, that's ready to go off with a loud bang any minute. Also, I'm the guy that asks the questions, and you're the baby that answers them. I've got the rest of them sized up, but not you. Once again, so's there won't be any mistake, what's your end of the Jake-Lang-Garner-Big Nick racket?"

Bob shook his head. "I don't know whether you believe me if I tell you I'm not mixed up in any racket. I never met any of those gentlemen until I came here."

"I see." Whitey's expression was sarcastic disbelief. "You just popped in here by chance, Shady Rest bein' a kind of health resort right at the present moment. It don't go. Come again an' make it better."

"Look here!" Bob repressed his impulse to hurl himself forward and chance that ring of blued steel. "You may be used to dealing with liars and crooks—"

"Easy," Whitey cautioned. "I'm askin' civil questions. You're the girl's third cousin or somethin'. Sure. An' Lang is the butler, an' Jake's the town constable, an' Garner's the hard-workin' garageman. All labeled nice and respectable. You may be straight an' you may be crooked. What I'm gettin' at, Mr. Third Cousin, is what your game is in Shady Rest."

"I own the place," Bob said. "It's been willed to me—was willed to me long ago—and I came down here to look it over, naturally enough. Not that I consider it any of your business."

Whitey looked interested. "Got any proof? Not too fast. Just keep your right hand down and use your left. I'm not invitin' a barrage."

Bob fished his wallet from his pocket. "It's in there—other identification too, if it makes any difference to you."

"Toss it over." With his free hand Whitey emptied the wallet on the window seat, keeping Bob covered, and picked out one paper after another: driving license, visiting cards, letters. When he came to the will he read it through, nodded, and replaced the pistol in its holster under his armpit.

"I kinda thought you were all right," he muttered, and handed Bob back the wallet and its contents, "but I had to make sure."

HE sat down on the padded window seat and grinned at Bob's amazement. "You probably figured I was one of the mob. So you've inherited Shady Rest! Do you know what you fell into, besides the property?"

"Plenty of excitement, I'll say," Bob frowned. "Now that you know who I am, perhaps you won't mind—"

"You've fell into," Whitey went on, disregarding the interruption, "one of the neatest little mobs of big-time crooks it's been my pleasure to work with in a long time, and one of the cleverest layouts a man could wish for. The guy that thought it up had brains. I'm only a poor slob of a private dick myself—"

"A detective?"

"Sort of," Whitey admitted. "Private investigator for the Jordania Insurance Company, an' doin' a little peekin' around corners to see what became of a certain pile of jewelry. You'll have to take my word for it. I don't carry a badge on my hat, nor in my clothes either. For the same reason that I use my own name—White, that I'm used to—instead of calling myself Alpheus K. DeSoto or Cyrus T. Abercrolligan. With the mobs I deal with, sometimes it's good dope to answer your name quick an' without too much time out for thought. What I'm gettin' at is, you an' me will have to work together on this. An', first of all, I'll give you the low-down on some of these gents 's far as I can."

He held up a tobacco-stained forefinger.

"Startin' with Number One, we'll take the town constable, Jake. Got the star an' gun an' everything an' that makes him a real hick cop. Only he isn't. His real name is Sidney Jacobsson, an' he's one of the toughest gunmen that ever sawed the bars offen a jail window. He's full of poison, an' if he bit himself he'd die in agony. Check!"

Another finger popped up beside the first.

"Then we come to friend Garner, the village blacksmith, an' a hard-boiled chestnut he is. His specialty is hi-jackin' liquor trucks, but he's broad-minded and don't mind tryin' his hand at swipin' a load of silk or tobacco and drivin' it off. Manslaughter, racketeering, an' two terms in Elmira. Check Mr. Garner!"

"Good Lord!" Bob breathed. "Do you mean to—"

"Number Three," Whitey went on smoothly. "Lang—Baldy Lang. Nice lad. Worked as a footman in a millionaire's house. Choked his boss with

a bath towel one day, an' beat it with a half-wit chambermaid, who calls herself Mrs. Lang, an' everything in sight, totalling about eighty grand. He came here to lay low, an' that's my main reason for being here too. I've got the best of jail references, an' I'm supposed to be an expert 'scratcher' for a forgery mob, taking a short vacation while the cops—"

"Wait!" Bob came out of his dazed silence with a rush. "Lang—he's dead! Slippy killed him down there at the Home."

Whitey was on his feet in an instant. "It's broke then! I was afraid of that, but I thought I had plenty of time! Lang has the stuff on him. Listen! I've got to get my hands on those emeralds before they get wise and search him. You slip out the north gate. There's a State police detachment at Grove Cen—"

"You're too late," Bob broke in. "They've already discovered Lang and they're looking for you just now."

He told of the incidents at the Home in the hollow. Whitey listened, glancing sidewise at the floor in the attitude of a man waiting for the sound of a footfall.

"Did he say where the stones were hid?" he asked eagerly.

"He mentioned something about emeralds, but he was going fast and died without further explanations."

"He would, damn him!" Whitey said savagely. "Here I've been playin' tag with an undertaker's wooden overcoat for three weeks, an' just when I get a line on him an' get set for a pinch. Are they wise to me—know who I am?"

"I don't know. I heard Jake say something about your double crossing them and getting away with the stuff."

"No such luck. But they haven't got here yet." He leaped to the door that led to the bridge, shot the heavy iron bolts home top and bottom. "Where does that lead to?"

Bob followed the direction of the pointing finger. "The roof of the tower. There's a kind of a parapet up there."

Whitey scrambled up the iron ladder, lifted open the trapdoor. "We may need it, if they rush this dump."

"DO you mean they're liable to make a regular siege of it?" Bob asked. "They wouldn't dare arouse the whole village."

Whitey grinned on one side of his pallid face. "Don't you believe they won't. They'll play a machine gun on this dump like a hose when they get wise we're here. They want me, an' they want you, too. You know too much about Shady Rest for Jake's comfort. He tried to shove you out the first day, an' he's been takin' shots at you off and on since. I heard him an' Tony, the ex-convict an' fence that runs the Community Store, talkin' about it. They'll want to take you for a ride, especially now, since you're buttin' into their deal with the Barnaby girl."

Bob, who had picked up the shotgun, sat down again on the bed and looked blankly at this glib informant.

"But—but do you mean to say," he gasped, "that everybody in this village is a crook or an ex-convict?"

"Righto! You're gettin' the idea. Hi-jackers, crooks, gunmen, fences, big-time panhandlers, counterfeiters, dope peddlers—all welcome to Shady Rest, with the boloney signs and the charity camouflage to keep out the guys they don't want. A whole village full of every kind of crook that's lookin' for a place to hide out; run by crooks, and almost owned by crooks until you showed up to spoil that deal. Shady Rest—shady but not much restful. An' they're two honest guys in the whole deck—you an' me to-night. There was three until the skirt blew out on us."

"Mortimer must be blind," Bob exclaimed hotly, "not to know what is going on right under his nose!"

"Mortimer!" Whitey chuckled quietly. "Mortimer don't know? That's a hot number, too. Why, he's the lad that started the game! He sold old lady Barnaby the kindliness-help-the-downhearted gold brick in the beginning. He's the front an' Jake's the works. Old 'Singsong' Bert, one of the slickest con men that ever talked an old lady out of her life's savings. He was in the stir for bigamy and fraud when you were wearin' diapers. Don't look for nothin' from that baby. Better get that gun set an' the shells handy."

Bob nodded grimly. "You don't expect Mortimer to interfere if they should capture us? Even a confidence man might have limits—"

"Not that kind. If you was drowning he'd throw you a rock—an' wait for you to come up the third time to grab your watch. Get set. I'm goin' to put this light out."

CHAPTER XII.

SIEGE.

HIS finger jabbed at the black button of the brass plate on the wall, and Bob had the sensation of being plunged into a pit of darkness. Whitey's hand touched Bob's arm.

"We'll play blind-man's buff with them for awhile. Slip up the ladder with me and we'll look around."

Bob felt his way after the silent-footed Whitey up the iron rungs to the level surface of the tower roof. It was lighter there, and leaning over the waist-high parapet they could see the top of the wall as a shadowy line ten feet below them, the dark patch of lawn just distinguishable from the darker blur of the trees crowding to its edge. In the hollow the light still shone from the window of the Home—from the room that held its immobile tableau of crime. From the far Community House more lights showed, unblinkingly.

Once more the depressing quiet seemed to have wrapped its smothering folds about Shady Rest, accenting the peaceful night noises—the *creek-creek* of the insect chorus, the grunt of a sedentary frog in the rank-grown moat, the shrilly faint and shuddering laughter of an owl searching the tree tops.

"Do you suppose they've beat it?" Bob whispered.

"Not them," Whitey muttered decidedly. "They're just gettin' set. Lay low. We'll hear from them soon enough an' it 'll be plenty. Jake wants me in the worst way—eighty grand worth of Ezra Deekin's emeralds that Lang got away with an' Jake thinks I got—I wish I had! An' Mortimer, old Singsong Bert, won't sleep peaceful until he knows you're laying in a ditch in the next State with identification-marks cut out of your clothes an' no questions asked. Boy! You sure spoiled a nice party he had arranged with the will of yours. He had one of the swellest layouts here a gang could want an' if he could buy off the girl— Lay low!"

Bob had heard the noise, too—the grating of approaching footsteps on the path up the hill. They came nearer without hurry or pretense of concealment; the sound stopped at the edge of the grass-padded lawn and a white-clad figure glimmered beneath them.

Mortimer's throaty barytone floated up.

"Are you there, Mr. Stuart?"

"No use keepin' still," Whitey whispered in Bob's ear. "He knows you sleep here an' he'll get hep you're wise. Stall him along."

Bob took a firmer grip on the shot-gun. His finger itched to send a load of bird-shot instead of a soft answer.

"What is it, Mortimer?" he asked.

"Sorry to, ah, disturb you at this hour," the big man apologized smoothly, "but I have a rather important matter to discuss—quite important, I might say. If you don't mind opening the postern door we can dis—"

"Let's not," Bob retorted, "and say

we did. I've got a hunch the air is better up here on the roof. You can say what you have to say from the outside."

"My dear fellow," Mortimer's voice betrayed shocked surprise, "this is most cavalier treatment. Surely you cannot think that my designs are other than strictly friendly and honorable."

"I don't know what your designs are." Bob slipped the safety-catch forward on the shotgun. "Mine aren't friendly at all, Singsong Bert, or whatever your right name is. I have heard too much about you lately. I'll give you about two—"

He was about to say "two minutes to be on your way"—a more generous time-limit, apparently, than he was to be accorded himself, for it was exactly at that moment that he ducked from the blinding glare of a light that played on the White Tower from the edge of the trees, while the smashing rattle of a machine gun ripped the still air to shreds.

He threw himself to the rooftop out of range of the particles of spattered lead and chipped stone that flew in every direction. On the other side of the tower a second gun roared into action, drowning out the shouts of the attackers and the ragged volley from their automatics. Overhead something sailed like a tossed ball, missed the top and landed in the court below with a blast that shook the tower.

"Come on!" Whitey shouted above the deafening bursts of sound. "Get below before they blow us to hell outa here!"

Bob rolled after him to the trapdoor that had been opened, and, dragging the shotgun behind, slid down feet foremost as a second bomb, better aimed than the first, exploded on the roof in a blaze of fire and fury.

WITH the searchlight on the walls of the tower, the room below was partly illuminated. Whitey jumped to one of the narrow, slitted windows that overlooked the front, and took careful aim. With the pressure of his steady finger the light went out and a sharp yelp of pain added a new voice to the uproar.

From below came the splintering of wood as the postern door was battered in. The glass of the casement window nearest Bob tinkled down, stinging his his cheek, and the plastered wall opposite became pitted with tiny black holes.

Whitey came away from the narrow window with blood staining his hand. His lips moved blasphemously, but the words were lost in the din.

"Get you?" Bob called.

"Just scraped me. Our turn to move. Where's 'at door lead?"

Bob shot the bolts back and flung it open. The flare of another grenade, bursting in the court, showed the bridge and the open door beyond leading to the keep. They hurried through to the balcony.

"This way!" Bob shouted. "There's another tower! We can hold them off for awhile!"

Whitey scurried for the winding stairs. Bob lost no time in vaulting the balustrade and dropping to the floor below. At the foot of the opposite stairs he waited for Whitey, and when that breathless person stumbled up, Bob pushed him ahead up the stairs. Whitey was evidently a good man with a gun even if a poor cross-country runner. Bob felt for the railing, to follow.

Triumphant shouts and the scuffle of feet sounded from the courtyard in the direction of the postern gate, and a renewed burst of firing around the White Tower. The great chandelier in the center of the keep blazed into light—caught Bob halfway up the stairs in plain view, showed Mortimer standing in the doorway, his finger still on the switch and his back to Bob.

"Quick!" he boomed over his shoulder. "Cut them off this way—"

The temptation, even at a distance that would only pepper the white-clad

figure, was too much for Bob. Both barrels roared—not louder than Mortimer did, however, as that worthy made a swan-dive through the door. But Bob was given no time to enjoy the mayor's painful and undignified injuries. The heavy, scowling countenance of the man called Nick was plunging toward the stairs, his extended hand jerking with the recoil of a flame-spitting automatic.

Luckily, his target was half hidden behind the iron-work of the stairs and moving fast. Fortunately for Bob, too, a man running has at best an erratic aim. Bob reached the balcony, and out of sight of Nick, stopped in the open doorway leading to the bridge, and ejected the empty shells.

Fumbling in his pocket Bob jerked out a shell and jammed it into the breech as Nick's bullet-head showed up. Bob should have sensibly followed Whitey along the line of retreat into the Gray Tower, but it seemed the proper time to lessen the number of pursuers by one.

He swung the gun forward without waiting to get it to his shoulder and jerked the trigger. There was a click and nothing more. Bob hurled the weapon at the snarling face on the stairs, and leaped backward through the doorway, his hands scrambling for the bolts in the dark as he slammed it closed.

He bumped against Whitey in the blackness of the passage.

"Thought they had you," Whitey grunted. "What happened?"

"Gun missed fire and I had to slam Nick with it. But I tickled Mortimer's hide. He'll be picking buckshot out of himself for a week."

He turned inquiring to Whitey as he pushed open the second door. The electric lights were bright on the ceiling. A bullet crashed through the window and starred the mirror over the dressing table.

"Switched them on to have a look around," Whitey panted hurriedly. "They know we're here anyway. I had to take another crack at those stones. Hid around the dump somewhere—no time now, though. Grab hold!"

Together they pushed the heavy bedstead against the oak door, sent the dressing table and a chest of drawers tumbling down the narrow stairway that led up from the lower room, blocking that means of access. Whitey, crouching under the light with the automatic held hip-high, covering the door, turned to Bob a pallid face that was a mask of grinning fear.

"We're cooked, kiddo. But I'll get Jake first or Mortimer. We ain't got a look-in here."

A deafening reverberation shook the inner door. "That's the first door. You duck out of the way. You ain't got a gun. I'll douse the light an' empty this gat when the door goes. They'll be in each other's way an' I may get a break—but it's every guy for himself now."

The narrow eyes that glinted over his shoulder widened in an unbelieving stare. Slowly, as if lifted by a tightening and invisible string, his quivering hand rose, pointed at the stone floor behind Bob.

"Look! I'll be—it's—"

Bob whirled around—to see the disheveled blond hair and white face of Anne Barnaby, almost at his feet.

CHAPTER XIII.

CRASHING THE GATE.

"ANNE!"

For a couple of precious seconds, while the room vibrated with the battering blows that were rained on the yielding oak door, Bob stood stock-still, taking in the details of this startling development — the square slab of dressed stone gaping upward from the level floor, a glimpse of rusted, racheted iron beneath it, Anne's head and shoulders in the opening, call-

ing to him in a voice that was soundless in the uproar, waving frantically to him to hurry.

Whitey needed no second invitation. He plunged for the opening, hardly waiting for Anne to vanish out of the way, and wriggled backward and downward from sight. Bob followed suit, feeling a damp, earthly breath fan his cheek as he felt for the rungs of a ladder, that showed by the light of an electric torch below.

Anne's voice—he could hear it now in the comparative quiet of the shaft—came to him from the foot of the ladder.

"That stone! You'll have to lower it! The crank is to the right."

She directed the beam of the flash light to a lever, something like a small edition of an auto crank, underneath the propped-up slab of stone. Under Bob's manipulation it squeaked dismally and the slab jerked downward, shutting out the light from the room above. He clambered down and joined Anne and Whitey. In the circle of radiance from the flash light her stockings and short, pleated skirt showed mud-stained and torn.

"Anne!" From above came faint shouts, the dull boom of an explosion. "How in the world—"

"One of Cousin Josh's medieval notions." She made an attempt to smile with pallid lips. "There's another passage like this leading from the White Tower. This one goes down under the moat and ends in the clump of cedars beyond the lawn."

Bob nodded. It explained the lost space in the lower tower room that contained only a bathroom. But he was more interested in Anne Barnaby at the moment.

"But you shouldn't have come back—that mob of gunmen there!"

"I had no choice. Mortimer detained me at the gate—said he had an important matter to discuss in his office; and left me there, locked in. I heard them loading the truck and the cars—heard the explosions here and I smashed a window with a chair. But we mustn't delay here!"

"Does Mortimer know about this secret tunnel racket?" Whitey asked.

"Yes. But he doesn't think you—"

"Best be movin' then before he gets his mind off bird-shot, an' thinks of this. He'll smoke us outa here like three woodchucks."

Bob relieved Anne of the flash light, sent its rays into the gloom. "Stick right behind me, Whitey, with the gun," he suggested, "in case we run into one of them. Miss Barnaby will be safer in rear."

A few feet away another shaft, lined with brick, led downward for ten feet or so, then connected with a tunnel, arched with moistly shining brick, that sloped gradually upward again. Bob switched off the light at the tunnel entrance and led the way along the narrow passage, stooping almost double to avoid bumping against the low roof. Josh Stuart might have been something of a "nut," but Bob felt heartily grateful to the eccentric castle-builder for this particular eccentricity.

He crept forward slowly, Whitey muttering as he slipped on the greasy footing. Then the dank, rancid air of the tunnel gave place to the fresh coolness of the night air, and Bob pushed cautiously through the fragrant bushes that were laced blackly against the sky. From the direction of the lighted keep and towers, the shooting had stopped, but the babble of shouts and the sound of slamming doors showed that the attackers were prosecuting a thorough search of the castle. In the other direction, down the sloping hillside, a pair of lamps gleamed between the trees.

Bob shoved forward under the low-hanging cedar branches to clear the exit and Whitey and Anne appeared shadowlike beside him.

"If we can get to the north gate," Whitey whispered tensely, "we got a chance of gettin' to—"

"Both gates are locked," Anne said.

"They've got some one watching each one."

UP the path from the two lamps that glowed on the road, a man raced toward the castle, passing within a few yards of the fugitives in the cedars. And, as he ran, he shouted to those in the castle.

"Hey! Snap out of it, you guys! This way, Nick! Tony! Mortimer says there's another place—"

Bob did not feel it necessary to wait to hear what Mortimer said. He could guess it. "Let's go! Hold tight to me, Anne!"

The three hastened downhill through the brush, Bob's arm helping and guarding Anne from the lashing tree-branches. At the road a hoarse voice challenged from the dark.

"Hey, there! Who the hell are—"

Whitey's automatic crashed in answer. Bob's arm tightened about Anne's waist, pulling her with him as he sprinted along the smooth concrete toward those twin lamps. Answering shots came from the rear and from up the hill as the men in the castle poured out. The headlights of a car parked by the road toward the Community House flashed blindingly in the faces of the three people who were escaping.

The headlights showed something else immediately in front of the refugees—the bulky outline of a five-ton truck, loaded with bales and boxes under its tarpaulin. The lamps were lit—they were the ones Bob had seen from the hill—and the engine was thrumming softly as if the driver had left it for but a moment to join in the hunt.

Bob swung Anne onto the step beside the wide, leather-covered driver's seat, as Whitey came up, in a series of dashes, stopping to send a bullet screaming toward the flashes from the black shadows tumbling out into the road.

"Other side!" Bob yelled. "Jump aboard!"

He leaped up beside Anne, and as his left hand gripped for the wheel his right was jamming the rasping gears into first. The heavy truck lurched forward, gathered speed as he threw into second, roared down the road toward the figures that spat fire and leaped aside as the juggernaut swayed down on them.

Glass from the punctured windshield flew back in tiny particles that lodged in Anne's hair, something burned in a red-hot line across Bob's knuckles on the wheel—and the road ahead showed empty.

Anne's hair whipped across Bob's face. "The gate!" she called in his ear. "The gate is closed!"

Bob's mouth tightened to a thin line. The north gate was closed, he knew—the scrolled and ornamental iron-work of the double gates appeared, gleaming in the light of the truck lamps. He knew also that by this time the pursuers would be piling into their cars to give chase, that there would be no time to stop and batter open the locks. He was riding a battering-ram that would have made a hole in the side of a fairly substantial brick house, let alone burst open a pair of tall iron gates. As to what would happen to the truck and driver—

The gleaming gates seemed to hurl themselves toward him from the darkness. His right arm went out, swept Anne downward under the partial protection of the dash-board and bent his head, instinctively shrinking from that impact of hurtling steel on resistant iron.

It seemed to him, in the instant of that terrific crash, as if the road itself had up-ended and smashed down on the top of the cab, splintering it about his ears, as he fought to hold that swerving wheel.

Then they were through, the water from a broken radiator cascading in a scalding shower, the torn tarpaulin fluttering in tatters, the lights of Grove Center, two miles away, twinkling

through the empty frame of the windshield, as they bowled down the long, sloping State road to friends and safety.

Jammed into the ruined hood of the truck was a twisted iron gate railing that carried a jagged fragment of wooden sign:

. . . leaving Shady . . . folk. The wicked man, the sinful . . . Come Again . . .

It was still there when they rocked into peaceful Grove Center with Whitey clinging to the running board and making whoopee at the top of his shrill voice.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADIES PRESENT!

"WE win," the investigator said dolefully, "an' we lose."

He looked around the disordered keep, still pungently reminiscent of smokeless powder in the gray light. Outside, in the court, a huddle of men, Jake and Big Nick among them, were being ushered none too gently into a touring car manned by gray-clad State troopers.

"A month's work wasted," Whitey complained bitterly, "an' nothin' to show for it, except a bunch of yeggs with no more reward attached to them than would buy me a new lid for the one I spoiled. Mortimer's the guy. They nabbed Mrs. Lang just now, but she don't know nothin'. If Lang wised anybody to where they were it was Mortimer—the big cow—an' Mortimer's the only one guy missin' from the mob. Likely he beat it soon's you peppered him with that bird gun. An' now they're gone an' I'm plain outa luck."

"What are gone?" Bob frowned. He was thinking of something else—a very important personal matter that had nothing to do with Mortimer. "I don't follow you."

"Ezra Deekin's emeralds," Whitey snapped disgustedly. "Why d'ya suppose I've been buzzin' them quick-trigger bimboes for the last hour? They ain't got 'em, that's a cinch. An' Lang ain't got them in his clothes either. Eighty grand! Eighty thousand berries' worth of stones that "Baldy" Lang grabbed the day he tied the bath towel on old man Deekin. An' seven thousand cold smackers' reward waitin' for the lucky guy that finds 'em. It wouldn't be me, of course. If it was rainin' twenty-dollar gold pieces I'd get hit right away with a bag of pennies!"

He lit a cigarette, flicked the match out the door. "You own the dump now, don't you?"

"I don't know," Bob considered. "Miss Barnaby, maybe. Why?"

"Because if you should run across—an' it ain't likely, I guess—a little heap of emeralds an' a diamond or two, say, about a small fistful, remember there's thirty-five hundred bucks in it for you an' maybe more. I'm goin' to beat it now to Grove Center with that bunch an' get in touch with the main office. I got bad news for them."

He slipped out the door, his battered Panama, which he had recovered from the débris of the White Tower, tilted as rakishly as ever over one prominent ear.

"Wait a second!" Bob fished around in the ruins of a spinet desk against the wall, found an envelope, and slipped the will into it. "Is Miss Barnaby still there in Grove Center?"

"Yeah. I promised her I'd drive her car down there for her. She's blowin' back to the city, she says."

"Give her this"—Bob handed over the envelope—"and tell her I'm—well, just give it to her."

He turned to the winding stairs, along the Bridge of Sighs and into the room in the White Tower, intending to locate his kit bag. He found it, rather battered, but unopened, under a white snowdrift of fallen plaster. He

picked it up and made his way down the littered stairs to the court, and out under the raised portcullis.

Beyond the lawn and the banked trees Shady Rest displayed its broad acres in panoramic view: the quiet lake glinting in the morning light, the smooth, concrete roadways sweeping in from the South Gate, where stood the lone figure of a State trooper barring curious sightseers, the neat row of bungalows, the expanse of cool woods, level meadows, farmland.

A promising place, Shady Rest, when all was said and done. With a little fixing up the Community House would serve as an office, lots could be staked out—small bungalow sites were easily salable in this country—the Home made into a real cottage, some of the outbuildings stuccoed and renovated into pretty cottages, the castle wall torn down for material for stone chimneys and foundations, the lake made a real garden spot for the home buyers, the farm made a paying proposition.

Lord! A fellow could do something real with a place like this—a fellow that had the energy to go to work and develop—

Bob snapped out of it, grabbed up the bag and plunged down the path. The car he had arrived in still reposed wearily by the side of the drive. He tossed the kit bag into the tonneau and set to work to make the wreck run.

HE was still working, lying on his back, his feet exposed as he explored the innards of a reluctant clutch, when Whitey called to him.

Bob crawled out from underneath. The "private investigator" was breathless and bursting with words as he tumbled up the hill.

"Shells — Mortimer — shells — shot the shells—"

"Take it easy." Bob grabbed his arm. "You'll have a stroke or something. What do you mean—shot the shells? What shells?"

"You shot them off!" Whitey broke away, waving his hands wildly. "Where's the gun—the shotgun?"

"Why," Bob said calmly, "it's where I threw it at Big Nick when it wouldn't go off. In the keep. Why, wait a min—"

Whitey had darted toward the castle. Bob followed him, wonderingly, caught up with him in the keep as the investigator broke open the breech of the gun and grabbed for the unexploded shell. He dug at the paper wadding with a penknife.

"What's the idea?" Bob questioned. "I told you that one was no good."

"No good!" Whitey turned the shell upside down and let a tiny cascade of shimmering green trickle into his perspiring palm. "Eighty thousand grand! Why, you darned fool, those are Ezra Deekin's emeralds you were shootin' around! Lang tried to tell you where they were. In the shells in his pocket!"

He swept the Panama from his head with a hilarious gesture. "Hey! Boy, are we good? They're all here—all except about six grand of diamonds an' I know where they are! Come to life! You got three thousand five hundred bucks comin' to you from the Jordania Insurance Company fast as they can write a check! Get me?"

"And they—they were there all—"

"Sure." Whitey dropped into a chair. "Gosh! You gave me a turn. I could see you blazin' away at them yeggs last night with eighty thousand dollars' worth of ammunition. Lang hid them there. Then he took the gun, too, for camouflage when he got ready to beat it. He figured they might stick him up to see what he was totin' away. He was supposed to split with Mortimer an' Jake for hidin' him out, but he kept puttin' it off. Then he tries to make a slide an' Slippy bumps him off."

Bob looked at the glowing green lights that Whitey was carefully counting into an envelope. Thirty-five hun-

dred dollars! It sounded like thirty-five million to Bob just then.

"But how on earth did you get wise to where they were?"

Whitey grinned happily. "That's the best part of it, kid. That's where you earn your dough. You see, when Lang emptied out the two shells an' filled one with these rocks an' the other with some measly diamonds, he must 'a' been in a hurry, for he forgot to take the powder outa the other. An' before I forget to tell you, Singsong Bert was layin' in that truck when we drove him to Grove Center. The cops found him—"

"Mortimer!"

"The guy hisself," Whitey crowed. "As full of bird shot as a pincushion an' only half as comfortable. Only they weren't bird shot, but about six thousand dollars' worth of small diamonds! He wanted them an' he got 'em. Talk about joy! They're pickin' them outa him now an' he's havin' the time of his life"

"Well, I'll be darned!" Bob whistled his surprise. "You mean to say I peppered his anatomy—"

"S-sh!" Whitey pointed toward the doorway and blushed for the first and last time in his career. "Ladies present!"

Bob waited, gazing into tearful brown eyes. Anne flung herself forward, in her extended hand the typewritten sheet he had sent.

"I won't take it!" she said spiritedly. "It belongs to you! You're just being foolishly generous! You—you must keep it!"

"But listen, Anne. I have no right—"

"Say," Whitey suggested from the doorway. "What are you two scrapping about? Split it—like we done the reward—fifty-fifty, see? Any church pastor can draw up that contract!

"An', say, folks," he popped his grinning face in the doorway again. "With thirty-five hundred berries in the kick, wouldn't this be a swell place for a honeymoon?"

It was.

THE END.

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The Haunted Forest of Classis

THE ancient forest of Classis on the outskirts of Ravenna is the same as it was in the days of Guido da Polenta, an old Lord of Ravenna renowned for his magnificence and cruelty. Beginning in the marsh at the Church of San Apollinaire Nuovo the forest extends along the sea for fifteen miles.

Local tradition avers that a clearing in the heart of the forest, on the first Friday in June of every seventh year a cold wind begins to blow. It is accompanied by a rushing sound that is not the sea. At last one distinguishes the crashing of branches, neighing of horses, yelping of hounds, and the horns and halloos of huntsmen. Into the clearing rushes the hunt, and the hotly pursued quarry is neither wild boar nor deer, but something milk-white that runs erect and screams piteously. It is a woman.

The hounds overtake her and pull her down. A hunter on a black horse transfixes the dying girl with a boar spear, and while she still lives cuts out her heart with his hunting knife and throws it to the hounds. Then all vanish.

The hunter was Guido degli Anastagi; the woman Monna Filomena, daughter of the Lord of Gambellara. Guido loved her passionately, was publicly scorned by her, and, leaving Ravenna in despair, was slain by robbers in the forest of Classis. Filomena died soon after, and her soul is doomed to be hunted down every seven years by her lover. Both were buried in the church in the marsh.

Minna Irving.

Suddenly Chet appeared out of that billowing mass

The Golden Tornado

Storm on the fair grounds—and to the accompaniment of the screams of fear-maddened horses, Chet faces death

By BERTRAND L. SHURTLEFF

CHET was the best boy that ever threw a currycomb or dipped hocks in bluing water. I met him out in the sticks when we were traveling around the country fairs. He seemed just another nut like myself, with no aim in life but to be near the "disappearing victims of this automotive age," as the newspapers have it.

You know how it is, if you've ever been around the county fair circuit; all the queer ones who used to hang around stables in the good old days, all the bums and failures who have a hankering after horses, but can't buy one of their own to manicure, all the would-be jockeys and touts and wise guys get a pail and a pitchfork and think they're happy, playing valet to the show stuff. I'm one myself. Can't shake it. Must have been born in the blood.

This Chet had his own peculiar little queer spot, and that was a stud called Golden Tornado, a California sorrel being shown by a steel magnate or something of the kind, a bird with plenty of ready money and a yen for ribbons. If that horse was showing in a one-tent stand, this Chet would leave a midway a mile long to be there and watch the sun shine on that golden coat.

We rolled into a burg away out in the wilds, riding in our private car as usual—two boards laid across the rods under a freight car. I had a hankering for breakfast, but Chet, who was my particular queer spot that summer, was all for taking a look at the horse tent the first thing.

There was a tall hick standing on the

biggest canvas in sight and shouting at a lot of rubes with sledge hammers and stakes. Chet takes one swift look around and calls, "This the horse tent, mister?"

The hick turns a whisky-red face on Chet and glowers. It's plain to see that he's a native and this job is getting his nanny. Being no more than a small-time horse trader, he doesn't recognize Chet and me for what we are, and thinks we're just a couple of plain bundle stiffs.

"What's it to you?" he snaps, throwing us a breeze that smelled like Milwaukee did fifteen years ago.

Chet is too much of a man in spite of busted shoes and worn coat to answer him in kind. He just shakes his head and says, "If it is, you're puttin' it in a bad place. There's a regular hollow here, that 'll be a catch-basin if she rains. Now, right overe there—"

The hick takes a threatening step or two and shakes loose the lash of the whip he's holding. "I'm taking a lot of advice," he snarls, "but I don't have to take it from no bum like you. Git out of here an' git fast or I'll sick the constable on you."

Chet just grins and mosies along. There's a hot dog stand up already and we get our java for an eye-opener. By the time that's gone, Chet seems to have thought things over a bit.

"I'm going back to watch that tall bird build himself some trouble," he grunts. "Coming?"

"Wherever you lead me," I comes back, for this Chet had me goggle-eyed from following him and I would have cheerfully gone to the hoosegow just to stick with him.

"If that's the stall for the Golden Tornado," he calls out a few minutes later, "it won't do. That horse has a bit of spirit and he'll kick those boards into match-wood in less than two minutes if anything gets him started."

"Say, nothing seems to get you started," howls the boss, starting for him with the whip.

"Hold on a minute," calls Enright, the owner of the stud. "Who is that man?"

"He's only a bum hanging around and shooting his face off in hopes he'll land a job. The town is full of 'em. They drop in wherever there's a crowd, to pan anybody who'll listen for the price of a drink. As soon as the constable comes back I'll have him run him in. I've warned him already?"

"Why, it's the man who stopped the Tornado when he broke loose last week," calls a silvery voice. "I'm afraid you have misjudged him, Mr. Darling!"

"By George, it is," says Enright, "the chap who handed me back the ten-dollar bill I gave him. He's no panhandler; he understands horses."

Darling glowered and sneered. Looking at Chet's shoes he had a hard job trying to believe that the kid ever let go of a ten-spot unless he saw more coming from the same source in some other way. You can see from the scowl of him that he figures Chet has some game for dragging down a big thing.

"DON'T you think this stall will hold the Tornado?" asks Enright.

"It will if we don't get thunder. If we do, look out."

The big, red-faced rube shrugs and looks at the sky as if he could tell whether it was going to storm four days ahead. I catches the girl who had remembered Chet eying him with a lot of wonder in her eyes and I wakes up. From the way it looks to me, the boy is more interested in golden hair than I had ever figgered and I wonders why I haven't tumbled long ago.

About this time the constable heaves in sight and we move again, just to save an argument. Chet sees another lad, Ben, walking that little bay mare of Thollen's and we drop over to talk with him.

"So Enright is showing Golden

Tornado here," grins Ben, winking at me.

"She's a daisy," said I, nodding to Ben.

"Are you speaking of Miss Enright?" asks Chet coldly.

"No, no, nothing like that," I tells him, giving Ben the wink. "I was commenting on Ben's little bay mare."

"If this bay was properly groomed and well shown," sighs Chet, "she'd cop the blue. It's a pity Thollen doesn't snap wise to himself and let Benny take a rest so that he can keep the mare in shape. With the lad so sick it's a wonder he does anything for the little girl."

"Who, me?" asks Ben.

"Sure, you. Too much coffee and too little sleep. Eats into a kid's system. Bulls bellowing at night and dogs barking and the roosters at it before daylight. I know what it is. I don't blame you."

Ben doesn't look so sick to me, but I know Chet well enough to know there's some game afoot. I just nods and looks sympathetic.

"Why don't you just rest this week," urges Chet. "Go out in the country and sleep in a big barn on the new-mown hay. Eat some fresh eggs and new milk instead of dogs and java. Make a new man of you."

"Who'll take care of the mare for me? I don't want to lose my job."

"I tell you what I'll do," says Chet big-heartedly, as if he'd just thought of it, "you run along and get a little rest. I'll take care of the mare and do it right. Won't charge you a cent and you can have the job back when you get fed up on new hen's eggs and fresh butter."

"How can he do it?" asked Ben very much bewildered, as Chet takes the bridle out of his hand and quiets the mare while she prances off. "What is he getting out of it?"

"A lot of disappointment," I grunts and stares after the best groom I've ever seen, who is tickled to death to work a whole fair for nothing just because his horse is only across the aisle from Enright's Golden Tornado.

There isn't another job to be had in the horse tent, though I tries my best. I always hated cows, but it's the best I can do unless I shake Chet, and that's about like this Damon bird going off without his Pythagoras or whatever it was he trailed so thick with.

As I'm staggering along under a bale of hay that got landed in the wrong place, as it always does at a fair, I thanks my stars that the fellow who staked the cow-cover knew his vegetables. It stands on a rise that will shed any water that falls, and more than half of the guy-ropes are made fast to trees instead of driven stakes. While I'm ruminating over what a simp that Darling was to pass up the best location on the lot for his horses, I happen to see Chet with the mare.

Thollen is standing around grinning at his work, for the boy has done himself noble with the little bay. She is so sleek you could shave looking at her flank and her white feet are blued until they'd shame a fresh-fallen snowbank.

"There he is," calls Darling loudly, grabbing the constable by the arm and pointing at Chet. "Run him in."

"What do you want of my groom?" asked Thollen, as the officer shoved forward. "Is there any specific charge against him?"

"He's a fresh bum," grunts the boss of the horse tent. "I don't want him around."

"Do you throw the private grooms of exhibitors off the lot because you don't like them?" asks Thollen, sarcastic as they make 'em. "You look little better than a bum yourself. If my man goes, my mare goes with him."

Darling took off his hat and wiped his forehead, flushing to an even deeper red. He can't offend Thollen because he is a member of the association and can haul half the exhibs off the lot.

"I—I didn't know he was your man. If he is, he stays, o' course. He was giving me a lot of useless advice and playing fresh this morning, and I did not want him around poking his nose into things that don't concern him."

"But the location of that horse tent does concern me," chirps Chet. "If we get much rain, the tent 'll fall down on us and it 'll be your fault for pitching in the hollow."

DARLING mutters something and hurries away. I had drifted over closer to get what's going on, and I'm just going to up-end the bale of hay again when the silvery voice cuts in.

"I understand you are here to stay."

Chet stands up quickly from where he was sitting on a box to polish his mare's bridle. His hat is off in an instant and I'm wondering why I hadn't seen the plain truth any earlier than this morning.

"Yes, miss," he answers, so polite it must have hurt, "I'm to act as groom for Mr. Thollen's Bay Beauty."

She takes a look around and I dodge behind the bale. They're as much alone in that milling crowd as though they'd been on a desert island in the movies. She gives him a look that would have made the best of them go nutty over horses and says softly, "So you think the Tornado is likely to prove troublesome if we have thunder?"

"Yes'm, he is a delicate bundle of nerves. Remember how he bolted at the pop of rifles when he was passing that shooting gallery?"

"Yes, and I remember how he jumped when that alligator in the sideshow bellowed as I was passing. If you hadn't been there to catch the bridle and hold him until I got down—"

"Oh, that was nothing. That wasn't an alligator. It was a boy out in back sawing a string through a hole in an empty box. The thing ought not to have been allowed on the midway, especially so near the horses."

"Daddy said, after it happened, that he remembered hearing somebody say that it might frighten some horse. Were you standing there waiting for such an emergency, the way you seem to be working here in readiness for the danger you told Darling might come?"

Chet laughed that easy, fetching laugh of his, and I saw her admiring the even whiteness of his teeth.

"Oh, it's the horses," he told her. "I like 'em. Always been around 'em. Sort of hate to see 'em abused."

"Is that why you follow the fairs, Chet?"

I saw him get pink at that, but he is a level-headed kid and must have thought right sudden that she was calling him by his first name as though he was a servant. I knowed him so well I could see him thinking he'd better hang onto himself and remember that she most likely called Thollen's other handler "Ben" just the same way.

"I like to study how they handle 'em, miss," he said very humbly. "I'd never seen horses shown before this season."

"And why are you interested in how horses are displayed?" Then as he hesitated and blushed again under her steady eyes, "I know you're not an ordinary follower of fairs. I've been watching you for weeks."

I starts getting that bale of hay onto my back about that time. I'm just as eager as the next one to watch the fade-out part of a good show, but I'm afraid Chet will lamp me—and if you've ever seen the way his biceps bulge, you'll understand.

"I—I'll tell you, if you won't let it out," he says at last. "I couldn't pick up as much from these boys if they knew. They're great for running with their own kind and keeping mum when the owners are around. I'm thinking of showing some of my own stock next year. I've got a little place up in the hills of New Hampshire and I'm raising some colts. I've learned what they teach about them in books: but there is a whole lot to showing horses that

some of the writers of books have never learned. I'm getting my information first hand because I've got to earn my living by exhibiting. In order to sell my horses I've got to take ribbons—and I'm learning how it's done."

"I knew it," she gurgles, with eyes sparkling. "Daddy is sure you are just another of those silly creatures that follow the fairs because they know of no other life. He is still wondering why you didn't take the money he offered you for stopping Tornado the day he ran away. I—I'd like to apologize for him, since he is too sure of his own opinion to offer one himself."

"Oh, I know how he feels, and I don't blame him," chuckles Chet. "I've got a lot of the boys fooled, and they see more of me than your dad does. I've got to expect that sort of thing—more or less invited it by dressing like this and playing the part."

I staggered away under the bale at that. It looked to me as if the boy was going to eat his heart out staring at a princess, for this Enright is worth a million cold, unless our steer is wrong, and the kid will do well if he makes enough raising colts to keep himself and a sweet little country girl—even if he can show his horses for all there is in them, and then some.

I'M so busy tending the moo-moos and passing back a lot of answers to the boys who drop over from the horse tent to kid me about turnin' milkmaid, that I don't see much of Chet until the next morning. Besides, it is hotter than New Orleans in July and the cattle are taking plenty of water, which means pails and aching arms for yours truly.

"Why would Darling want to dope my mare?" asks Chet, as I slip in beside him for a chat, having dodged the boss of my own tent.

"Because he's got a grudge against you, youngster," I comes back. "Did he try it?"

"Last night. I was sleeping here on the cot, meaning to keep a close watch on her because she seemed to be off her feed a bit. About two this morning she snorted so loud I woke up. There was somebody in her stall and she was shying away. I jumped over and tore the coat off him, as he slipped over the bars. Know the checks?"

I took one look and grinned. It was the loud noise Darling had been wearing ever since the show started, a queer sort of brown-checked rig such as coachmen used to wear at Newport on the drive.

Darling hurried past us a few minutes later wearing a black and white coat with white riding breeches.

"Hey, Mr. Darling," I calls, "is this yours?"

He turns even fierier red and snatches at the coat.

"Be careful of it after this; it might get you into trouble," Chet sings out as he bolts down the aisle.

Nothing happened that day except it got warmer. The crowds thronged in on us until you wondered where so many hicks could have been hidden out in the fields. Things were going so well that some new attractions dropped in for the midway, shows that had been playing to a losing proposition at some fair that wasn't pulling.

I was sitting chinning with Chet that evening, when the crowd-caller in the latest addition started his work. It was a long-drawn bellow that sounded like a cow calling for help with her hindquarters bogged and a foghorn stuck in her gullet.

GOLDEN TORNADO, the sorrel stud, leaped halfway across his stall at that first deep grunt. The groom who had been combing out his tail and fussing around him slapped him on the rump and barked at him. The stud whirled and sent his heels against the corner post of the stall, cracking the three-by-four studding as though it had been a match, and missing the groom by inches.

Darling, standing near by with the long whip, leaned across the railing and slashed at the streak of golden light. Luckily he missed, or the destruction would have been greater. As it was, the groom was scared stiff when he finally managed to crawl through the fence and make sure he was whole.

"He's afraid of that bellowing," called Chet sharply, seizing the whip hand of the tent boss. "Don't strike him, or there'll be trouble. That's no way to handle a real horse, even if it does work with livery plugs. He'll break out of there and kill somebody if you lash him."

Enright came rushing through the crowd to stop Darling, who was plenty sore at that crack about his livery stable. Chet slipped between two low bars and sidled up to the stud, crooning softly.

"Easy, Tornado," he said as the bellow began again. "It won't hurt you, boy. It's nothing but a rope sawed through a box to make the suckers in the crowd think it's a big alligator. The little three-foot cuss in that tent couldn't hurt you. Easy, boy."

You've seen how some people can do it with horses. Inside of three minutes that stallion was just as quiet as though that crazy noise was a thousand miles away. The whites of his eyes stopped rolling in terror, his flanks lost their heaving, and he began to nose around Chet's pockets looking for sugar. Even when the boy stopped rubbing his neck and stroking his ears there was no sign of trembling in the golden colt.

"Don't let 'em get you excited, Tornado, old boy," I heard him whisper. "That long mistake in the checked coat is drunk and doesn't know horses, but I'll be right here with you. Here comes Daisy to feed you sugar."

AS quiet as he had gone in, Chet slipped away and went back to his own mare. But Enright had seen the way he stepped into the stall, and now came over to him.

"Don't do that again, boy," he said, his voice shaking with nervous excitement. "That stud killed a man in the stable last winter. He's a bad actor when he gets thoroughly aroused. I—I think I'll have him shot, if he keeps on."

"It wasn't the horse's fault," Chet comes back. "He'd have been all right, only he was struck. You couldn't blame a nervous horse for being afraid of that bellow."

"No, no, I guess not, but I get excited when anything happens. You saw him last week when he was running away. You know what he can do. I don't want Daisy to ride him, but she insists."

"I'd get them to move that alligator show," Chet advises him. "It's not the kind of thing to be placed near the horse tent."

"I did kick," sighed Enright, "but they said the show had to have ground somewhere, and I'd already made them move a shooting gallery that they were going to open on that side. I'm getting sick of all the fighting in this exhibit business. One more accident, and I'll sell the stud and get out of it."

I could see the light of desire in Chet's eyes, and I knew he was biting his tongue to keep from asking to be allowed first bid on the Tornado. But he could not let on to Enright without danger of having it get around that he was an owner, and he wanted to work a few big shows before letting the bag spill open.

It was hotter than ever in the big tent. Horses drooped under the heat and people perspired freely as they elbowed their way past the many stalls. I got so tired of lugging water that I sneaked out and landed over at Chet's stall, where the kid was dividing his glances between his mare and the show of thunderheads along the horizon.

"We'll get it to-night or to-morrow," he muttered. "Let's hope it comes to-night, when we won't have the crowd under our feet."

But evening came, and the long night hours dragged along. All of us were red-eyed and sleepy with exhaustion next morning, when the dogs and the roosters routed us out. It was one of those red sunrises with not a leaf stirring and the whole world shuddering in the knowledge of what was coming.

I'm bunking my cow job again, when Miss Daisy sweeps in, like a cool breeze, in dainty white.

"I'm riding the Golden Tornado this afternoon, Chet," she calls. "Are you coming out to watch me, or are you still afraid of thunder?"

"Both," grins Chet. "What time do you ride?"

"Two thirty."

He sighed and turned to me.

"They won't make up that fast," he said, jerking a thumb at the ominous clouds that began to show an angry black under their billowing softness. "If Daisy is away from that stallion when the storm strikes, I'll feel a lot easier."

"Aw, you are calamity howling again," I says, to cheer him up. "I've seen thunderheads for a week with no storm."

"So have I, but there's rain and wind in those babies, mark my words."

I didn't have any come-back, for there was the feel of rain in the air and the rising black of those clouds looked ugly. But the band struck up Miss Daisy's air just then, and the Golden Tornado, sleek and shining like burnished gold, stepped daintily forward into the roped arena. Before the t u m u l t of applause the stud pranced eagerly, unafraid of this accustomed noise. Arching his neck in the pride of his showing, he went through step after step of the intricate dance that the girl on his back had taught him.

I sneaked a look at Chet, and there was no sign of thunder-fear in his face. He was straining far forward to catch every movement of horse and girl, and I couldn't blame him much, for the lighter gold of her hair, where it trailed down her back in beautiful old-fashioned glory, and the dancing sweetness of her smile made even me think that there might be something else in life worth looking at besides a fine horse.

All too soon the dance ended, and the crowd opened to let her shoot back to the tent in that burst of speed that always pleased onlookers.

Just as the horse neared us a low mutter of thunder rumbled along the skyline, and the stud shied. Chet caught him in an instant and stroked the soft neck, while Miss Daisy slipped down.

Then he turned the horse over to the groom and stared moodily at the yellow streak that was showing under the increasing blackness to the northward.

"I'm getting out of this tent with my mare," he told me. "If Thollen comes, tell him I've put her in a good barn. I spoke to the fellow who owns it the day I took this job. Be back in ten minutes."

THE wind was whipping up clouds of dust from the midway, where the throngs had worn off the grass. The canvas billowed a bit, and I heard the patter of thick raindrops. Then the crowd came surging in, hurrying to make the tents or the sheds before the real storm struck.

I scurried over to the cattle shed, but everything was tight. The lad in charge of the top had stretched everything taut during the morning, and the worst we could get would be a little leakage through the seams, which would do no damage at all.

I had just decided that the horse tent was none of my kettle of fish, when Chet came racing past me. That black blanket of cloud was right over us and the autos were throwing on their headlights, it was so dark. Under the black to the northward that yellow fine

kept growing and spreading, until the yellow glow from it tinged everything.

"She's going to blow like blazes," he called. "There's going to be plenty of trouble in that hollow."

The rain came down in a blanket then, just as if it had been poured. Somebody threw a pailful of water at me once, and it was like that, only more so. We could see the roof of the horse tent begin to draw taut where the flood was catching in the slack above the sidewall poles.

"Come on," called Chet.

"Go on, I'm a cow nurse," I answers, remembering how the boys have kidded me. "Let Darling and all his little pets pull the ropes taut. We took ours up this morning."

"This is no time for kidding," said Chet, and his face was white. "It's a regular tornado coming, and there'll be men and horses killed if things aren't handled right."

I was in a wreck once where horses were hurt and screaming. I couldn't stand there and let anything like that happen, so I dug after him. Before we'd taken ten steps into that deluge we were as wet as soaking, but we staggered on against the wind, for the top of the horse tent was pounding up and down and the water was collecting in lakes over the heads of the horses.

A flash of lightning almost blinded us. Horses squealed. People rushed out of the tent, more afraid of the wild-eyed beasts than they were of the floods without. There was little wonder at that, for the hollow where the tent stood was fast filling with water and the straw and sawdust were bobbing about on an eight-inch flood when we stuck our heads in at the door.

"Who ever heard of putting horses in a place like this," called Chet, sagging onto a rope and motioning to me to take in on it at the peg. "Hey, lend a hand, boys, and pull this top up snug so that she'll shed water."

Thollen grasped Chet by the shoulder and demanded, "Where's my mare? Why aren't you with her to keep her quiet?"

"Precious little good it would do to be with her if she was in here," shouts Chet against the noise. "This tent'll be down on the whole mess if we don't lighten it by shedding off that water. I put the mare over in Gray's barn, where she's as safe as at home."

The wind picked up the corner of the tent and whipped it savagely. The walls buckled and swayed as though pushed by a wild mob of dancers. Another flash of lightning split the sky, followed by a terrific battering that made Verdun quiet by comparison.

We went from rope to rope down the whole length of the tent, around the end, and up the other side. As we sagged to the ropes the water would come pouring off like a young Niagara, almost drowning us. We were only a bunch of bums and touts and hangers-on, but we didn't give up.

THE first round should have seen the tent snug and tight, but the stakes were giving as the water rose around them and softened the ground in which they were bedded. Wearily we went the round again, driving the stakes in fresh places, drawing down the flailing canvas, dumping those lakes of water down onto our straining bodies.

The water inside the tent came higher and higher. When a side wall ripped and gave us a view of the inside of the tent, we saw Darling standing in the center, up to his boot-tops in water, still snapping his whip madly at the plunging horses.

The Golden Tornado reared and slashed at the boarding of his stall with his forefeet. We heard the crack of breaking timber, even above the roaring of wind and water. The last of the crowd spewed out of the tent, leaving the drunken Darling and half a dozen hostlers alone with the beasts.

Chet saw that Tornado was going wild, and rushed into the tent.

"Here, boy," he coaxed, avoiding the slashing feet. "Steady, lad. Quiet down, now."

He was in the pen with the frightened horse and petting him gently. When the next crash came the stud tried half-heartedly to lurch away, then snuggled closer.

The groom came edging in to relieve Chet. The roof sagged again in an unexpected place. Out into the unnatural night we rushed.

Unseeing, half drowned, hopeless, we staggered on again from rope to rope. Thinking of Noah's flood and what a job he must have had with the animals, I trailed along after Chet. Nobody knew why we went. The boss was standing there in the center of the floor, lashing at the beasts and swearing at the top of his lungs, and Chet had no hold over us except the hold that any leader has over men at a time like that.

A stake slipped behind us in the soft mud. He ran for it, but it was free before we reached it. It tore loose and flayed around like a live thing. The wall above it buckled and swayed with the repeated gusts of wind and whanged against a kicking, squealing pair of mares. The slap of the water-heavy canvas sent them rearing back against their hitch ropes. They broke loose and tore madly into the center of the lighted area, where Darling stood snapping his whip in desperation.

Chet threw himself on the flailing stake and pinned it to the ground. We seized it and tried to draw the rope taut. The wind was too much for us; it pulled and hauled us about as though we had been kids. Another and another of the stakes at the side loosened and tore free. With a great billowing, thrashing, flailing the wall leaped into the air to meet the descending roof.

Tons of water, sagging with sudden force upon the roof, snapped the center halyards. With a shriek of sliding wood the clacking rings on the center pole started a swift drop. The great top billowed for a minute and then dropped on the frightened horses.

One after another, the beasts along the sides tore loose and came free, dashing madly about and adding to the confusion. Under the fallen top, bodies heaved and thrashed as the less fortunate horses tried vainly to get away from the terrifying thing that sagged upon them.

Chet was everywhere. His knife, razor-sharp from long whetting, slashed great holes in the canvas, ripping breathing holes for smothering horses, cutting vents big enough to release some of those that were down and lying quiet.

"Daisy!" called Enright, his clothes sodden with water. "Where are you?"

Chet turned his face toward the man. I could see that it was suddenly white, through the weariness and fatigue.

"She's in there," chattered Enright, pointing at the hump in the center of the mess, where the uprights of Golden Tornado's stall told us that the little stud was all right.

"She came running when the storm broke. Said she must be with Tornado to keep him quiet."

Chet had a frightened horse by the tender nostrils and was leading him free, but he turned him over to me instantly.

"Darling, do you hear?" howled Enright, shaking the drunken boss. "She's in there, my girl, caught under that canvas."

"Can't help it," hiccuped the boss, reeling unsteadily. "Can't go in after her. Crazy devil'll kill anybody what goes near him."

CHET was walking gingerly across the swaying mass. The water under the top made going difficult. He staggered and sprawled his length, just missing the heels of a massive truck horse that fought under the great load that had come down upon him in such a queer manner.

Not another man offered to move as Chet did his best to get to his feet and go on.

"A thousand dollars—ten thousand to the man who brings her out."

If any of them heard Enright, they made no move to follow. I saw the knife flash in Chet's hand, and wondered what he was doing. Then muddy water and shavings welled up out of the hole in front of him and he was gone.

"He's slipped in," whispered Ben, back from his brief vacation just in time to mix in the mess. "He'll drown sure."

A sudden flurry of kicks struck wood, and we saw the stall that held the sorrel stud tremble under them. Squeal after squeal of horse terror sent shivers down our backs. Then a girl screamed somewhere in the center of that fallen canvas, and we waited, breathless.

Just beyond where Chet had disappeared into the hole we saw something moving. At first we thought it was one of the Shetlands, but they had all been at the other end of the tent and were safe.

"It's Chet," called Ben. "He's ducked under the canvas to travel better. Watch him go."

Inch by inch that thing crawled nearer and nearer the shaking stall that was rapidly breaking apart. Once I thought that I saw a knife blade gleam through the canvas and imagined that I saw a tiny breath hole cut by the figure. Then the inching forward began again, while we watched and waited.

The wind and rain died suddenly, and a silence settled over the wrecked fair. Nothing but the dripping of water and the thrashing of the few horses still imprisoned could be heard in the moments of silence that came between each battering of those hoofs on wood.

A post fell with a ripping crash, and boards splintered. Enright covered his face with his hands and groaned. The crawling thing reached the shattered side of the stall.

"Easy there, boy, steady," came Chet's calm voice. "Nothing but a little wet canvas, lad. Take it easy, boy."

We knew that he couldn't be feeling as calm as that voice sounded. Right through the bars of the stall he went, still crooning away there in the darkness as if to a baby. The pause after the last flailing of hoofs seemed to grow longer. We found ourselves waiting for a new outbreak that did not come. Then a knife began slitting the canvas above the box stall.

"ARE you there, Daisy? Are you alive? Daisy?"

It was Chet's voice and still soothing to keep the stud silent, although there was a little anxiety in it that he couldn't keep out. If she had not been struck by timber or hoof, she must have fainted and fallen into the filthy water to drown.

Circling slowly around the wreck of the stall he found her body. We knew he had come upon it by the anxious pause while he felt for a pulse. Then the knife slashed wildly above them, tearing a gaping hole in the canvas. Out of that hole came Chet, the limp body of the girl across his arm, her beautiful golden hair trailing full of shavings and draggled straw.

Taking courage at sight of them, four or five of the boys rushed in to help him. There was little danger now, for most of the horses were out or silenced. Together they carried her to the higher ground.

Somebody had found a doctor before she was landed. He bent over her and felt for a pulse.

"O. K.," he said. "Just fainted. She'll be around in a few minutes."

Chet waved the boys after the sniffing horses that were wondering what it was all about. Then he started toward the stall in the center again.

"Don't go near that devil," said En-

right. "I'll have the constable shoot him right there."

"It wasn't his fault," Chet begged. "You'd have done the same thing. I'm going to get him out before he hurts himself."

Terrified at being left alone, the stud was starting to kick again as Chet picked his way across the top. At the sound of Chet's voice he stopped and listened.

A few more slashes of the knife freed the stallion, and at last they came gingerly out of the mêlée.

"Keep him—he's yours!" said Enright grimly. "I don't ever want to see him again. I'm through playing around with horses."

"I'm not," smiled Daisy, rising on an elbow and looking at Chet with that look a man can't resist. "I'm interested in breeding them up in New Hampshire. I don't think we'll let the Golden Tornado out of the family, even if you have given him away, dad."

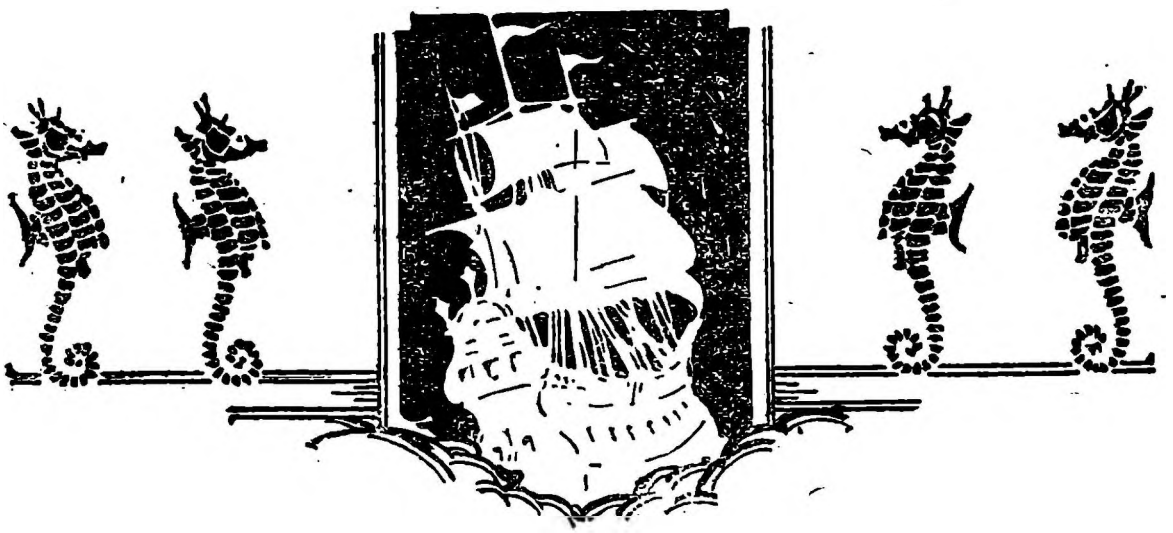
The black cloud was all gone, and that queer yellow light that had come with the worst of the wind was fading fast. I turned and tied the filly I was holding to the nearest tree, and looked around for a dog stand. I was feeling pretty cold inside, and old all over. You don't pick up a pal like Chet but once in a lifetime, and all the lure had gone out of the fairs for me.

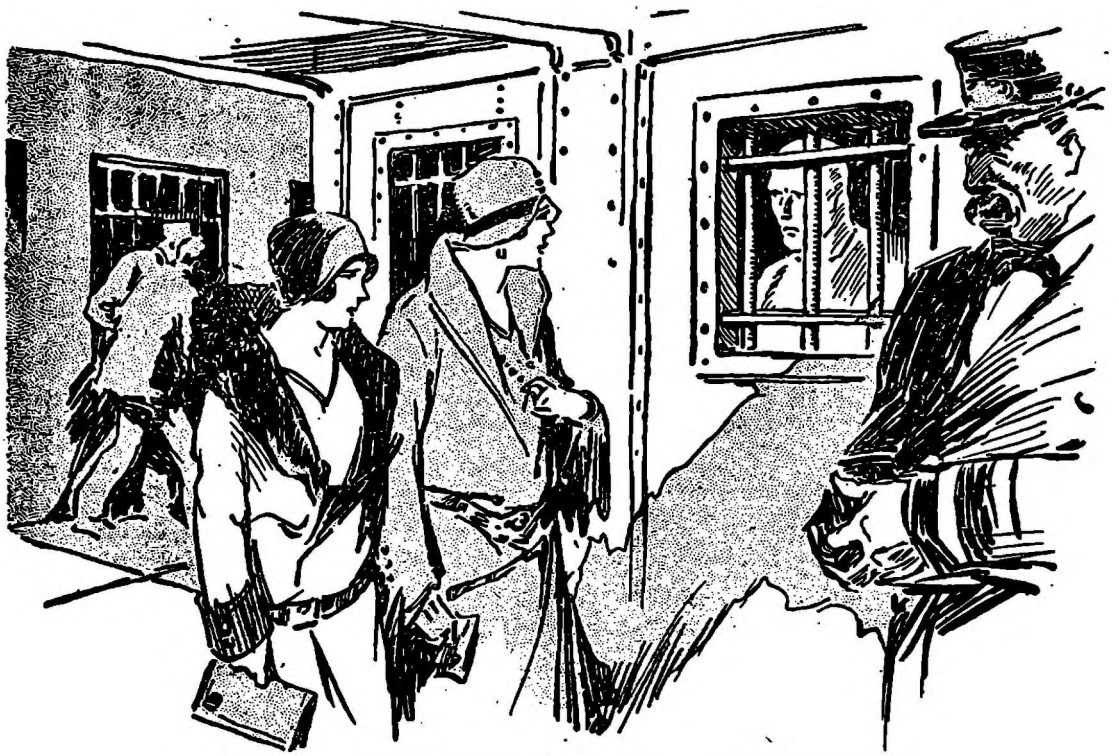
"Just a minute," calls Chet, getting me by the arm. "There's a lot to do around the place up there, old-timer. Suppose you sort of put yourself out to pasture, up on the old place."

I thought of the nights under the tops with the dogs barking, the cattle lowing, and the roosters crowing. I thought of the smell of sawdust in the sun and the jolting of brake-rods and the all-gone feeling you get from living on hot dogs and coffee. I saw the crowds, too; jostling, hot, staring, poking; the pop commen, and the barkers, and the merchandise wheels, and the gay bunting, and the Saturday morning feeling after a five-day stand.

Then I thought of horses and colts running and frisking around a meadow that stretched far off over the rolling hills. I'll leave it to you to guess who's taking care of Golden Tornado's first offspring.

THE END.





"My confession stands," he growled uncompromisingly

The Black Ace

Trailing the treacherous and fiendishly clever Dr. Touchon, Madame Storey runs into a deadly ambush

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Murder at Fernhurst," "It Never Got Into the Papers," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

AN anonymous client retains Mme. Storey, the famous criminologist, to obtain evidence which will put the clever charlatan, Dr. Jacmer Touchon, behind prison bars. The client tells how a "very dear friend" consulted Touchon, who professes to practice "psycho-synthesis" or soul-building, for discontented and wealthy middle-aged women. After he gets them to tell all their secrets, he has his confederates blackmail them, pretending to have stolen the records of their cases from the innocent Touchon.

Mme. Storey meets Touchon, who had been her psychology professor in college until his philandering with students had caused his dismissal. He is interested in her, and pretends friendship, though he knows she is investigating him; for he deems himself cleverer even than Mme. Storey, and enjoys the deadly game.

She hires Basil Thorne, an actor, to shadow Dr. Touchon; and Thorne finds him signalling to a Francis Fay, across Gramercy Park. Thorne gets Fay dissatisfied with Touchon, and under threats of exposure, Fay makes an appointment with Mme. Storey. A few minutes before Fay was supposed to appear, Dr. Touchon drops in!

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 12.

As Touchon, Mme. Storey, and her secretary, Bella Brickley—who is telling the story—are in the office, Fay appears. From behind a tapestry, some one cries "Judas!" and shoots Fay. Touchon, playing protector, kills the assassin.

The youth is identified as Arthur Sims, nicknamed "Blondy," an accountant. He had a confederate, Jack Coler, or "Scarface," who disappears. Mme. Storey's agents trace him to Chicago, where he sees a girl, Maud Heddle: then, on the way back to New York, he succeeds in losing the pursuit.

Mme. Storey, Bella, Touchon, and another man are dining at Guillaume's, when Scarface appears. Apparently not knowing that Touchon was the man for whom Blondy, Fay, and himself worked, and hating Touchon as the murderer of his pal Blondy, Scarface whips out a revolver and points it at the charlatan.

CHAPTER X *(Continued)*.

SCARFACE STRIKES.

AS I dropped into my seat, Scarface was in the act of rushing forward, gun in hand. Quick as he was, Crider was quicker. He flung his arms around Scarface, pinning his arms at his sides. The gun went off, pointing harmlessly downward. Scarface struggled furiously, but Crider held him firmly as in a vise.

At the sound of the shot a wild panic took place in the street. People fought to get back into the restaurant. Others ran away yelling for the police. What became of Shaler I never knew. Dr. Touchon stood by the taxi door utterly unmanned. Standing so close to death caused his *savoir faire* to desert him. He was shaking like a leaf. He didn't know what to do.

"Get in! Get in!" said Mme. Storey sharply. "Let's get away from here." She had her own reasons for not wanting a general disclosure just then.

He obeyed blindly. Our chauffeur let in his clutch with a jerk, and we sprang into motion. A policeman passed us, running toward the scene. Looking through the rear window, I saw Scarface break from Crider's arms, and start running pell-mell in the other direction. Crider and the policeman took after him. Then all passed out of sight.

Dr. Touchon's readiness of wit began to return. "How dreadful," he gasped. "You must have another enemy."

"I was in the cab," said Mme. Storey dryly. "You were the one that he commanded to turn around."

"But what does it mean?" he cried in pretended dismay. "I haven't an enemy in the world that I am aware of."

"I expect he was mad," said my mistress with a shade of beautiful irony. "He looked utterly wild."

Touchon seized at the suggestion. "That must have been it! He was mad!"

There was no question of any further diversions that night. Dr. Touchon took us to Mme. Storey's door, and then drove off home. After so lamentable a collapse in the face of danger, he knew that his pretensions to mastery must appear somewhat ridiculous—for awhile, anyway.

Since she had been going around with Dr. Touchon, Mme. Storey had taken me into her house to stay. The real reason for this appeared a little later. As soon as we were alone I said:

"What does it all mean? If Scarface is Dr. Touchon's principal agent, why did he shoot at him?"

"Think it over," said Mme. Storey with that provoking smile of hers. "You know from Basil Thorne's reports that Touchon never meets his agents. Presumably he and Fay were acquainted, but Fay directed the other men for Touchon. It is a fair inference that Scarface has never laid eyes

on his boss. It is certain Scarface doesn't know that his boss and the famous Dr. Jacmer Touchon are one and the same. But Scarface reads the newspapers like everybody else, so he saw that it was Dr. Touchon who shot Blondy. Suppose that Scarface was very strongly attached to Blondy. We know that the lad inspired such affection. How natural that Scarface should try to avenge the death of his pal!"

I stared at her with hanging mouth. "But," I said, "this case is like one of those Japanese boxes. When you lift the cover there is only another box inside! How will it all end?"

"Oh, as to this particular box," she said smiling, "I think we can depend upon it that Scarface's boss will now call him off from the pursuit of Dr. Touchon."

CHAPTER XI.

AN INTERESTING TRAIL.

ABOUT an hour after Mme. Storey and I returned to her house, Crider came. "Scarface got clear away from the police," he said.

"Good!" said Mme. Storey. "It would have been awkward to have him jailed just now."

"That's what I thought," said Crider, "so I let him go, even though it meant losing him myself. I had to decide quickly."

"He's not the sort of young man who hides his light under a bushel," said my mistress. "We'll find him again."

Crider, self-contained and poker-faced as he always is, was clearly impressed by his experience. "This lad is not just the ordinary, mean crook," he said. "Wait till I tell you about him. While he was struggling in my arms he was crying: 'He killed my pal! He killed my pal!' He was not thinking about himself at all."

"Well, one does not exactly hate him for trying to kill Touchon," said Mme. Storey dryly.

"When I saw the cop coming," said Crider, "I said to Scarface: 'Beat it, kid, beat it!' hoping that it might count in my favor if we ever met again. Of course I had to make it appear as if Scarface had burst away from me by main strength, and when he started running I took after him side by side with the cop. Scarface darted around the corner into Fifty-Third Street. He couldn't hope to make the long block down to Lexington with an armed cop behind him, so he ran into a doorway. It was one of a row of old walk-up flats that are still standing in that street. Such houses always have a door on the roof, and you can cross over and come down through another house. The cop was all alone then. He posted me outside, ordering me to watch the doorways and grab Scarface if he ran out. Then he ran in after him.

"A few people ran up, but I don't think any of them had seen the attempted shooting. That lot had scattered good and plenty. Anyhow, in a minute Scarface came walking out of the doorway as cool as you please. In his evening clothes and fine overcoat, he didn't look like one who might be wanted by the police. 'What's the matter here?' he said. The men on the sidewalk just gaped at him. Then he saw me and his hand slid into the side pocket of his coat. But I grinned at him and called out: 'Come on, Bob, we're late.' He grinned back and the two of us started walking up the street together.

"We met two more cops running down from Park Avenue. They stopped us and asked what was the matter. 'I don't know,' I said. 'Somebody told me there was a shooting in front of Guillaume's, and the fellow ran in this house with a cop after him, But I haven't seen anything.' One cop ran into the house, while the other stayed outside. Scarface and I walked on. Those two cops got a good hard

look in my face. I hope it won't make trouble for me later."

"There will be no complainant in this case," remarked Mme. Storey. "It will soon be dropped."

"At the Park Avenue corner we got a taxi," Crider continued. "I said: 'Where to, fellow?' He said: 'Know any place around here where I can buy you a drink? Shooting sure is thirsty work!' We laughed. He certainly is one cool hand. Well, I took him to a speakeasy down in Thirty-Seventh Street. I thought it would be a cinch for me if we could get drinking together. But I mistook my man. He was willing to drink, but the more he drunk the closer-mouthed he got.

"I took the line that I was a hard-working fellow who was a bit fed up with a respectable life, and hankering for more excitement. That gave me an opening to ask him questions, but he only answered those that were convenient. He didn't give me any real information, but plenty of good advice. 'Keep away from it, fellow,' he said, 'you couldn't stand the gaff.'

"'You seem to stand up under it, all right,' I said. He grinned. He had a grand conceit, that lad. 'Me,' he said, 'I'm a special case. I've got a nerve of iron. I don't need any snow courage. I'm not organized either. I play my own hand. It needs cold nerve. I went into it with my eyes wide open, and I don't kid myself. I don't give a damn for my life; I'm ready to go whenever the flag drops. Do you get that, fellow? Are you willing to put up your life on the flip of a coin?' I shook my head. 'All right,' he said, 'you're a square kid, but you'd best stick to your safe and sane job!'"

Mme. Storey's eyes sparkled through her lashes as she listened. "This young man rather appeals to me," she said.

"OF course I got nothing out of him," Crider went on. "He had eyes all round his head. When he got up to go I tried to get him to make a date to meet me there again, but he shook his head. 'A man like me can't afford to make friends so easily,' he said. Then he said: 'If you're on the square with me, fellow, as you make out, you'll sit here for five minutes and let me make a clean get-away.' Well, when he put it like that what could I do? I had to let him go."

"Why, of course," murmured Mme. Storey. "We're not bloodhounds."

While the three of us were talking it over, our Chicago man called us up in respect to the girl that Scarface had visited out there. I took down his report. The girl went by the name of Maud Heddle, he said, and was from New York. He had not attempted to approach the girl herself, he said, but had palled with one of her friends and got the information concerning her.

Maud had come to Chicago to take the job of hostess in a little night club. The police had raided it, and she was broke when Scarface found her. On the day after Scarface's visit, she told her friends that a fellow from New York had offered her the job of running a very select little club there. A new idea, she said; very exclusive. She was going East to take the job just as soon as her friend sent her the fare.

Mme. Storey smiled when I laid this information before her. "Every little bit helps," she said. She pondered for a moment or two.

"Bella," she said at last, "what was that telephone number we found in Blondy's pocket?"

"Orchard 1771."

"Let's take a chance on it," she said, reaching for the phone. She gave the number, and we listened curiously to see what would happen.

"Hello!" said Mme. Storey. "Is Mr. Jones there? Mr. Alfred Jones. You don't know him? Who is this?"

A broad smile overspread her face as the answer came over the wire.

"Oh, sorry," she said. "I have the wrong number," and hung up.

"The Cobra Club," she said to us. "That name sounds like Scarface."

I snatched up the telephone book, but no Cobra Club was listed there.

"A private phone, of course," said Mme. Storey. "Oh, well, if one has a friend in the telephone company one can always get the addresses of such phones."

She deliberated for a moment, tracing an imaginary figure on her desk blotter; then said: "We'll give Basil Thorne the job of getting himself elected to the Cobra Club. It's just in his line: a well-known actor, a sport, and an amusing fellow; he'll be an ornament to the membership."

CHAPTER XII.

A FALSE CONFESSION.

THIS brings me to the seventh day after the murder. During these days, of course, the case had never ceased reverberating in the press. Dr. Touchon, who was evidently behind the newspaper campaign, saw to it that just enough new matter was fed to the public each day to keep its interest at fever heat.

To us it was perfectly obvious what was going on. Touchon would plant his little bits of "evidence" and then suggest offhand to the fatuous Creery that he look in such and such a place. Creery would thereupon find what Touchon intended he should find, and become still more delighted with his own perspicacity.

It was good comedy when you were in the know, but a little hard to watch in silence, especially since Creery, when he was interviewed by the press, always hinted that Mme. Storey's disinterestedness was a bluff. He as good as said that he knew we were working tooth and nail to solve the case, but added that he would beat us out in the end. "I will put these amateurs where they belong," he would say darkly.

Following the fracas in front of Guillaume's, Mme. Storey had remarked with her usual acumen that Dr. Touchon would now make a bold play to intimidate us and to remove from our minds—and incidentally from his own—the recollection of his pusillanimity before Scarface's gun. Sure enough, next morning Dr. Touchon and Inspector Creery drove up to our office in one of the police department limousines, followed by a perfect mob of reporters in taxicabs. These had evidently received a tip at headquarters that something important was about to break. All came crowding into our outer office.

Creery made believe to be wroth at the reporters. He was a clumsy dissimulator. "You fellows wait outside!" he roared at them. "I got private business to talk over with Mme. Storey. Whenever I leave my office," he said, turning to us, "they scent news, and come tagging after. What can I do? I can't forbid 'em the streets. The streets are free."

"That's all right," said Mme. Storey, smiling, "they are friends of mine. Sit down, gentlemen, as many of you as can find seats."

Dr. Touchon, Inspector Creery, Mme. Storey, and I proceeded into her room. Both men were beaming with satisfaction, but there all resemblance ceased. Dr. Touchon's smile was as smooth as cream. Yet, under this parade of smoothness and warmth and friendship there was an insolent glitter in his strange eyes.

On the other hand, Inspector Creery could not pretend to hide his coarse triumph. He did most of the talking while Touchon watched him with directing eyes like a parent, and a contemptuous half smile. How he put the old dog through his tricks! Creery, all unconscious, continually glanced at Touchon for support and applause. One was reminded of a ventriloquist giving a performance with his dummy.

Creery began rubbing his freckled red hands together.

"Well, ma'am, I've solved the murder."

"Splendid!" said Mme. Storey.

"I said I'd do it, and I did!" boasted Creery. "I'm a kind of a bulldog in my nature. When I get a grip of an idea I never leave it go. From the first I said it was you that this fellow Sims or Blondy was tryin' to get, and I stuck to it till I proved it. Why, Blondy had been layin' for you for weeks, hadn't he? And the other fellow Fay on'y turned up that day."

"Then why hadn't Blondy shot me long before?" asked Mme. Storey mildly.

Creery impatiently waved this away. "I can't tell you that. Maybe he lost his nerve. But I can prove it was you he was layin' for."

"Well!" said Mme. Storey, as if she was learning something. "And I thought all this time that Blondy was only spying on me. Sneaking in while we were out to learn what he could about my affairs."

"Nothing to it!" said Creery. "You can take it from me, ma'am. I've been chasin' crooks for thirty-five years!"

"You ought to know them," murmured Mme. Storey.

"I ought to know them, and I do know them," said Creery, glaring around. "From the first I said that Blondy had been hired to croak you, and that Fay was his pal. Fay had made up his mind to rat on him; thought he could get more out of it by warnin' you, I reckon, and that's why he come here. Blondy surprised him here, and shot him. He would have turned his gun on you then if the doctor hadn't been so quick. It was as clear as daylight to me. All I had to do was to prove it, and I have proved it."

"CONGRATULATIONS, inspector," said Mme. Storey sweetly.

He wasn't bright enough to perceive her irony, but it affected him subconsciously like a little barb.

"Yeah, congratulations!" he said, turning redder than his wont. "You'll all have to hand it to the professional now; to the stuffed bluecoat, as they called me."

Here Dr. Touchon, feeling perhaps that his puppet was becoming a little too crude in his manifestations, said good humoredly: "Don't keep Mme. Storey in suspense, inspector."

"Sure! Sure!" said Creery with a grin of perfect comprehension in the direction of his friend. He took a paper from his pocket. "Cast your eye over that, ma'am," he said with a sneer. "There's the result of a little *real* sleuthing!"

Mme. Storey took it. It was a single sheet of plain paper, letter size, typewritten and having several signatures at the bottom, and a notary's seal. While she was reading it, I noticed that Touchon's eyes were fixed on her face in fiery intensity. The man was hungry to read some sign there that his blow was telling.

However, he was disappointed. No muscle of Mme. Storey's face changed. When she had finished, she said in exactly the same tone of pleasant irony: "Good work, inspector!" handed the paper to me, and took a cigarette.

I read:

I, Barney Craigin, being under sentence of death, do wish to clear my soul of a crime that was not carried out as planned by me, but two men met their deaths through it. This is how it was. I would never have been convicted of murder if it had not been for the work of Mme. Storey. That woman never let up on me. All through my trial I brooded on it. It preyed on my mind, and when I saw that my conviction was certain, it seemed to me that I could die happy if I could only send her before me.

But there was no way I could get at her, locked up as I was. When I was in the Tombs during my trial, another prisoner used to pass me a shot of snow once in awhile. Me and him used to talk when we could, and I told him how crazy I was to get back at the woman who had hounded me. He said if I

had money enough it might be fixed through the fellow that gave him the dope. I said I had a thousand dollars for the purpose.

A couple of days later this fellow, Francis Fay, came to see me in the Tombs. He made out he was my cousin. We talked through the grating, but we couldn't come to no agreement. He said: "How do I know you got the thousand?" And I said: "You go to my wife and she'll show it to you. She'll tell you that it's yours whenever I give her the word." She thinks it's for my defense. He went to her and she showed him the money, and a couple of days later he came to see me again.

"How you going to do it?" I asks him. "Hell!" he said. "I ain't going to do it. I don't want to land here alongside you, bud! I got a kid working for me that will do it. Name of Blondy. One of these well-brought-up kids whose head is turned by crime. He thinks it will make a man of him to pull off a murder!" But still Fay and me couldn't come to no agreement. Fay said if he did the job me and my wife would just give him the laugh. He wanted his pay in advance. "Nothing doing!" I says. "If you got your pay in advance you wouldn't give me the laugh, I suppose. Nothing doing!"

So we argued it back and forth. Fay said he had looked over Mme. Storey's premises and there was a vacant room over her office that he could hire, and send the kid down through the chimney by removing a few bricks at night. This sounded pretty good to me. Finally I told my wife to give him half the money. The days passed, and he told me how the kid had hired the room and so on, and finally how Blondy had succeeded in getting into Mme. Storey's place. Then Fay refused to go any farther without the balance of the money.

"How do I know you're not stalling me?" I says, and the next time he came, he brought me some envelopes addressed to Mme. Storey with the postmarks and all, to prove that the kid had been in her office. The kid got them out of her wastebasket, he said. This looked like pretty good proof, but I never trusted Fay. I got a friend of mine to shadow him. I won't give the name of this friend because I don't want to incriminate him.

My friend found out where Fay lived on Gramercy Park and found out about Blondy, too, and where he worked. He found for a fact that Blondy had taken the room over Mme. Storey's offices. My friend found out a lot by chumming up with the hall-boy in Fay's house. The hall-boy would listen in on the phone and tell my friend who Fay talked to. So this sounded all right, and I told my wife to give Fay the other five hundred.

Well, it seems just as soon as Fay got my money he opened negotiations with Mme. Storey to see what he could get by selling me out to her. The hall-boy called up my friend and told him that Fay had been talking to Mme. Storey and had made a date to go to her office in a couple of hours. My friend then called up Blondy and told him to watch his step. Blondy cursed Fay and told my friend he would get Fay and Mme. Storey, too. The rest of it was all in the newspapers. Seems Blondy hid himself in Mme. Storey's office and got Fay when he came. And a caller who happened to be there, named Dr. Touchon, he got Blondy. This is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

(Signed) BARNEY CRAIGIN.

A NOTARY'S affidavit completed the document. I handed it back to my mistress without comment. I confess it made me feel sick. I could foresee so clearly what a complete triumph it would be for Creery—and Touchon!—in the press. Touchon would at the one stroke make Mme. Storey look small, and triumphantly clear himself of any complicity in the crime. It is bitter to see the evildoer prevail like this!

Creery said with a leer: "Being as you had an interest in the case, I thought it only right to show you this before handing it to the press."

"How considerate of you," said Mme. Storey with her delicate irony. "Let's have the boys in now. This will be a fine story for them." She herself opened the door, and beckoned to the waiting reporters.

The newspaper men, or at least those of them who were our friends, listened with interested but glum faces. Quick-witted as they were, they missed

none of its implications. They did not relish what they had to write about this case.

Mme. Storey continued to carry it off with perfect aplomb. The irony was there for anybody who was sensitive enough to hear it.

When we got them all out, the false animation faded out of my mistress's face. "Well, Bella," she said, "what did you think of the 'confession'?"

"It is damnable!" I cried. "I know that every word of it is a lie!"

"Ah, that was the Touchon touch!" she said. "Touchon wrote that confession. The poor wretch in the death house hasn't got the imagination." She took a turn up and down the room. "Bella," she cried, "that man is as clever as Satan! To choose a condemned murderer with three days more to live, and persuade him to take the crime upon himself. Who else would ever have thought of such a thing? Ah! I hope he had to pay dear for it! With Fay and Blondy both dead, and Craigin to die in three days, how can we disprove that document?"

I could only shake my head.

"Yet you can see what the result will be if we don't disprove it?"

"Professional ruin for you," I said.

"Nothing less than that," she said grimly. "Unless I can come back, and quickly, too, with a still more brilliant counterstroke."

"Can you do it?" I asked eagerly.

She raised her shoulders and spread out her hands. Her face was an inscrutable mask. "Time will tell," she said.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEHIND PRISON BARS.

"BELLA," said Mme. Storey to me, "if you were Dr. Touchon, what would you expect me to do when I first heard Craigin's pretended confession?"

"I don't know," I admitted.

"Wouldn't you expect me to rush up to Sing Sing to try to get Craigin to retract his lies?"

"Well, I suppose I would," I said.

"Then let's do that very thing. We shall not get Craigin to retract," she added grimly; "but at least we'll convince Touchon we're running true to form, and we may pick up a bit of information—say, as to the price Touchon paid for this confession, and how the money passed."

Upon consulting a time-table, we found we should make better time on the round trip by motor. Fifteen minutes after Touchon and Inspector Creery had left our office we were on the way, and an hour later we were in the warden's office of the prison.

Mme. Storey explained the situation briefly, and he took us to the death house where Craigin was confined. Of that calamitous place I shall say nothing. I only hope that it may be abolished before I die. How unspeakably dreadful is the situation of a condemned man, who, as is usually the case nowadays, goes into the death house, comes out again, and goes back again, according to the status of his case on appeal?

We came to a halt in front of Craigin's cell. I was astonished at the alteration in the man. During his trial he had had the aspect of a trapped rat, mean, furtive, terrified, ready to snatch at any desperate lie to aid himself. All that had passed. He was not, even now, one of the comelier specimens of humanity; but he had quieted down; a certain serenity had come into his face; his glance had a remote quality as of one who already regarded himself as cut off from life.

"Well, Craigin," said Mme. Storey, "I hope you bear me no ill will."

"No, indeed, Mme. Storey," he said unhesitatingly. "All that is past. I have confessed. My mind is easy."

"So I see," she said, "and I'm glad of it. That being so, I shouldn't think

you'd want to leave that lying confession behind you, Craigin."

He hesitated, gazing at her in his curious, detached way. No shame appeared in his face. If he had experienced a change of heart, as he claimed, I couldn't understand why he didn't show shame upon being reminded of his lies. He seemed to be borne up by some inward strength. "I don't care to say anything about that," he said slowly.

"You know and I know that it's all a pack of lies," said Mme. Storey persuasively. "How do you reconcile that with an easy mind? In three days you're going to leave for a place where there's no returning, Craigin. Wouldn't you go happier if you left a clean slate behind you?

"You know full well what you are doing, of course, in signing that confession; you are enabling a murderer to go scot-free and to continue his crimes—a worse man than you ever were. Why do you want to take on his load?"

He showed uneasiness then; hung his head; hesitated. Mme. Storey gave him his own time. Finally he said to the warden:

"What time is it, sir?"

The warden, somewhat surprised, told him: "Quarter to twelve."

"Give me an hour," said Craigin to Mme. Storey. "In an hour I may have something to say about this."

This aroused my indignation. "You can't expect Mme. Storey to hang around the prison awaiting your pleasure," I said indignantly. My mistress laid her hand on my arm.

Craigin looked at me as if he saw straight through me and beyond. "She is the great Mme. Storey, and I am only a condemned prisoner," he said. "But I'm going to die in three days. What do I care for such differences now?"

I felt justly rebuked.

"That's all right, Craigin," said my mistress. "I will wait in the warden's office until you are ready to speak to me."

HOWEVER, as we were turning away, an attendant came along the corridor with a telegram which he handed to the warden.

"This is for you, Craigin," said the warden, opening it. "It is from your wife." He read out: "'Can't come to-day, but all right.'"

Upon hearing these words Craigin drew a long breath, and his back stiffened. A faint color relieved the pallor of his hollow cheeks. He looked at us with a kind of indifference; it was the look of a man who has passed beyond all petty human concerns. "There is no need for you to wait, Mme. Storey," he said. "I have nothing to say. My confession stands."

My mistress and the prisoner exchanged a look. His eyes never faltered. He had the aspect not of a confessed murderer, but of a martyr going to his death gladly. How strange are the manifestations of the human spirit! Mme. Storey saw that it would be quite useless to attempt to argue with him.

"Very well, Craigin," she said quietly. "Good-by."

"Good-by, Mme. Storey," he said.

This was a farewell in good earnest. I found myself trembling as I left the dreadful place.

Back in the office, the warden said: "Surely you are mistaken in believing that his confession was fabricated, Mme. Storey. If ever a man was telling the truth, he seemed to be."

"Then how is his hesitation to be explained?" I said.

"That's easy," said Mme. Storey. "He didn't know if the price had been paid over. Evidently the telegram from his wife informed him that it had."

"To lie so coolly with death only three days off!" I cried. "I can't understand such a man!"

"I can," said Mme. Storey. "Craigin's one redeeming feature throughout

his trial was his affection for his wife and child. He has no money—the thousand dollars mentioned in the confession was pure myth; and he worried ceaselessly about what would become of them when he was gone. Put yourself in his place. Suppose some one came to you promising to make your family independent for life if you signed a certain paper. Wouldn't you sign it gladly? Isn't it natural to put your duty to your own flesh and blood above your duty to abstract truth? Wouldn't you face death serenely if you knew that in so doing you provided for your dear ones far better than you could have hoped to do in life?"

"Maybe so, maybe so," said the warden uneasily.

She continued: "That confession was undoubtedly taught to the prisoner by rote beforehand."

"How could that be?" said the warden.

"Well, what visitors has he had?"

"Nobody but his lawyer, his wife, and his sister."

"You are sure?"

"Positive, madame. Nobody can visit the death house without seeing me first."

"A very great sum of money may have changed hands in this case, warden. Every man, they say, has his price."

"That is quite true," said the warden with some bitterness, "and I take my measures accordingly. I won't say but what a letter could have been smuggled to him, but no one could visit him without my knowledge."

"He may have been approached through his wife," said Mme. Storey; "but I doubt it. She is too stupid a woman to be trusted in a matter of this kind. And his sister is quite out of the question; a pale, mousy little woman who dares not call her soul her own."

"What!" cried the warden, staring at us in a very peculiar fashion.

"I said his sister was too timid a woman to have been used in this matter. She was completely overcome by the trial. Never appeared in court."

"Has he more than one sister?" asked the warden a little hoarsely.

"No, only one."

"But you are mistaken, madame," said the warden agitatedly, "his sister is a very tall woman, with bold, handsome features. A very striking looking person. I took her for an actress."

Mme. Storey smiled dryly. "What about her voice?"

"I didn't hear her speak. She appeared to be overcome with emotion. She came with Mrs. Craigin, who vouched for her. I knew Craigin had a sister. I suspected nothing. Good God! do you mean—?"

Mme. Storey opened her bag and took out the little photograph of Scarface. "Did the sister by any chance resemble this photograph?" she asked.

The warden's eyes almost started from his head. "A man!" he cried. "Impossible!" But as he gazed at the card he began to weaken. "And yet—and yet, there is a certain likeness. I suppose you know what you are talking about — you always do. Yes, I suppose I must admit that this is a photograph of the same person that posed as Craigin's sister. I don't see how I could have been so deceived. Good Heavens! what a laughing stock this will make of me in the press!" The worthy man's distress was pitiable.

"Make yourself easy, warden," said my mistress soothingly. "There is not going to be any public exposure of the trick that has been played on you. At least not for the present. I am not going to try to disprove this document by direct methods. I could not hope to do so within the short span that remains of Craigin's life. Let the poor wretch die with a quiet mind. I shall bring out the true facts of the case through quite other channels."

He looked vastly relieved.

"Scarface again!" murmured my mistress as we drove away from the

prison. "There does not seem to be much danger of our losing this active young person. He forces himself on our attention."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DISGRACE.

ONLY those whom it has made or marred can fully realize the power that publicity wields in modern life. If it never happens to have blown your way, you take it for granted. But the popular favorite—and the ex-favorite—know how its winds can nourish and destroy. Individuals nearly always affect to despise what they read in the newspapers, but men in the mass are fatally swayed by it.

The newspapers rule us. They would be as good as any other rulers if they had a corresponding sense of their responsibility, but this, with two or three shining exceptions, they sadly lack. With the run of the popular press, the guiding principle is merely to climb on the band wagon; in other words to out-praise when praise is in order, and to out-decry the moment the wind changes.

The sinister mind of Jacmer Touchon had perceived how to turn the power of this mighty engine to his own purposes.

When Mme. Storey and I returned to town the afternoon papers were coming out with complete stories of the scene in our office that morning. Craigin's confession was a first-class sensation.

The newspapers, like everything else in our exuberant country, know no half measures. They now seemed bent on making poor old Creery into as much of a prodigy as he had before been a scapegoat. It was enough to make the judicious weep. Nor did the papers stop here; they had to indulge in cheap sneers and fleers at my mistress. It was the first time she had ever felt the adverse wind of publicity. Some of the more unscrupulous sheets actually described how the tears of vexation had sprung to her eyes upon hearing the news; how she had "left the room in a huff" and so on. One is helpless against this sort of thing.

As the hours passed the situation grew worse. Mme. Storey bore it all serenely, but I was in a highly charged state of exasperation. Some of the morning papers carried editorials reflecting on my mistress's abilities. Merely another form of climbing on the band-wagon.

As long as I live I will never be able to understand why people seemed to rejoice so over her downfall. I suppose it was the penalty she had to pay for having been exalted so high in the popular estimation. An experience like this makes one cynical as regards human nature.

IT was not long before we began to receive more serious evidences of the disfavor into which we had fallen. General Rampayne took his case away from us. It had been dragging along for months, through no fault of ours, but simply because the old warrior was incapable of telling a plain story. We were glad to be rid of him; but we were less pleased when a certain Federal district attorney, who had offered us an important Secret Service case, withdrew his offer without explanation. There were other incidents of the sort.

This was Dr. Touchon's hour! Never shall I forget his entrance into our room after we had returned from Sing Sing; his air of profound sympathy with Mme. Storey; his hot indignation against her detractors. And all the time his strange eyes were glittering with a deep satisfaction. That cruel glance of his, which had nothing whatever to do with his purring speech, said to us boldly: "All that you are suffering from is my work! Beware lest worse befall you!"

Meanwhile my mistress was playing

a no less subtle game with him. In his company she betrayed something of the pettiness and chagrin that the newspapers credited her with.

"Ah, will it ever blow over?" she cried. "When will they leave me alone? How I wish that I had never bestirred myself in the matter. I suspected from the first that Creery was laying a plot against me. I am convinced that that confession is a fake, but I wish I had let it go."

Touchon feigned to express the greatest amazement. "A plot!" he cried. "The confession a fake! Whatever do you mean?"

"Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!" she cried. "Let it go! I'm sick of it!"

Touchon wagged his head in seeming concern.

I was secretly delighted with her cleverness. But after he had gone she said with a rueful smile: "He didn't believe a word of it. It is useless to lie to Touchon, because he takes it for granted that everybody always lies—Somehow we've got to convince him that we've dropped this case, but it's not going to be easy."

THREE days later, Barney Craigin was executed. What the newspapers called his "eleventh hour confession" had renewed the public interest in his case, and his electrocution was made the occasion for a tremendous outpouring of sob stuff in the sensational press. It was a shame. The man met his end well, and one hated to see it cheapened.

His widow added to the excitement by announcing that she would sell her effects at auction on the following day.

Mme. Storey and I had not intended to trouble the unfortunate woman at this time, but as long as she was inviting attention to herself we thought we might as well attend the auction. It took place in one of those wretched little wooden houses that are run up, hundreds at a time, in outlying sections of Brooklyn.

A great crowd swayed and pushed in front of the house. The widow could be seen moving about, highly self-conscious and not ill-pleased at her conspicuousness.

Mme. Storey was not interested in the sale. She saw a group of the woman's neighbors looking on somewhat sourly from the porch of the house next door, and she maneuvered until she had secured places for herself and me immediately below them where we could overhear their talk. A stout woman in a knee-length dress was saying in a voice of great bitterness:

"There she goes! You wouldn't catch her lookin' over this way. And after the way I befriended that woman! Three days ago she turns proud and won't speak to me no more. Now she's movin' away and won't tell none of her friends where she's goin'. There's gratitood for yeh!"

"That's all right," put in a shriller voice, "I found out where's she's goin'. When they carried the canary and the cat over last night, I sent my Alfred to follow where they went. They never noticed him. She's took a flat in an elegant new garden apartment with six rooms and a sun parlor. What do you know about that? It's 163 Locust Avenue, and when Alfred told me the number I went and looked at it meself, and asked around a little. It's all furnished complete with new suites from a department store. None of your installment stuff. She's changed her name, too; calls herself Mrs. Daly over there, so she does."

"I'll tell you what it means," said still another voice, "Mame Craigin has got herself another fella already. I seen him myself on Monday night sneakin' in there, and her husband in the death house at the time. I knocked against him and got a good look. A dandy-lookin' fella he was, like a movie star. Wicked-lookin' like Bill Hart. I'd know him anywhere again. Had a scar on his right cheek bone—"

Mme. Storey looked at me with a

smile in her eyes. Her lips shaped the words: "Our old friend again!"

"He was carryin' a little satchel," the gossiper went on, "I reckon in the new flat he'll hang up his hat for keeps."

They traveled endlessly back and forth over the same ground. When we were satisfied that nothing new was forthcoming, we edged out of the crowd and taxied to 163 Locust Avenue. It was indeed a fine home for one in Mrs. Craigin's station. There was a business center springing up near by, and Mme. Storey spotted a bank.

"Let's ask in there," she said.

Though we were *persona non grata* to the present police officials we still had our old police cards. I showed mine, since my name is unknown to fame, and the young bank manager willingly answered our questions, saying Mrs. Daly had opened an account, also renting a safety-deposit box.

We bowed ourselves out. "Strong presumptive evidence," said Mme. Storey. "It will all come in useful later."

"I wish we could get a look in that safe deposit box," I said.

"Wouldn't do us a bit of good," said Mme. Storey cheerfully. "Non-registered Liberty Bonds and other negotiable securities which are impossible to trace. Besides, we don't want to deprive the poor woman of her nest egg. She's not our mark."

CHAPTER XV.

THE COBRA CLUB.

HERE are some extracts from Basil Thorne's reports of this time. The address of the Cobra Club as listed in the private records of the telephone company was 3 Wood Street.

REPORT NO. 41.

Last night I dressed up in old clothes and went down town to make a preliminary reconnoissance of my scene of operations. Wood Street, I found, was an insignificant thoroughfare starting at Delancey Street and running north for three or four blocks. It is a very poor quarter, with the exception of Delancey Street.

No. 3 Wood Street has all the earmarks of a long-deserted house. The windows are thick with dust, the outer doors of the vestibule locked fast, and the steps littered with dirt, as if they had not been swept in months.

The windows are shuttered on the inside, and you cannot see into any of the rooms. Yet there cannot be any mistake as to the house. It is certainly the best bit of camouflage I have seen.

I dropped into the corner drug store, obliquely opposite, for a soda and a pack of cigarettes.

"That's a funny old house," I said to the proprietor as I lighted up. "Not many of them left nowadays. Isn't it used for anything?"

"Nope," he said. "It belongs to Manny Low. He owns the big apartment next to it, and lets the old house stand idle just to protect his light in the rear.

"That's the highest-priced apartment house on the lower East Side." This explanation may have satisfied the honest druggist, but it didn't satisfy me. Real estate in New York City is not allowed to lie idle.

"Manny has a lot of property hereabouts," my informant volunteered. "He owns the Elite Theater adjoining the apartment house on Delancey Street, and a lot of houses in Middlesex Street."

When I learned this I felt as if I was becoming "warm," as the children say. Everybody has heard of Manny Low. He is one of the rich men of the East Side, and is said to be hand in glove with ward politicians, police, gangsters, and all the elements of that picturesque quarter. Just the

one who might be "angel" of the Cobra Club.

BASIL.

REPORT No. 44.

THE Elite Theater is a very old house, once a temple of the legitimate drama, but now renovated and given over to pictures. As a relic of its former state, it still has a mezzanine balcony with a row of boxes all the way around. Since I had learned nothing from a seat on the orchestra floor the night before, last night I took a friend to keep me in countenance, and engaged one of the left-hand boxes near the stage.

Before the performance was over I had satisfied myself that I had discovered one way into the Cobra Club. While we sat there at least fifteen people passed down the passage behind our box, yet there were only two boxes between us and the stage, and one of them was empty. These people descended an emergency stairway at the end of the passage, and so gained the alleyway. They have another way to get out, I suppose, because the theater closes at midnight, and the patrons of the club must stay later than that.

Afterward my friend and I had a bite of supper in the restaurant next door. This place has an additional room in the basement, but it was closed at this hour, as a sign at the head of the stairs informs one. Yet while we were sitting there two parties of people went down the stairs. When we got up, I took a squint down the stairs, and saw that there was a door on the landing halfway down marked "Emergency Exit." This door is invisible from the main restaurant, and gives on the alley surrounding the theater. So there is entrance No. 2.

I sent my friend home, and, turning up my collar and pulling down my hat brim, I prowled back and forth through Middlesex Street. I saw people entering the tenement house at No. 4 Middlesex, who certainly did not live in such a place, though they were trying to make themselves look as tough as possible. This house backs up against 3 Wood Street.

That makes three ways in. It's the most elaborate layout I ever saw. It hardly seems necessary, since it is certainly not too difficult to square the police under the present régime; but my guess is that the patrons of the place really enjoy all this pussyfooting. I judge that most of the patrons or members are uptown sports, but I noticed that each party was under the guidance of a genuine East Sider.

Now that I have found the different ways in, the next thing is to get myself inside.

BASIL.

REPORT No. 47.

I had the luck last night to recognize one of the men who entered the tenement house at 4 Middlesex Street. It was young Ronald Waddon, son of the president of the steel cable trust. One meets him in all the flash joints around town, a perfect ass who has achieved a sort of distinction owing to the wads of money he tosses around. He ought to provide a stepping stone into the Cobra Club.

BASIL.

REPORT No. 49.

LAST night I had the luck to encounter Ronald Waddon in the Palais Royale. He was slightly tight, and I made out to be even tighter; in two minutes we were as thick as thieves.

"I'm sick of all the places I know," I said. "Isn't there something new in town? You're always the first to be in on a thing." And so on, and so on; ending up with: "What's this Cobra Club I hear fellows talking about? Take me there."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" he said, shocked.

"Why not," I said, "aren't you a member?"

"Sure, I'm a member," he said with an air of pride, "but you can't take guests to the Cobra Club. No one but members are admitted. You're not even supposed to talk about it to outsiders. Who told you about it?"

"I don't know," I said vaguely, "I hear fellows talking. It must be a hot joint."

The Cobra Club being out of the question, we went to a speakeasy in Fiftieth Street. Notwithstanding Waddon's qualms about talking, I had no difficulty in pumping him respecting the club, and collected some quaint information concerning it. The scheme is to provide a place where the gilded sports from uptown can hobnob with crooks. The great attraction of the place is that famous criminals like Gyp the Dope, Monk Eyster, the Pinny Dropper, and Little Stobey hang out there. Apparently Ronny Waddon and his like are willing to part with any amount of money for the sake of shaking hands with this crew, and calling them their friends. It's a queer world! No rough stuff is permitted, Ronny says; everybody's got to behave like ladies and gentlemen. Evidently some very wise bird is behind this joint. The ostensible manager is a young fellow known to Ronny only as Jack. Ronny boasts of his friendship with him. Jack is a handsome fellow, he says, and a cool hand. Keeps order in the place with a glance of his eye. Has a scar on his cheek which gives him a wicked look. The hostess is called Maud Heddle. She's a newcomer.

You can depend on everything you get in the place, he says. Champagne is fifty dollars a bottle, but it's the real thing. There are two classes of members, regular and associate. The fellows from uptown are the associate members, and they put up the dough, I take it. No associate member is allowed to enter the clubhouse except under the guidance of a regular, who meets him outside. No associate member is permitted to attend the club more than once a week. Good psychology in this when you think it over.

I made out that all this made me crazy to belong. I begged Ronny to try to get me in. "I don't know," he said dubiously; "can you stand the gaff? It's five hundred initiation, and you're expected to spend a couple of hundred every time you go there."

This put me in rather a quandary. I know that you stand ready to put up whatever may be necessary, but the point is everybody knows I'm only an actor with nothing but my pay. Wouldn't it arouse suspicion if I produced such a lot of money to blow in at the place? Naturally, prospective members would be subjected to a sharp scrutiny. You can decide. I didn't tell Ronny positively one way or the other.

Meanwhile, isn't it the neatest scheme for peeling gilded youth that has yet come to light? And all conducted so respectably! Evidently they expect to make it last. BASIL.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISING CHANGE.

IT was from the light-headed Mrs. George J. Julian that we first heard of an impending change in the situation. Mrs. Julian, whose income is said to amount to half a million a year, would have been very much astonished to learn that she was acting as one of our operatives. As a matter of fact, she made a good one; she was so perfectly silly, no one would ever have thought of suspecting her, yet Mme. Storey had gleaned considerable information from her chatter.

"Oh, Rosika, what do you think!" cried Mrs. Julian. "My darling doctor is retiring from practice!"

"Which one?" said Mme. Storey. "You have so many darlings, Edna."

"No, no, you are quite wrong," she said. "I have given them all up for one. I mean Jacmer, my soul builder. What will my poor soul do now?"

"Oh, it will find another healer."

"Cynic!" said Mrs. Julian. "You pretend that you have no soul. I tell you that Jacmer Touchon is the greatest man of this age, and you merely smile."

"That is only my way," said Mme. Storey. "I quite agree that Jacmer Touchon is a remarkable man. And so he is giving up practice?"

"I asked him what his plans were," Mrs. Julian went on, "and he said he hadn't any. His place is being done over.

"And if one can believe the newspapers, you are the lucky woman! What a fate to be married to Jacmer Touchon!"

"Quite!" said Mme. Storey dryly. "However, congratulations are not yet in order, dear. Nothing is settled."

On the morning of the day following this talk with Mrs. Julian, Dr. Touchon called Mme. Storey on the telephone. I switched the call to her desk, and then listened in, as she had instructed me to do.

"Rosika," he urged, making his voice warm and persuasive, "won't you dine with me alone to-night? It's rather a special occasion."

"That question has already been settled, Jacmer."

"But how ridiculous it is for a woman of your position and assurance to set such store by propriety."

"It is not propriety, but prudence," she said slyly. "I am a little afraid of you, Jacmer. What is the special occasion?"

"You'll see when you get there."

"Shall it be *en grande toilette?*"

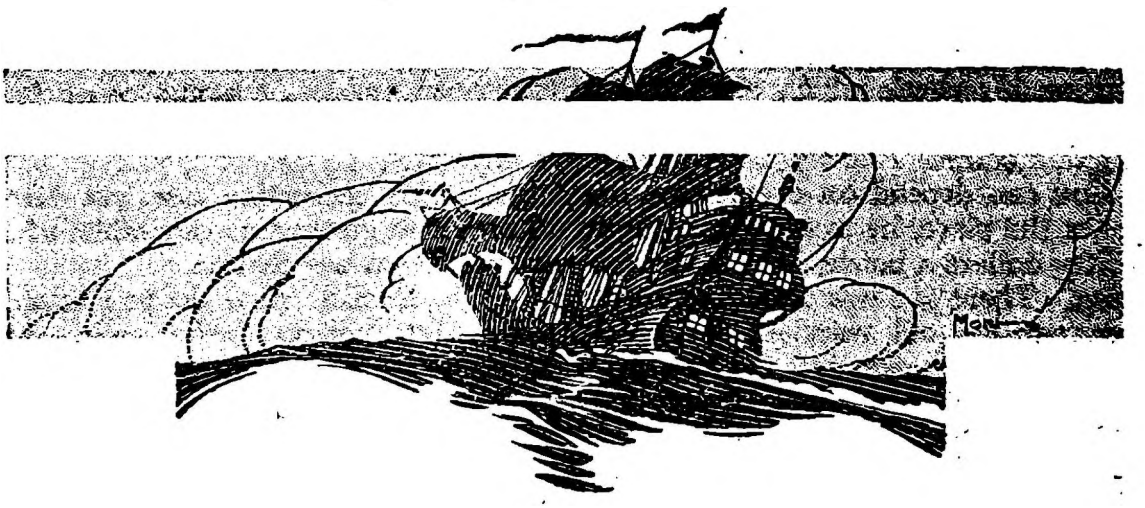
"Whatever you wear becomes you, Rosika."

They hung up, and I hastened into the next room. Mme. Storey was in the act of helping herself to a cigarette with a thoughtful half smile. "This is no ordinary party," I said agitatedly. "Is it safe for you to go?"

"Oh, you misread the situation, Bella," she said, smiling broadly. "He doesn't want to kill me, he wants to marry me. When he learns that he cannot marry me he will try to kill me, but we'll try not to let matters go as far as that to-night. That is why I am taking you."

I shivered.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Major Meeker's hand plunged toward the six-shooter on the bed

The Ghost of Gamblin' Dan

Major Meeker had been a wild cow-puncher in his youth—but he little guessed what a terrifying figure would rise out of his dead and buried past to confront him

By JAMES W. EGAN

"BUZZIN' rattlers!"

With startling force, his queer pet expletive burst from the lips of my uncle, Major Remington Meeker.

We were eating what the major defiantly called supper, in the small dining room of the Aladdin Hotel. From where we sat it was possible to gaze out upon the one dusty main street of the Arizona town—if the eyesight was good. Apparently the windows had not been washed since the days of the Apaches and pony express.

I had passed my uncle the gravy bowl. He was looking outside at the moment, and the next thing I heard was his exclamation. He topped it off by unseeingly tilting the bowl, spilling considerable gravy. However, the table linen seemed used to such episodes.

"Burn yourself, major?" I asked. The bowl had been infernally hot.

"No, Pen, no. I just seen—"

The major paused. I could see it was something serious. He was disturbed violently. His sun-dried features had paled. His long gray mustache fluttered faintly. For the first time in the weeks I had known this relative of mine, owner of the huge MRM ranch, he appeared bereft of his customary autocratic composure. I expressed the thought which leaped into my mind.

"Why, you look as if you'd seen a ghost!"

"Buzzin' rattlers! I reckon I have, Pen. Yes, I've seen a ghost sure enough!"

I surveyed him in perplexity. The major was a fairly tall, well set-up man in the late fifties. Ever since coming out from Connecticut to visit him I had heard stories about my uncle which indicated he was a man of nerve, not easily shaken. He had fought with distinction in the Spanish-American War, and earned his ranking. He was credited with having lived a wild, rough life in earlier days, when the West was considerably wilder and rougher than now. Not a man, I'd say, to display agitation without real cause.

"You can't mean you've actually seen a ghost, major?" I said dubiously.

"Couldn't have been nothin' else. Dan Glade has been dead thirty years, and yet I'll swear I seen him goin' along the street out there! I done seen the ghost uh Gamblin' Dan Glade!"

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "Dead men don't come back after thirty years. Probably a case of chance resemblance. In all that time your memory of this Dan Glade may have become dimmed. You saw somebody that looks like him."

Major Meeker shook his head.

"No, Pen, I couldn't forget the face uh Gamblin' Dan in a hundred years! I tell yuh it was Dan or his ghost—I'd know his face outa thousands!"

"Well, I don't believe in ghosts," I stated firmly. "If you saw the man, he's alive. What reason have you for thinking him dead?"

"REASON?" snapped Major Meeker. "Reason aplenty, Pen! I shot him down myself!"

"You—shot him?" I gasped.

My uncle nodded.

"Thirty years ago I drawed on Dan Glade—and shot tuh kill!"

"And you are positive you killed him?"

"I wasn't in the habit uh missin' them days, Pen," he said. "Yuh had tuh get yuhr man, or he'd get you!"

While I had been long enough in Arizona to realize the peril of questioning the marksmanship of an old-time gun handler like Major Remington Meeker I decided to brave an outburst of wrath.

"And so you know for an absolute certainty your bullet ended the existence of Glade? You saw him buried?"

Major Meeker frowned.

"Buzzin' rattlers, no! After drillin' him and seein' him drop I made m'self plum' scarce. Wouldn't been healthy tuh linger around there. I shot Gamblin' Dan in Tapwater, Texas, and I ain't been within hundreds uh miles uh the town from that day 'till this. I figured he was dead, and acted accordin'!"

"Then," I said triumphantly, "There is a bare possibility Dan Glade didn't die, and you saw no ghost just now, but a flesh-and-blood entity. Provided, of course, you aren't mistaken."

"I ain't!" asserted my uncle. "Mebbe he did pull through, Pen, but I aimed tuh kill him. I've regretted that shootin' for thirty years—the hull affair ain't one I can look back on with pride. That's why I got outa Tapwater in a hurry and steered clear uh the place ever since."

"Sounds interesting, major," I observed. "I'd like to hear more of the details."

The old ranchman sliced at his roast beef.

"Mebbe I oughta tell somebody," he said, at length. "Kinda hate tuh, though, for I'm plum' ashamed uh the dirty trick I played. Reckon Dan Glade oughta plugged me, Pen."

"Perhaps you are unjust to yourself, major," I hinted. My uncle's reputation for fair dealing was widespread through the Southwest.

"No, Pen, I was a lot younger and foolisher in them days. Soon's we

finish eatin' we can go upstairs tuh my room and I'll tell yuh all about it. While I'm talkin' I can be oilin' up the old gun, as well, for if Dan Glade is livin' and finds out I'm here he's liable tuh come around tuh settle scores."

Possibly a quarter of an hour later Major Remington Meeker and myself were in his second floor room. The major produced a new quart bottle of whisky from his dresser drawer and poured out two stiff drinks. These downed, he opened the bag he had brought from the ranch when we drove in that morning and dragged forth a dark-barreled six-shooter. Dropping on the bed, he began to examine the weapon critically as he talked.

GAMBLIN' DAN GLADE and me —began my uncle—drifted intuh Tapwater about the same time. We went tuh work on the Flyin' O, a big ranch outside the town, punchin' cows. Like young jaspers will, we rid intuh Tapwater whenever we could, and raised our fair share uh hell.

Dan was about my age, but built different. He was mebbe a head shorter and kinda stocky. His face was big and round, and he had innocent lookin' brown eyes. They wasn't so plum' innocent as they looked, uh course.

Dan's rulin' passion was gamblin', as yuh might guess. He was willin' tuh lay a bet on most anythin' and he loved tuh play poker. He was pretty lucky at cards, gen'ally; but he never got far ahead because he'd take up a fool bet uh some kind and lose his poker winnin's. His luck held best at cards.

In them days I wasn't known as Remington Meeker. Yuhr dad prob'ly told yuh about me runnin' away from home when I was in the sixth grade and hittin' for the West. I didn't want tuh get found and took back home, so I called myself Curly Black, mainly owin' tuh the fact I had hair like that when a youngster. I was goin' by that handle when I hit Tapwater.

For a spell Dan and me was pretty good friends. But a few weeks after hittin' the Flyin' O, come a split-up. Both uh us got stuck on the same girl.

Buzzin' rattlers, but there was a real woman for a man! Her name was Maud Mayfield, and she lived right on the edge uh Tapwater. Her father owned the stage route. A big strappin' girl she was, nigh ontuh six foot tall, strong and healthy. High-spirited and pretty, too, with snappin' black eyes. Never seen no woman afore or since what took my eye like Maud Mayfield. No, siree!

Well, Dan and me each made up our mind tuh win her. From the minute we laid eyes on Maud it was each man for hisself. We started courtin' in dead earnest, and just about stopped speakin' tuh each other.

At the end uh two months uh regular hangin' around the Mayfield place neither uh us had any advantage. She seemed tuh like one as well as the other. Dan and me was gettin' all on edge.

There'd been another hombre kinda sweet on Maud before we happened along, feller by the name uh Lin Hawks. It appeared he'd never made no progress, though. I don't reckon he was the kind uh man who would. Hawks was a perfessional gambler and s'posed tuh be somethin' uh a gunman. He was about as tall as me, with a mean, sneery sort uh face.

I say Hawks wasn't a jasper Maud Mayfield would have any time for, because she seemed a girl with strict moral idees. She said she didn't like gamblin' or drinkin' or even smokin'. Dan and me practic'ly swore off tanglefoot and tobacco on her account, but Dan still gambled some. Nothin' could break him uh that.

Time dragged on, and Maud continued tuh hold us both at arm's length. I was gettin' desprit, and so was Dan Glade. All our schemes tuh draw her intuh decidin' between us failed tuh work. Finally Dan come tuh me one day at the ranch and says:

"Curly, we ain't gainin' a thing by both hangin' around the Mayfield place. I reckon Maud is sorta fond uh both uh us, and don't want tuh hurt no feelin's by makin' a choice. The oney thing tuh do is for one uh us tuh quit."

"Well, now, Dan, that's right noble uh yuh," I says, shovin' out a paw. "Maud and me will name the first—"

"Blast yuhr hide!" he yells, "I ain't quittin'! Yuh got yuhr gall, yuh long drink uh water!"

Buzzin' rattlers! We come close tuh blows right there and then! But I managed tuh ca'm m'self and ask what he meant.

"One uh us gotta drop out," he repeats. "Are yuh game tuh gamble which one that'll be, Curly?"

"GAMBLE how?" I says, kinda riled at his sneery tone.

"When we go intuh Tapwater tuh-night we'll sit down in the Sam Houston saloon and play one hand uh draw poker. The winner gets a clear field."

I give him a laugh.

"Yes, we will! Don't try tuh come no card sharpin' on me, Dan Glade. Think I'm plum' loco?"

"I ain't a card sharp, and yuh know it!" he returns. "Yuhr chance is good as mine, Curly. Uh course, if yuh ain't game—"

Buzzin' rattlers! Yuh can figure how wild that made me, a hot-headed young jasper.

"I'm as game as any man in Texas!" I bark.

"Then yuh're willin' tuh let the cards settle it?" he demands.

I didn't answer right away. While I hated tuh have any hombre, least uh all Gamblin' Dan, question my gameness, I was terrible far gone on Maud Mayfield. Tuh think uh losin' a girl like her on a single hand uh poker seemed plum' foolish.

"Afraid, huh?" he taunts. "I don't blame yuh. I'm pretty lucky at cards."

Well, I'd been thinkin' fast, and all uh a sudden a idee flashed intuh my head. I looked him straight in the eye.

"I'll play yuh tuhnight!" I says, snappylike.

"May the best man win!" grins Dan Glade, kinda sarcastic.

The rest uh that day took a long while tuh pass, Pen. I reckon I never did so much worryin' in all my life. I was bound and determined tuh be the winner uh that poker hand. I didn't plan to lose a girl like Maud Mayfield.

The Sam Houston saloon was a big place, the biggest drinkin' and gamblin' house in Tapwater. Gamblin' Dan and me walked in that evenin' after the ride from the Flyin' O, grim and businesslike. I recolleck we each took one glass uh whisky, our first in weeks, just tuh settle our nerves a mite.

Then Dan called for a fresh pack uh cards and the pair uh us sat down at a little corner table. We cut for deal, and Dan won. I might say we wasn't intendin' tuh play pat hands. Each was privileged tuh draw the number uh cards he wanted after the deal and discard.

Just as Dan was shufflin' the pasteboards, with me watchin' him mighty close, somebody strolled up tuh our table. It was Lin Hawks, in his long black coat and slouch hat. He had played a number uh times against Dan, and perfessional or not, Hawks had lost more'n he won.

"Can I get in on this?" he asks, with that hard smile uh his.

"Sorry, Lin, but Curly and me gotta kinda special game on right now. Mebbe later one uh us will join yuh at another table."

"That's all right, boys; go ahead." Hawks give a careless wave uh the hand and strolled on.

Gamblin' Dan finished shufflin' and I made a deep cut. He flipped out five cards tuh me and hisself.

Pickin' mine up, I seen I hadn't done

so bad. There was two pairs—kings and nines. The fifth card was a six or seven uh hearts—I forget which.

Dan discarded three cards, and I knowed he had just a pair. Uh course, three uh a kind would beat me. I was pretty darn shaky as I asked for the one card I had comin'.

Just as he was dealin' it a couple girls in the dance hall started pullin' hair over somethin', and he looked around at them as he throwed me the pasteboard. Oney a second, but long enough—

I had arranged my hand, when I happened tuh glance up and catch the eyes uh Lin Hawks, a few feet away. They were half sneerin' and I wondered, kinda uneasy, if he had been watchin' me.

Gamblin' Dan called me back tuh the game.

"It's a showdown, Curly," he says, eager. "Look at this! Queens full!"

He spread out his hand. He had a full house, all right—three queens and a pair uh treys.

"Pretty good, but not good enough," I tell him. I showed my hand. It was another full, and a mite higher. Three kings and the nines.

His jaw dropped and he looked for a minute as if he couldn't believe it. I got on my feet.

"Sorry, Dan, but yuh made this card proposition yuhrself. Shake hands and I'll be ramblin' along."

"I didn't think yuh could beat me!" he mutters, half tuh hisself.

But he shook hands and then I struck out for the Mayfield place. Gamblin' Dan Glade was still lookin' dazed as I departed.

I NOW had clear sailin' far's Maud Mayfield was concerned, but I wasn't so happy as I'd expected. I wondered just how much Lin Hawks had seen.

I got a disappointment when I reached the Mayfield place. Maud wasn't home. Her mother told me she'd gone for a trip on the stage with her dad and wasn't comin' back until the next day.

Buzzin' rattlers! I reckon I cussed all the way back tuh the main section uh Tapwater. I decided I'd better have a coupla drinks. I couldn't see Maud this evenin', anyway, and I was feelin' the need uh refreshment or somethin'.

I went intuh the Sam Houston and throwed three or four stiff doses uh tanglefoot intuh my system. Neither Lin Hawks nor Gamblin' Dan was in sight. The fact both uh them was missin' kinda worried me some. I'd just called for another drink when the pair uh them come in from the street, at the opposite end uh the bar.

I knowed immediate trouble was brewin'. One look at their faces told me that. I figured Lin Hawks had seen everythin' and passed it on tuh Dan. I got ready tuh draw quick.

Yuh see, Pen, I'd been so blasted anxious tuh win out, I'd cheated.

When I set down tuh play I had several aces, kings and queens hid on me. Gamblin' Dan never dealt me a third king. The card I really got was a small diamond. That second he looked away I made the switch in pasteboards. Uh course, it was a lowdown, dirty trick, but I'd been afraid uh Dan's luck. And he nearly had beat me at that!

Lin Hawks musta caught me at it. I was positive he'd told Dan. He wore his mean, sneery expression, and Dan's face was set in hard lines.

All at once Hawks glanced in my direction and said somethin' tuh the man I'd cheated. Gamblin' Dan swore, and his hand plunged tuh his hip. He started tuh draw.

He never got the gun outa the holster. I was pretty fast in them days. Whippin' my perforater loose, I let him have it. I seen him fall and I could swear I drilled him through the heart.

Before any one could stop me I'd tore outa the saloon. I heard Lin

Hawks yellin' somethin', but I wasn't intrusted. I managed tuh reach my horse and rid outa Tapwater hell-bent.

I never went back. Under the circumstances, I didn't dare. And I knowed I'd lost Maud Mayfield. A girl uh her strict moral idees would never forgive what I done. I ain't even heard uh her from that day till this, Pen.

The war with Spain come along a few months after I got away from Tapwater and I joined the army, givin' my real name. When the fightin' was over I drifted out here and went intuh the cattle business. Reckon nobody knowed Remington Meeker and Curly Black was the same jasper. Leastwise, I ain't been bothered none. But I've never married, and mebbe yuh know why now.

MY uncle paused, sighed. By the blankness of his eyes I realized his thoughts were far-away.

Then, without warning, the door of the room was pushed open. A stocky figure, with a wrinkling round visage and faded brown eyes, stepped inside.

"Buzzin' rattlers! Gamblin' Dan, or a ghost!"

Major Meeker's hand plunged toward the six-shooter on the bed. I shrank back against the wall.

The newcomer threw up both hands.

"Yuh murderin' ole fool, what's the matter with yuh? Yuh dang near killed me thirty years back, and the first moment yuh clap eyes on me again yuh start in where yuh left off! I ain't armed, Curly—though I guess yuh got another handle these days."

"Yuh ain't got no gun?" My uncle was suspicious.

"Ain't packed one for years," affirmed the other. "No, sir, I ain't gunnin' for nobody. I'm willin' tuh let bygones be bygones, even though yuh did me a lot uh dirt thirty years back."

"How did yuh find me?" asked Major Meeker heavily.

"Seen yuh this afternoon, and begun figurin' out why yuhr face was familiar. Yuh've changed more'n me, ole-timer. Finally I decided yuh was Curly Black, and then discovered Curly is now Major Remington Meeker."

"It's my name—my real name."

"Uh huh! Well, yuh've done right well since yuh punched cows on the Flyin' O. I ain't so bad off m'self—been in the oil business last ten years."

My uncle put down his gun. I drew a relieved breath. Bloodshed did not appear imminent.

"This is my nephew, Penfield Meeker, just out from the East," introduced my relative. "I was tellin' him about—about Tapwater. I spied yuh through a hotel window an hour ago, Dan, and thought yuh was a ghost."

"Yuh dang near made me one, and I don't know why yet!" declared Dan Glade. "Yuhr lead went too high in the chest, and I finally pulled through. I got quite a bit uh nursin', and soon's I was able I married my nurse."

"Yuh mean Maud Mayfield?" Major Meeker's mustache fluttered sadly. "So yuh won her, after all! I reckon it was fate!"

"A dang crool fate, if yuh ask me!" sourly remarked Gamblin' Dan. "Yuh really won her yuhrself, Curly, and three months after the knot was tied I was beginnin' tuh wish yuh had her! How that woman deceived us! Her high spirits was high temper, and she was a reg'lar fury when she got mad, which was most uh the time. She would throw things, anythin' she could lay hands on. She had me hoppin' for my life seven days a week! Honest, I put in two years uh misery, and then Lin Hawks, that tinhorn gambler, come back tuh town. He'd left a coupla days after yuh shot me, owin' tuh some trouble at the Sam Houston. Well, yuh know he'd been soft on her afore we started stickin' around, and when he come back he got her tuh run away with him. I never went after 'em. Not me! I was tickled plum' tuh death.

Never seen either uh them since and never want tuh. But I'll bet Lin Hawks was a sorry hombre!"

MY uncle was staring at Dan Glade in horrified disbelief.

"Maud turned out like that?" he gasped.

"I'm givin' yuh the gospel truth! Yuh sure saved yuhrself a lot uh misery by shootin' me and leavin' me tuh her tender mercies, though yuh may not've knowed it. But why in blazes did yuh try tuh kill me? Yuh had no reason, dang it! Yuh'd won, fair and square—"

"Fair and square?" cut in my uncle. "Buzzin' rattlers! I thought Lin Hawks told yuh! Didn't yuh know I'd cheated?"

"Cheated? Yuh cheated?" Dan Glade's amazement was genuine.

"Yes, I cheated!" said Major Meeker. "Yuh looked away for a second and I slipped an extra king I had hid away intuh my hand and made the full house. I was bound and determined not tuh lose out. But I was sure Lin Hawks had seen me pull the trick. And when yuh and him come back intuh the Sam Houston he sneered and looked at me. Then yuh started drawin', so I figured yuh'd got wise. That's why I shot!"

The countenance of Gamblin' Dan mirrored varied emotions for a moment or two. Finally he dropped to the bed and began to laugh. His stocky figure shook with mirth.

"What a pair uh dang fools we was!" he said, wiping his eyes. "All that we went through on account uh that deceivin' woman! Why, yuh hasty ole galoot, Lin Hawks wasn't tellin' me yuh cheated. He was threatenin' me! Got me so mad I was startin' tuh draw on him an' nobody else!"

"Threatenin' yuh?" snapped Major Meeker. "I seen him look right at me, Dan!"

Gamblin' Dan Glade sighed.

"Reckon I might as well unbosom m'self. I was powerful anxious tuh win that night, too. So I come prepared. On the first draw I got just a pair uh treys and I didn't help it none. I added three queens I had convenient. I was afraid four uh a kind would look too raw, and I figured a full would beat yuh, anyhow. I got the idee yuh was drawin' tuh a flush or straight and hadn't made it. But yuh fooled me! It was *me* Lin Hawks seen cheatin'—not you! I'd won a bit uh money from him in the past, and he jumped tuh the conclusion it was a habit uh mine tuh stack the cards. Yuh saw him threatenin' me later on that account. He got plum' nasty and said he'd tell yuh what he'd caught me doin'. I was riled and reachin' for a gun tuh use on him when yuh plugged me."

Major Meeker sat agape for an instant. Then his eyes began to blaze.

"Buzzin' rattlers! Yuh're a bigger crook'n me! No wonder Maud couldn't live with yuh! Why, I got a blame good notion tuh—"

Hastily I intervened. Seizing the quart bottle on the dresser I flourished it before the eyes of the old-timers.

"That was thirty years ago, boys! If there must be any further shots, let's get them out of this!"

THE END.

"Can't you see? I am not your brother!"

The Phantom in the Rainbow

Scalded and tortured almost to death by Van Mortimor's relentless vengeance, Edmond Fletcher finds all his wealth and power are helpless against his maniac master's fiendishness

By SLATER LAMASTER

Author of "Luckett of the Moon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

EDMOND FLETCHER, young broker with Morton, Keene & Co., is leaving his offices when a foreign car stops and its liveried chauffeur inquires if he wishes to go now. Fletcher, a good gambler, sees a chance to meet wealthy clients, and steps in. He is whisked by car and yacht to a great country estate, and learns he is being mistaken for Sigmond Van Mortimor, wealthiest man in New York, who has just returned from a fourteen-year absence abroad.

The only relative, the lovely and petite sister Gloria, accepts him unhesitatingly and will not hear his explanations. Fletcher falls deeply in love with her, while her loneliness and pent-up affection for her "brother" quickly makes them intimate. But as Fletcher is kissing his "sister" a weird, unearthly wailing as of some dead soul strikes them with supernatural terror.

Time and again, as Fletcher takes up the life and duties of Van Mortimor, he encounters this uncanny influence; once he meets it face to face—

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and it is his own face and shape, ghastly, blanched, and horrible!

Fletcher takes Van Mortimor's place in the business world without difficulty, and even his former boss, Morton, and his chum, Bland, whom he hires as his confidential secretary, accept him, despite their first suspicions, for he is too generally recognized. He takes charge of the vast railroads, banks, and other interests, which he welds into a tremendous force.

Getting a summons to a consultation of specialists on his "case," he learns that his double has a deadly blood clot on the brain, which will probably drive him into stupendous criminal activities, probably toying with his victims' emotions. But Dr. Bates, the family physician, saves him from an immediate operation, and gives him the stenographic reports of Van Mortimor's case. An eccentric genius, Van Mortimor, with all the world at his command, had sought a superlative thrill in adventure, epicureanism, voluptuous dances and bacchanalian orgies in Paris; finally, indulging in stupendous quantities of drugs, he had gone to India, becoming a hashish addict and an adept practitioner of the occult magic of Hindu fakirs. There he had learned this unearthly wailing cry, the mournful wail of ultimate hopeless desire after an unattainable ecstasy—the cry of the damned!

Fletcher, suspecting that he is the puppet of this fiendish trifler with human emotions, nevertheless, goes bravely ahead with his stewardship of the Van Mortimor wealth. A tabloid feature writer prints a sensational story, insinuating that Fletcher is either an impostor or a maniac. When he sees Gloria's faith in him, however, he instantly marshals the power of his great wealth to smash the paper and drive the writer, Bill Skyles, out of the country.

By showing Gloria something of the tragedy of poverty, he starts developing her beyond a mere society girl, artificial and unreal as such friends as Myrtle Marbleton and Count Rononotski. But this is in line with Fletcher's personal and selfish desire to win Gloria; for the most part he attends to business. Having unified his organization, he determines to help his employees become self-respecting and thrifty; and announces that he will add half again as much money as they will permanently put in savings banks.

This widespread scheme starts a terrific run on his stocks by jealous and fearful capitalists; and Fletcher lets the attack drive his and all other stocks downward till at last, feeling they have hit bottom, he buys millions of dollars' worth of bargains. Still the stocks go down, and at last he is forced to throw all the Van Mortimor assets into the balance to support the market. That night he goes home, knowing that the morning's market will tell whether he is saved or ruined—and fearing that Van Mortimor will wreak some fiendish vengeance for this reckless philanthropy and gambling.

Deep in the sleep of overwrought nerves, he dreams he is stifling in a wet, hot tropical forest. Screaming in agony, he gets to his feet in a cloud of dank heat—and dimly sees Van Mortimor's ghastly figure spraying live steam upon him from the automatic heat regulating machinery. His doors are locked from the inside—and his screams grow fainter as he suffocates in this scorching steam!

CHAPTER XIII (*Continued*).

REMOLDING THE WORLD.

YET just as the burning inferno enveloped him he could hear frantic pounding on the door. With a terrific impact something came crushing in. Air, air, worlds of cool air flooded in; but he was unconscious. He was gently carried out to Gloria's tender ministrations, while the steam was hastily shut off from below.

Lying in Gloria's rooms, the setting of so many happy moments, he was found to be scalded and burned almost all over his body, for he had been unable to protect himself. A physician was tediously and carefully plastering some greasy balm over his skin. He had to be nearly mummified to live.

Fletcher revived momentarily as a measure of blessed relief came to him, and with swollen eyelids he painfully blinked at the anxious crowd about him. The sensitive little "sister" was sobbing her anguish.

"What happened?" he asked faintly with quivering lips.

"Some wretch broke the automatic control device off the wall and that opened the steam valves. Your bedroom was flooded when the steam came on this morning," they tried to explain.

"I shouldn't have left the window open," he said wanly. "Any evidence of the intruder?" he mumbled.

"None," replied a detective, "unless you can remember giving some person this. One of your cards—we found it on the window sill."

Fletcher beheld across the pasteboard:

SIGMOND VAN MORTIMOR

He shrank back from it in mortal terror as they carefully and sadly prepared him for the hospital.

"Oh, yes! Van Mortimor," he cried in sudden delirium. "I am sorry I didn't get to see him, but you must get somebody in my place. His fortune is at stake. Get somebody just like me. It's quite the regular thing." He raved on.

"Poor dear boy," sighed Gloria, tears streaming down her face, "and he wanted that horrible thing out last night."

Day stretched after day, and then weeks passed as he lay helpless, unconscious the greater part of the time, in his suffering from his burns and a general nervous breakdown. Hard as they fought against it, pneumonia set in from the scorched condition of his lungs.

In an all-consuming service Gloria Van Mortimor did practical things which had previously been undreamed of by her. She alone must feed him and wash his face. No one but she must be permitted to touch him more than absolutely necessary. What did mere doctors know about how gently he should be handled? Were not her hands infinitely softer than theirs? Theirs might not be tender enough. In her now truly was aroused the eternal feminine.

Horrible were Fletcher's ravings. He continually feared he would be poisoned. "The Borgias have me!" he would shout, "but only the brother is venomous!"

He examined his food minutely and, holding a clear glass of water up to the light, he would study it intently for the palest of discolorations before he dared drink it. To please him, Gloria had all his food searchingly examined and she would try to allay his fears by tasting it in advance of him. But this would throw him into paroxysms of fear, and his innate character was vividly shown, in that no matter how much he feared the food himself, he would let no one else, however humble, taste it before him.

"This is my gamble only," he would hysterically cry. "Do you think I am an ingrate?"

BUT time heals or kills all things, and in Fletcher's instance, slowly the pain from the scalded places abated, the overwrought nerves became firmer, and though he could not move, and still had the pneumonia, his intelligence at last emerged out of chaos. They had kept all news from him; but now that he was himself mentally they saw it would be worse to withhold information than to give it to him.

Gloria had assured the patient repeatedly that everything was well, that there positively had been no wolves howling at the door which she had noticed! Bland and the secretaries had often tried to convey to their audacious leader that the market was better, but in his feverish state it had been hard for him to understand how such a thing was possible; for even in his half delirium he knew that they would not have told him the worst if it were true.

A day came, though, some six weeks later he was permitted to run exultantly over the stock report page of a newspaper. What he found there was too good to be true. The market for his securities was up an average of ten points from the dreadful low at which he had loaded up so heavily.

He took some gigantic profits on a part of those great purchases and settled back in bed, his mind eased for the time being of his very greatest fear. If Van Mortimor had any interest at all left in worldly goods, Fletcher had certainly garnered an astounding supply of them for him! He did not know how much he had bought on the break, and it would take the boys at the office a long time to compute exactly all he had gained.

Dr. Bates had practically given his entire time, simply lived with him. By some strange telepathy the good old family physician also seemed to suffer equally with Fletcher through it all.

So the days ran along as Christmas approached. Gloria's only aim in life, it appeared, was to get Fletcher home for the holidays. How one's view can change. Here was this wonderful brother of hers, one of the most eligible young bachelors in the world, and what a social season she had planned for him in which he would have been lionized! But now she had dropped all of those plans entirely, and the confusion of the hospital and her anxiety about him had caused her to forget even her personal invitations and engagements.

CHAPTER XIV.

STRANGE CHRISTMAS VISITORS.

CHRISTMAS was almost at hand, and each day Fletcher grew stronger as if Gloria's unconscious prayers were being answered. Subtle emotions often enter into trivial events and make of them epochal occasions.

Gloria Van Mortimor had been reared virtually an orphan and her great wealth had served to make her a singular one in some respects. There were some bleak little spots back in her life that must be lived over again, since at the time the circumstances of her childhood had precluded her from ever enjoying them.

Every recent Christmas since she had settled upon her way of celebrating it, had found her alone with her Christmas tree and surrounded with reminiscences of what this day had meant when she had a dad, and Sigmond was a big playful boy.

Then, years later, dad left her and Sigmond; and, against her pleadings, they took him, all that she had left, this dear dreamy-eyed brother, far away from her. She always bought him a gift, however, and placed it on the tree, aside from the formal ones which they at first exchanged across the ocean.

She had some of the dolls which her mother had given her, particularly "Psyche," a big beautiful bisque one, and these, together with treasured things that she had received from her father, she grouped about her tree and kept her trysting place with memories alone each Christmas, looking at the gift for her brother and wishing he might be there to receive it. Then her heart always broke and she cried in her loneliness.

Too wonderful to contemplate—for

this Christmas she would have him, her brother! By every means, she must get him home! For did she not have a rendezvous with love?

Under these circumstances Fletcher came home on Christmas Eve, making the event real for Gloria.

The Christmas spirit was upon him also and he wondered absent-mindedly why Gloria kept so busy away from him, with her door closed so very formally. Finally from his rooms he peeped through the keyhole into her boudoir. On her bed were a dozen dolls of all sizes. "So that is what she likes!" he smiled to himself.

Fletcher carefully made his way down below and ordered the car. The servants bundled him up and the ride was exhilarating, as his motor nudged through the heavy traffic to the best toy shop on the avenue. A hasty consultation with a magical engineer of toydom produced a good suggestion! From what he had seen Fletcher naturally wanted the finest and prettiest doll obtainable. This order fairly kindled the toy wizard into a flame of inspiration.

"WE shall make of it a masterpiece," he promised, "a work of creative art! A truly lovable doll, and a highly complimentary gift to your sister, would be an exact likeness of the young lady! We shall produce a miniature Miss Gloria Van Mortimor!"

Pictures were obtained hastily.

There were many strange doings in the Van Mortimor play house that evening.

Snow was gently falling on the window sills before Fletcher closed his eyes. He was content with all the world, and to-morrow would be a white Christmas.

The next morning early, ever so early, for Gloria could not sleep, there came a knock on the door between the rooms, and Fletcher jumped to the entrance, for fear she would see in prematurely.

"Merry Christmas!" sang a glad little voice. "Come through this way to our Christmas tree. Just put on a dressing gown. I cannot wait for you to dress!"

Fletcher put on some things quickly, and went through Gloria's bedroom to the parlor of her suite.

Before him he beheld Gloria in a gorgeously flowered kimono, seated before a fairy Christmas tree, resplendent in ethereal frost and sparkling silver. It was not yet dawn and mellow candlelight from its verdant branches cast a glamorous flickering softness about, which made Gloria the picture of a saint at a shrine, while she again kept her tryst, and this time so rapturously looked upon a true Christmas tree, one which could be shared. Radiantly, she turned to Fletcher.

"Come sit close to me on the floor and just be foolishly happy. This is so much ours alone that no one else must even see us now."

Fletcher dropped down beside her and gave her a big hug. Silently, half in awe of what was around him, he had a vision of the innermost workings of her strangely famished heart. No one but himself, who had been partially admitted to her tenderest feelings, could have guessed what lay buried under the cool exterior of the little heiress.

"Open up your presents, Sigmond, just as you used to do for dad and me," her soft voice quavered, "and so long ago for—for mother."

Her grateful hand trembled, as she delicately pushed to him in their proper order boxes, each containing a present which she had kept for her brother from one to twelve years.

"Hurry," she said, while he undid one gift after another, "you are a little late. I have had merely to look at them for so many Christmases."

We are all children at heart and such is the spirit of Christmas. For a little while these two wiped out the callousness and selfishness of adult life and

reveled in the mythical existence of childhood.

Gloria's happiness was complete, except that suddenly there came over her face a slightly blank expression, which Fletcher immediately caught and correctly interpreted. It had just occurred to the winsome little lady that her remarkable brother had not given her anything.

Fletcher instinctively glanced over his shoulder. They had been so absorbed in their own affairs that they had not noticed the approach of an eavesdropper, although the eavesdropper had had a very hard time getting in. Behind Gloria and Fletcher, and all rapt attention but so begrimed and dirty that he was scarcely recognizable, sat a great, big, shaggy dog.

Gloria had turned around sharply, following Fletcher's startled expression.

"Heavens!" she cried. "What is it and where did it come from?"

"My Lord!" exclaimed Fletcher, "that is Belshasher!" At the mention of his name the big dog came galloping upon them. He waded into them with such force and scattered their presents so effectually that everything was chaotic for a minute.

"Down, Bell! Down, Bell!" frantically yelled Fletcher, and at last the big dog subsided from his strenuous greetings, taking up a position half in Gloria's lap with his head cocked wisely to one side at Fletcher. Sometimes all academic discussions about our relationship to animals can be very easily settled by a mere reunion with an old pet. In this instance it was hard to tell which expressed the greater affection for the other, Fletcher or the dog.

PARKINS, very deeply distressed, presently appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, sir! Beg pardon, sir!" he stuttered. "How did that dog get in here? I have put him out of the house a dozen times!"

"Where did he come from?" asked Fletcher eagerly.

"I don't know, sir! He jumped off of the dumbwaiter this last time! He rode up on the groceries and I was chasing him in the picture gallery when I heard him crash in another direction."

"Don't chase him any more!" said Fletcher, both he and Gloria laughing. "Leave him here with us. I think he has earned a good rest!"

The butler limped away in outraged bewilderment.

"I can't guess how he found us," commented Fletcher blankly to Gloria, "but that old rascal you are nursing is my very own dog, Belshasher!" The old rascal barked again at the mention of his name. "See how he knows his name? I'll show you all of his circus tricks later. You probably want to get rid of the mud of our early caller and then come into my rooms. I have something for you that you may like!"

"Let's take his mud along! I can't wait!" said Gloria, but she was inspecting the old and obviously unpedigreed dog thoughtfully.

Belshasher, possibly thinking it meant breakfast as of old, joyously led the way.

Fletcher among other things diffidently presented his small but rather unique surprise, the artistic miniature likeness of Gloria Van Mortimor. Gloria in all anticipation undid its elaborate wrappings carefully. Then she tenderly brought out the beautiful little reproduction of herself. She fondly held this marvelous creation of her own self in her arms and studied it, nearly overcome with emotion.

"Little Gloria," she breathed ever so softly, as she held it close to her and looked up at Fletcher, her eyes showing her gratitude, "how sweet she is!"

In rapture she carried her gently—ever so gently—over to the window, straight into the full light of the breaking dawn as Fletcher followed her. He was struck with the new and wonder-

ful softness in Gloria's countenance as she gazed upon her little Gloria in her arms.

"Sigmond," she perceived suddenly, "she has blue eyes!"

Fletcher reddened. That confounded toy artist had worked wonders from pictures, but he had not discovered the true color of Gloria's eyes and he had taken a chance on their being the same as her brother's. Fletcher's small surprise had proved a boomerang.

He was so genuinely embarrassed that he would have been forced to leave the room, but for the quick assertion of the eternal feminine in Gloria Van Mortimor. Gloria was in every sense a woman and she possessed the full complement of the complex emotions of her sex. Every Christmas Day about this time for many long years she had cried in her bitter loneliness and now, for the very extreme opposite reason, she was also crying. Edmond hurried over to comfort her.

NO explanation could be found of Belshasher's startling appearance, and Gloria, with that usual complaisance with which she shrouded all strange occurrences, asked none. But along in the afternoon she dropped a remark even more amazing to Fletcher than the dog's coming.

"Sigmond, dear," she said, gently chiding him, "you peeped at my Christmas tree last night." And when he glanced at her in frank astonishment: "I saw you in my room after I had retired!"

"Oh, Gloria," he declared, "you are mistaken!"

A look of wild alarm came into her sensitive countenance and quickly spread into one of positive terror.

"Don't! Don't!" she cried out sharply. "Sigmond, you scare me! You wouldn't joke with me about a matter like that, would you, dear? Tell me—you must tell me that you were in my room about one o'clock!"

A cold chill crept up Fletcher's spine as she gave way to her fears; and he answered her numbly:

"Yes, dear! Yes, yes; forgive me, it was I. I couldn't wait to see what you had for me!"

The little lie worked wonders and restored her composure nearly at once. But the distressing coincidence left Fletcher unsettled. Was Gloria dreaming or was there some connection between two weird occurrences in the same night and on Christmas Eve? Anyhow, he had Belshasher again without having to make any apologies about it, and that was something.

The first time, however, that he was alone Fletcher made use of his private telephone line. He called the kennels where he had left Belshasher for safekeeping and he inquired about him.

"Don't argue with me," said the landlady's firm voice, which he knew so well, "you took the old dog away yourself!"

Fletcher dropped the phone and fell back faintly into his chair. He was curiously disspirited after dinner. Only Gloria's cheering presence made the silly struggle in which he was engaged seem worth while, and possibly he paid her a little too much attention that evening.

"Isn't it sweet to be home again?" she said, rather late, when he attempted to kiss her good night.

After being with him so continuously at the hospital Gloria now seemed to forget the little point of etiquette which had been seemingly emphasized by the weird voice. Grasping him around the shoulders with her soft, clinging arms, she looked longingly into his face as he tried gently to disengage himself.

"Sigmond," she asked pensively, "where is my old Sigmond who was so good and sweet to me, who did not mind sitting up ever so late with me, as on the first night up at Cleborough?"

"Oh," he answered considerately, but still trying to free himself, "I suppose your old Sigmond gets caught

in the dark of the moon sometimes, where you can't see him so well!"

Very close to him, he saw in her eyes a flicker of ecstasy which he felt sure no girl could feel for a brother! In her gaze was all that ardent rapture which has a way of welling up for the first lucky one of a girl's choice! Something within Fletcher relented. He realized there was actually nothing in the whole world comparable to having this exquisite little creature beside him.

"But, honey," he went on, "sometime, somewhere, somehow, the old moon will shine again, ever so softly, for us!" His voice unconsciously carried far more meaning than the words.

"ON out across the golden Pacific, which is merely a step for us," he mused aloud to her, "are beautiful little tropical islands with pink coral beaches; and on them there are no tiresome railroads, or banks, or selfish people, or—anything else that we have to contend with. There, I imagine, the moon would shine the very softest and the sweetest."

"How wonderful that would be, to run away!" she whispered.

A tumult of thoughts were turning about in Fletcher's tired mind. "Chuck it all! What a relief it would be—and to have her, too!" The idea was very enticing indeed, but it occurred to him that as surely as Belshasher strangely slept in his bedroom, the most sensible thing Edmond Fletcher could do was also to go to bed.

"All right, honey!" he answered carelessly. "Life is such a grand adventure that you may be asked to twiddle your little toes in the pink coral sands almost any time now, but it is getting late now, and I am tired. Gloria, dear," he stated emphatically, "I must retire."

"Don't!" she begged.

"Why?"

"Because I can't give you up!"

"Annette," he called out, and the maid appeared. "Miss Gloria wants you. Good night!" he said as Gloria made a face at him.

But that was not all of it as he found out. About an hour later Fletcher was awakened in bed.

"Move over!" came Gloria's voice in the dark, and he nearly swooned as he felt her delicately lovely, warm body cuddling up to him.

"Gloria Van Mortimor!" he exclaimed. "Suppose the servants see you? Are you crazy?"

"The servants didn't see me!" pleaded Gloria. "I have them locked out of here, and if you will just keep quiet no one on earth will know I am in here with you."

"Honestly, dear, sweet little Gloria," he said tremulously, "tell me truthfully from the bottom of your heart why you do a thing like this?"

"Because," she answered plaintively, "I can't help it! All else there is for me that I can think of is not worth staying away from you—and if I am bad, forgive me, I am what I am and I didn't make myself this way! All I want is to be near you—just let me sleep close by your side," she sobbed as she hugged up closer to him. "There can't be any wrong in this! You are ill, and I am so awfully afraid in my room! I'll be so quiet and so very good if you will just hold me here in your arms."

Fletcher dared not move or speak again, but he tried to collect his racing thoughts, for he needed to think fast now, if any one ever did. Gloria, however, took his silence for consent. She remained with him! And then, to Fletcher's great wonder, she went happily asleep—almost at once!

There they were, he realized, locked up together all alone, and no one on earth could know it!

Under the bed was a sudden low, sharp growl. Its dismal significance set Fletcher's teeth on edge. Belshasher had sighted the unseen. Fletcher felt a cold chill leap to his throat. A breath

of icy air swept over his face as though a door had been suddenly opened. Across the room stood the blanched face of his other self!

Pallid and haggard, like a wraith from another world, it rested in his doorway. Some stray moonlight from the hall framed the phantom in a gray shroud. It was calmly contemplating them.

FLETCHER, in some manner, fell onto the floor. He desperately pulled himself over the door-sill into Gloria's room. He hoped this mad ruse would draw the pale specter after him.

A horrible tragedy was imminent, and he wanted the gruesome details out of Gloria's sight.

But the apparition wavered at his hasty retreat—silently turned as if disappointed in some particular! Fletcher, spellbound, watched it sadly fade away. It appeared simply to float down the stairwell outside.

At his feet was only left Belshasher crouching in fear, moaning pitifully. Fletcher snapped the light on.

Gloria sat up in his bed confusedly. "Oh, Sigmond," she moaned, "I had a bad dream!"

"Yes, I know," he said wearily. "Let's trade back rooms, Gloria. Would you mind telling me what you dreamed?"

He eyed her anxiously.

"When I came running in I was so happy to be with you! Everything was delightful, and I was so contented there by you. I reached out to hug you, and something touched me, oh, so very lightly, on the arm.

"I looked up, and there was a beautiful butterfly playing around over my head. I tried to catch it, but my arm hurt me, and then I saw that the pretty butterfly was an ugly wasp and it had stung me! Ugh!" she said. "That wasn't a nice dream."

"Gloria," exclaimed Fletcher, "your arm is bleeding! Let me see?"

And so it was. Fletcher examined it carefully. On the tender flesh of Gloria's white arm was a single drop of blood.

She was scared speechless. Fletcher brushed away the drop with his handkerchief and disclosed a little pin prick; nothing more.

"Just a tiny scratch," he said. "Put some iodine on it! Now, Gloria, is that absolutely all that you saw to-night?"

"Yes!" soberly stammered his formerly vivacious little companion. "Is that not enough?"

"Uh-huh!" answered Fletcher, in one respect greatly relieved. "Gloria, I don't propose to understand such things as have happened to-night; but you would better keep Freeda in your room after this when you are afraid in the dark. Please, whatever you do, don't chase any more butterflies in here!"

Gloria went very silently into her boudoir and closed the door ever so softly behind her.

"That's a damn good ghost for me in some particulars!" said Fletcher aloud, and disheartenedly threw himself back into bed.

So finished Christmas Day for Gloria and Fletcher.

But, ghosts or no ghosts, there followed some wonderful days for Gloria and Fletcher, between whom a deeper and deeper intimacy continued to develop.

Always there hung something of the glamour of stolen fruit about his having her now, and possibly that made her appear all the sweeter to him. Fletcher had frequently to restrain himself from making violent love to Gloria. He wondered daily if he should not throw over everything and take her as his very own.

She seemed so acquiescent in his every mood now that he believed his transformation of her was about complete. But he did not dare to take the desperate chance of Van Mortimor's

vengeance, unless he was absolutely sure of his lovely little ward, Gloria.

WITH the new year Fletcher returned to business cautiously, devoting only a few hours daily, as his strength permitted. Everywhere out on the far-flung stretches of his railroads the men were becoming more dependable as their welfare was becoming more or less automatically assured.

Nearly all of his people were taking advantage of the savings bonus. The small thrifty element had gobbled up the opportunity he offered at one gulp, and by their quick action had led the crowd. With widely varying enthusiasm, and actually painful reactions among the most extravagant, nearly all were saving the full ten per cent; for if they did not, they suffered a real cash loss of the bonus from Van Mortimor. This urge to save was all-compelling. People's jealousy, selfishness, and even viciousness were turned to account to make them help themselves against their own weakness.

A queer part of it, too, was that once a man was in the employ of any of Van Mortimor's companies, and started this insidious thing, every day put him so much deeper into it that only a fool could quit. These earnest workers were now clicking off their various tasks with clocklike precision, and naturally great corporations, so sound at the bottom, went ahead powerfully.

Nevertheless, a very disturbing factor rankled in Edmond Fletcher's breast while his health returned. It was that he had somewhat lost sight of the more serious phase of his singular position in this eccentric genius's shoes.

Dr. Martel had said that Van Mortimor would probably act like a snake in alternately charming and scaring a bird, until he was ready to strike the final blow. Van Mortimor was certainly doing just this to him! But what Fletcher desired more than anything else was, in so far as it was possible, to anticipate in advance specific moves of his phantom master. Thus to some extent he might be able to protect himself.

Late one night Fletcher locked himself in his rooms and took the history of the Van Mortimor case from his private safe for some careful analytical study on his part.

Slowly it occurred to Fletcher that love and fear, two greatest of emotions, had struck simultaneously in him the very first night up at the Cleborough estate; and that everything else which had happened since then had actually been a variation of love or fear playing in him, while both grew stronger within him all the time. Love and fear were the keynotes of this beast's operations against him, and they ran consistently through everything. There was reason in this madness, after all!

Then, as Edmond Fletcher sat there brooding his true predicament dawned upon him. He could see clearly that, though his petty initiative and drive toward business power might at times irritate or even appease his crazed master, for the most part all that was incidental and mattered no longer anyhow.

The real, the logical stage for love and fear was and always had been set around the exquisite little Gloria. Now he could see that the big show, indeed the main event for which Van Mortimor had staged so much, had begun in earnest!

Now, indeed, it appeared to Fletcher that Sigmond Van Mortimor had the situation well in hand for wringing out exquisitely morbid thrills from his puppets' actions. Out of his present acute relations with Gloria, Fletcher recognized that some thrill-stuff would arise deliciously morbid enough for even this jaded master. Of course, this human anaconda had no other disposition to make of Fletcher finally

than to try to finish him off with a nice thrill murder at the very end.

CHAPTER XV.

TORMENTING JOY.

AS the days wore on the strain of this watchful-waiting attitude on Fletcher's part toward Gloria became almost unbearable to both of them. The holidays had increased their intimacy to such a degree that her solicitude for him and her desire to be with him every possible moment were pathetic. It was hardly fair to her, he thought, to let her go on in this way, continually intoxicated and tormented by strange insuppressible emotions which she could not possibly understand.

Then, very much as if some invisible stage manager in the great wings was pushing the next character upon the scene, Fletcher one evening had a caller.

Count Rononotski asked a private audience with Fletcher, and he was received alone in the drawing-room of the playhouse. Candidly and honorably he asked Van Mortimor's permission to sue for Gloria's hand.

Fletcher was stunned by the abruptness and frankness of the fellow in stating his business so openly, but, after a fashion, he was also inclined to admire him at least for his sincerity in the matter.

"Count," he answered deliberately, while the very thought of what he was saying cut into him cruelly, "I am willing to give you the sporting chance you seem to deserve! It is all up to Gloria, and you have my permission to have her if you can—provided that you will give me your promise that you will ever remember who she is! She is an American girl, and does not by any means fall under the Continental standards for handling women." A dry smile came over his face. "It's a considerable responsibility to which you aspire. If you get her, she'll have to be your sweetheart always as well as your wife, or she won't understand at all and it will be all off with you!"

"I promise solemnly," pledged the count, "and you overwhelm me with the liberality."

They shook hands in a jovial manner as befitted two such high adventurers, but the masked one, Edmond Fletcher, retired at once, in uneasy sorrow, to the seclusion of his rooms.

Hours later came a gentle tap upon his door, and Gloria was admitted. She sank on a cushion at Fletcher's feet and lifted up her large eyes appealingly.

"Sigmond," she remonstrated, "you gave the count permission to ask me to marry him!"

"Yes," replied Fletcher, not meeting those eyes of hers, "that was the only thing to do. Such decisions are up to you."

"You put me in a strange position," she confessed contritely. "I do not suppose that I am capable of loving any man, and yet I want a home"—her voice became very low—"a distinguished husband, and little children to love me. Money is of no importance in these great things, for I have too much of it. The count has some truly fine points of character, such as are rare in men! That much I have learned from you. The count might give me all the happiness I require, except that I have no affection to return for his. However, even that might come in time but for one insurmountable difficulty—I could never leave you! I admire the count and strangely I should trust him, but when he touches my hand there is no romance—no feeling in it. You, my own brother, look at me, touch me even accidentally, and bewildering sensations, ever so sweet, pulsate all through me!" She dropped her eyes, and her clear complexion flushed.

FLETCHER, yearning for her from the very depths of his soul, could not trust himself to speak. "Sigmond! Am I unnatural? Why

do I have these uncontrollable impulses?"

"Gloria," he said, "the count is a gentleman, and I suppose, in my own fool way, I shall always try to be something of the same sort. Do not let me influence you in the least! The way of the heart is weary, but it is not too long; you will find your happiness somewhere—somehow! I do trust, Gloria, you will recognize it when it comes!"

"Never with the count," she asserted brokenly. "I admire him, but that's all there is in me for him or any other man! He is just the latest of a string of men from whom I have fled since you kissed me that first night at Cleborough. I have refused this really fine man—he sails to-morrow.

"Lean over and kiss my hair, Sigmond, just once, to help me forget. How could he know what was wrong with me?"

Fervently, Fletcher kissed her lustrous hair, drinking in its luscious, natural perfume, to him like fresh red wine.

Fletcher caught up her hand.

"Gloria!" he said. "You have made me promise not to discuss this matter so many times that I do not know how to make you understand me!

"But when you feel it so strongly, can't you see the simple truth? *I am not your brother!*"

Out of her tears, Gloria sat up, one slender arm akimbo, an elbow on his knees and a hand on her face, while she looked up into his eyes thoughtfully several moments without saying anything.

Then she darted instantaneously to a standing position, her lithe little body taut and erect. The storm of dejection which had swept over her was gone, and her radiant self was brightly shining forth again.

"I must study that over with 'Little Gloria,' my little Gloria with the blue eyes," she avowed playfully as she hurried away, suddenly bashful, but smiling happily again.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REALM OF FEAR.

FLETCHER'S secretaries were shortly buzzing with activity. This Van Mortimor carried knightly adventure and high ideals into business. For the moment Edmond Fletcher was taking men out of themselves and giving them a glimpse of faith in the ultimate good in all things.

Late one afternoon he sat at his desk well pleased with the progress he was making.

"Cablegram in code, sir," announced Colston Floyd, placing a message before him, "which we can't possibly decipher."

It read:

3 P.M., 10 Feb. Paris.
Following my nose. Smell so strong trail not much trouble.
SKYLES.

"Personal code, thank you," said Fletcher, remaining, by a great effort, outwardly composed. "I'll take charge of it."

Then he thought hastily as the door closed on Floyd: "Thank goodness, he closed the door sharply!" If it had been shut softly, Fletcher would have screamed. For the full realization of what he had done now broke upon him. This message was from Bill Skyles, the scandal-hunter whom in his anger he had crushed and banished from the country. Now he understood Skyles's taunting remark that day about its being very kind of him to help defray the expenses of his banishment! Skyles knew where to go!

Would his pitiless revenge on this poor, foul-mouthed news editor prove his own undoing? He thought morbidly: "I have ordered my coffin in advance from Skyles!"

Fletcher miserably slumped down in his chair and buried his head in his

arms. What a fool he had been! Right at the very apex of his accomplishments an ugly storm of his own making was brewing close behind him! Great fear settled down upon him then and made of him a weak, sickly thing.

Angrily he braced himself—disgusted at the fear he could not avoid or conquer. Masking his face as best he could, and pretending a calmness he did not possess, he summoned Bullard Bland.

"Bullard," he confided, "I need you now desperately! Read this message from Bill Skyles, whom I drove out of the country. Give me all that stuff you looked up on him before. Get all the personal information you can about him from our old files to help you; then pack your bag for Paris. Sail next steamer and employ any service you need over there to shadow his every movement. Just keep me advised and stand ready for summary action!"

"Mr. Van Mortimor," responded Bland as his eyes ran over the surprising words before him, every moment adding to his wrath at the insinuation upon his generous leader, "if you should have to ask me to burn down a cathedral over there I would do it rather than refuse you! There may not be much to me, but you can use me and depend on me just like a dog does on a bone! And anybody that can get any meat off me after I am through obeying your orders over there, is welcome to it!"

A certain grim humor had visited the visages of the two men. With no further discussion they parted. Fletcher knew that in the whole world he could not have had a more trustworthy or formidable emissary for this delicate mission and also he knew that—maybe he might have to use him!

THE thought was so consoling that he turned his mind to Gloria with even pleasurable feelings for the immediate moment. After all, why not live madly, happily, to the utmost of his heart's desire, each hour that remained?

In all of his more serious moments, however, Fletcher's mind was inescapably focused upon the unrelenting Van Mortimor; and the long hours late at night grew longer in which he secretly studied the phraseology of "The History of the Van Mortimor Case." This had become really an evil bible with him, for though he found nothing but hell in it he ever hoped to be able to glean something of positive advantage to himself from this frank medical statement about his invisible master.

Late one night he had finished reading a part of this morbid record and had just closed its worn covers, when he turned slightly and glanced at a picture of Gloria, placed there on the table by her own hands.

"Ah! So sweet," he mused half aloud, "she is worth anything! If I but knew I could have her for a little while I'd sacrifice the rest of my life and end this silly torture!"

It was getting very late and he was so very tired; he scarcely had the energy to retire. He leaned far back in the soft comfortable chair in which he was sitting.

Fletcher's attention was arrested nearly at once by a slight movement of the window sash. He was about to give the alarm, thinking that some burglar was jimmying the sill when the window came slowly up, moved noiselessly by an unseen hand!

In the opening he saw evolve a conglomeration of colors, which gradually took the form of a human being. It moved silently as the wind and was wafted over opposite him where he could plainly discern the blanched face of himself projecting from a dazzling-hued Hindu robe.

The iridescent colors of the mystic garment played about crazily before him in the dim light. The face was the same one he had seen in his bedroom window at Cleborough, and here at Christmas, only its expression was

different now—the blanched face was leering at him. On its features was a look of unutterable contempt and gloating hatred! Fletcher felt rooted to his position, and this gloating countenance held him spellbound for a dreadful second.

The ghastly apparition raised its gaunt open hand. It dashed its palm forward, cutting the air in the direction of the table—and the light instantly went out. Dismally now came the harrowing weird cry of this dread thing from out of the darkness! Low and shrill it was as if the thing were exultantly whistling while contemplating some dire act.

"What are you? Are you dead? Are you alive?" cried the distracted young man, speaking by a mighty effort.

"You know who I am," answered a sharp voice, interposed between snatches of its weird dirge, "I am Sigmond Van Mortimor, whom you fear! Whether I am dead or alive doesn't matter, for you, my very counterpart, live for me. But be careful what you do!" And there was a whistling, sneering interval before the Thing went on again:

"You trifle with your petty life. Off the ledge outside the window, the pavement is hard and cold," stated the sepulchral voice oracularly. "Beware how far you follow me! Sit still or run from me as you did at Christmas! Never be so foolhardy as to try to run after me! I am always with you, my fool, to study you and punish you if needs be."

"What do you want me to do?" quavered Fletcher, for he knew not how to deal with a thing like this.

THE shrill, dismal notes took on a tone of fiendish glee, after a chilling pause had ensued, and then:

"You know what I would have you do. Do it—or how bitterly you'll suffer! Run this fortune like a man; stamp men down, tramp them down, and make them pay, as the world has ever been run, so that men will say I am dominant, a master on earth. Nasty little spill you nearly had, following your fool bonus scheme, wasn't it? You should have learned a little lesson from that. Fear alone turned the trick for you! Fear of the loss of savings and the little premium you gave your employees was all that made them come across so nobly!" The ghastly voice chuckled in glee:

"Whose word now is worth the more in these affairs? Mine or yours? But play the game more safely. Use fear alone—make every one fear you! Fear is the master of all men and gets more results than anything else on earth! Fear of the hereafter! The masked face! The hooded power of some secret order! That is what accomplishes great results—the fear of loneliness and desertion!

"If you want results inspire sufficient fear and all things will move with alacrity to accomplish your ends. As you fear me, make all men fear you! Of such is the secret of mighty human endeavor. Thus, too, I shall run it all." The thin queer voice chuckled ghoulishly as it shrilly trolled a few bars of its weird gloating cry.

"You can supplement your means of fear by a neat little trick! Marry Myrtle Marbleton! She even desires you!" the rasping voice again chuckled. "Ah! There's a fitting mate for a ruthless dictator. Thoroughly disillusioned, wrung dry of all sloppy sentimentality; shoulder to shoulder, she would apply the social scourge while you cowed them in business. A courtship with her or any other woman is disgusting to me, weak and vulgar since you buy them anyway! However, it is expected. You might usefully bring your predilection for such philandering into play there and if I ever supplanted you, then, even such a sniveling worm as yourself would have been of some service to me in return for all I have done for you!" The voice

now came hollow as if from the depths of some desecrated tomb as it went on:

"You contemptible ingrate, Christmas gift ghoul that you are! The circumstances of your mission places a delicate girl, my sister, near you. Ha! Ha! You may play with her much as you wish—that's part of my sport! But touch her and I'll kill you, snuff you out as I would an odorous smoking candle! Ever shall I be with you, as you will know!"

The voice blurred. Fletcher was repeating the words. Was he going crazy? Was his other self within him doing the talking? Was he talking to himself? He could hear the weird notes of the blanched face now receding toward the window! He heard a slight grating noise—was the window going down? He didn't know. Whatever it was, it had passed away and he was so comfortable; such a relief that this monstrous thing had gone—and he knew no more.

FLETCHER was awakened by his servant, who shook him gently.

"It is nine thirty in the morning, sir."

Fletcher looked about him, stupefied. By his side on the floor lay the history of the case, which he hastily picked up. The window was down.

"Did you turn off this light?" he asked, while he tried to grasp the situation.

"No, sir," answered the valet, "the light was out when I came in."

Fletcher attempted to turn it on, but found the switch was already on, but the lamp or connection was dead. He pushed the button off and on again in vain.

"Take this lamp out and get another one for the room," he ordered the servant.

Something on the table caught his eye and held him spellbound. Gloria's picture lay face down. It might have been a dream, but how did that, too, happen? Dazed by his night vision of horror, he made his toilet for the new day.

Was his mind disordered? Had he seen an apparition or had Van Mortimor been physically present? Was this Van Mortimor working some Hindu magic upon him in this phantasm of fear? He shuddered at the weirdness of what little he knew of the occult. Those sinister dark stretches of the human mind from which could be conjured such black magic, into which it is very unhealthy for any one to penetrate. Surely he little desired to enter into such a realm, but how else could one defend himself from such a subtle and obviously powerful influence as was now bearing down upon him?

Consider it as one would, there had been indicated to Fletcher in no uncertain terms what was expected of him; and there was no doubt that to win Gloria, his fondest fancy, would call down upon him swift and horrible destruction.

"Always shall I be with you. Make them fear you even as you fear me! Of such is the secret of mighty human endeavor." The words still rang in his ears.

For several days this held sway over him, coloring all his thoughts, distracting him with strange black moodiness. No matter how it had come, the phantom's message had been delivered, and the words of it were indelibly imprinted upon Fletcher's brain. The very worst of it all was that Van Mortimor might actually have been present! This fellow's life was a drug dream; he was not like ordinary mortals.

One evening not much later, he sat brooding after he had eaten dinner. Gloria was sitting near him pretending to be reading, but he knew she was not. She seemed to partake of his moods and when he felt at his worst he knew she was simply contriving to remain silent which was a hard thing for Gloria to do at any time with her interesting relative. He was wondering

what she might be thinking of him, too, when a servant announced:

"Miss Marbleton."

Gloria arose and smiled an apology to her brother, but the man added:

"To see Mr. Van Mortimor—excuse me, sir."

Gloria stopped shortly as though some one had struck her, and Fletcher felt as guilty as if he had intentionally hurt her. However, he quickly assumed an impassive countenance and strode out of the room.

MYRTLE was wreathed in smiles when she met Fletcher. In fact, her obvious pleasure proved very alarming to him.

"Isn't the new freedom delightful which we women enjoy to-day?" she cooed after the exchange of some pleasant remarks. "We women now engage in business, do just as we please, and meet men on an equal footing in every other way, don't we?"

"Yes, indeed," he politely stammered, trying to guess all the while what had brought her here to-night. He knew Myrtle was not interested in the modern freedom of her sex. Her practices, though as old as the race, gave Myrtle much better than an equal footing with men.

"May I discuss a matter of business with you?" she begged ingratiatingly.

"Certainly," he replied, and from him emanated very much the attitude of a banker eying a customer about to request a loan.

"We both have large fortunes. They should be united," she said sweetly. "It would put us in an enviable position. I have no embarrassment in proposing such a sensible and expedient matter. I assure you, no sentiment need enter into the affair!"

Fletcher was studying her with narrowed eyes and Myrtle, who had lighted a cigarette taken from her hand bag, was regarding him languidly through little slow puffs of smoke.

"Pardon me, Myrtle," queried Fletcher breathlessly, "but by any chance did you have a dream?"

"Oh! My word, no!" she gasped, leaning over until her cheek nearly touched his. "No, I did not have a dream about this. But, of course, we shouldn't lose any emotional flavor that we might happen to find, should we?"

His senses, it seemed, were being narcotized and deadened as she swayed toward him. He was being lulled into forgetfulness by the powerful appeal of her voluptuous body, which it was his ghost-commanded duty to take! If she, too, had dreamed, the spell would have been complete. But suddenly Fletcher caught himself, and sprang to his feet.

"Well—if that's the case," he spoke decidedly, "I'll take this—er—business matter under advisement." By his attitude he dismissed Miss Marbleton in the same fashion as he would have terminated an unpleasant conversation at his office.

He shuddered to think of what might have been the consequences if she had not intruded that false note, by admitting that she had not been supernaturally directed to come for him!

Myrtle left the apartment obviously disconcerted. This man was a perfect enigma to her, and she did not know whether to be elated or depressed at the indecisive outcome of her unconventional venture.

But Fletcher, turning back upon the threshold of the room, met a young lady of a more positive disposition. It was Gloria, and her face was livid with anger. It was obvious to him that in some manner she had been listening. She was so badly agitated and he was so nettled that he merely waited coldly for her to say something. He had not long to wait.

"You have given that awful woman an excuse to invade our home!" accused Gloria haughtily, but her feelings broke over. "Haven't you guessed that for months I have been keeping her away from you?"

"I had no reason to expect this,"

he answered sadly, "but be reasonable —Myrtle is your friend; and if I am only your brother, why should you be so angry?"

"Myrtle was my friend!" she corrected him. "But she is one no longer, because you are mine! And no one else shall have you—even though I certainly do not want you now!" She sulked like a spiteful kitten.

"Be still or I'll kiss you," he flung at her deliberately; yet he was just a little uneasy about her temper.

"Just dare try it," she flared hotly, "and I'll scratch your eyes out!"

"Gloria," he asserted calmly and evenly as his face became very serious, "don't ever talk to me that way again. I mean it!" But far down in his heart he thought how black the world would be in the short time he had if she became cold and impersonal to him as she was to most people.

Gloria, fuming with dislike of his actions, considered even in the depths of her peevishness how terrible it would be if this wonderful brother turned against her and then he was so masterful — she shuddered — what might he not be expected to do to her?

NOT another word was spoken, and very formally they left one another at the head of the stairs in the play house. Each went to his own broodings which were only about the other. But it further unsettled Fletcher, this rift with his object of all desire, and he wondered whether Van Mortimor was in the offing again, whether Bland would be able to handle that detestable news-monger, Skyles, whom he had foolishly set on his own trail. His mind raced along from one fear to another. While he tossed about in his bed that night he dreamed that he was on a voyage and a shoal of sharks was following his ship.

The next morning starting for the office, for the first time that he could remember, Gloria did not appear at breakfast and the food was tasteless. He gloomily sauntered down to his car and just out of habit looked high up to her window. A little hand waved ever so faintly. His heart bounded upward!

"Hurry along," he spoke to the chauffeur. "It may be that I am late!"

Fletcher forgot almost at once about Myrtle. But his mind did dwell upon the dream of the night before. He tried to put such silly things out of his senses, but he worried, "Could they be sign posts of my dread? Sharks following me at sea!"

On his way down town he felt a compulsion to count automobiles waiting for the traffic signals, to determine if he were riding with units of thirteen or a multiple of the number. Various premonitions, to watch for symbols of superstitions, which ordinarily would not have bothered him, bobbed up in his mind.

A cat, black as midnight, darted out of an alley and ran along the pavement with the motor. He found himself watching its untoward movement in actual horror! Would it by chance pass in front of him? Happily it stopped and turning sharply around walked lazily away! "That's the spirit," he soliloquized. "I don't need any black felines to cross my pathway now!"

But before he could begin the day's work at the office he had the operator get Gloria on the phone.

"Gloria, I just wanted your encouragement," he stated, "before I begin talking to all the people that are waiting to see me down here. I saw your hand wave from the window and I concluded I could ask this of you?"

"I did no such thing," she declared indignantly. "I did not!"

"That is all right," he affirmed merrily. "I saw you, you dear little storyteller! Now what are you going to say to your poor brother who has to carry on world affairs without the encouragement of his stanch little partner?"

"Understand, I dislike you," came back spiritedly, "but no one will know

it and in business, at least, I am for you to the limit!"

"That's fine of you! Thanks!" he answered, and hung up the phone.

"Another one of those cablegrams, sir," announced Colston Floyd, "in your personal code, sir!"

Fletcher opened the missive and read:

Bombay, March 5.

Pardon me for crowing. This trail leads to a feast. I am going to spread-eagle down soon if I can beat a certain vulture to it who is hovering over the prey.

SKYLES.

Things went black before him, and he felt once more the terrible smothering feeling of close places. The next he knew he was faintly drinking a glass of ice water which some one was holding up. He weakly made his way to a window which was pushed open for him by many hands.

He motioned them back, all these many enthusiastic assistants. They stood respectfully on the other side of the room awaiting his better disposition while he drank in the cold clean air. It partially refreshed his lungs and cleared his mind.

For another instant he stood there deeply meditating like some young soldier of fortune who read impending disaster in the glowering skies; and then he acutely realized that if he was to accomplish anything at all he must drive hard before the storm. His shoulders came back and he turned sharply; in an abrupt manner he dismissed the respectfully curious crowd behind him.

But by the time he reached home that evening the full realization of his misfortune had once more borne down his spirit. He looked pale and haggard. Gloria, reproachful no longer, was half frantic at his unusual appearance. Her recovery from her anger in view of this new development in her brother's "health" was wholehearted. She simply threw her arms around Fletcher's neck and wept, declaring that she had been petty and that she did not care what happened so long as she could have him well. Then she wanted to know if anything alarming had occurred at the office to-day.

"Nothing! Nothing to worry about!" he asserted, most unconvincingly, as he sat down, clasping her comforting little self close to him for a moment.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GHOULISH DIRECTOR.

SINCE her capitulation after the quarrel, Gloria had been exquisitely delightful to Fletcher. Her affection for him had become so ripened, so complete, that at times only the scandal from Skyles which hung like a shroud over him, and, through him, over the whole family, kept him from making a desperate attempt to snatch her out from under her brother's fangs, as dangerous to them both as that might have proved.

Illustrating woman's sweet inconsistency, or stratagem of reason as the case might have been, coincident with her surrender, Gloria had asserted a very positive little proprietorship over Fletcher's most intimate affairs.

She developed an inclination to talk too much about his being her very own, and to ask his opinion of herself much too frequently.

She evinced a very keen interest in doing all Fletcher's personal shopping. She read every little thing of his that lay around, and when she would get cuddled up in his lap, as she quite too often did now, she would playfully go through his pockets.

Inasmuch as Edmond fell more deeply in love with Gloria daily, all these trivial attentions from her pleased him immensely, but then too they accentuated his desire for her and his permanent worries, which day after

day only made worse as time passed and nothing definite was heard from Van Mortimor or Skyles or Bland.

Fletcher realized that he was not fully recovered from the dreadful ordeal of the steam pipes. He did not dare trust himself under any great strain very long for fear he might break down—even go mad. He knew now what Dr. Bates had meant when, so long ago, he advised him, above all things, just to be himself.

Until recently he knew that he had, for the most part, a very clear mind, but now the agonizing suspense of all things, these troubles and unknown perils were shaking it. After every previous flagrant act of his, Van Mortimor had evidenced himself in some manner, but at present, though Fletcher had continued handling the family fortune to his own taste, though Skyles was bearing down upon him, and though Gloria cared so much for him now that she was pathetic to behold—yet Van Mortimor did not show himself in the slightest! All too well Fletcher guessed what was coming. His horribly subtle master was quietly coiling to spring upon him.

He knew that the great climax in this hideous drama was approaching. Everything was rounding in on him to crush him for the superlative thrill of his drug-crazed ruler, who would certainly manage that affair. The worst aspect of it all was that so many weird things had occurred and such horrible fears were beginning to surround every further effort upon his part, that, like water continually dripping upon a stone, it was telling on him. He could not keep his senses straight much longer for the big ordeal with his cruel master.

Soon Fletcher was having impulses to count houses in a row, people in a group, callers at the office, dishes served at the table, and, in short, anything that might total up to thirteen, or a multiple thereof, with the idea of avoiding the Judas numbers. If he started a computation and was interrupted, he did not feel comfortable until he had counted it over again.

That he should be swayed by such irresistible feelings gave Fletcher much concern; and yet too there was a sense of singular logic about it all. This Van Mortimor would be just the type to play with him and finally dispose of him in some very subtle manner by heinously perverting the very forces of nature to trap him. Therefore Fletcher felt that he must study any apparent evidences of such things which seemed to abet the monstrous phantasmagoria of hope and fear in which he was enmeshed.

Strange to say, despite industrious efforts, he did not find many thirteens; then again these doleful digits would turn up most unexpectedly in the most uncanny fashion.

AT last some news from Bland pierced the gloom. It was forwarded up to the play house one night, and Fletcher avidly read:

> 3—16. Bombay, 9 A M.
>
> Roosting and dining with the crow. Has full knowledge, but is completing proof by following itinerary which leads to New York. As his co-worker suspicion allayed. He is surely covered. I stand out here awaiting any orders, but watch out in New York. The great danger lurks there. Occulists here secretly communicate with party in question in New York and contemptuously say greater forces than Skyles handle the matter. Weird business. No New York details obtainable. Advise me.
>
> BLAND.

There was some little measure of relief in finding that Bland had the confidence of Skyles and that therefore Skyles lay in his hands at least for the present; but the reference to the occult in the message and its absolute confirmation of Van Mortimor's presence hovering over him here in America actually gave corroboration to his worst superstitious premonitions.

So gently and feelingly did Edmond Fletcher stroke Gloria's hair late that same evening while she out of habit now was cuddled up to him and reading some poetry, that she intuitively glanced up and caught his eyes hungrily drinking in her loveliness.

"Why," she asked, "are you so tender to-night, Sigmond?"

"I guess, darling," he answered, "it is because I love you so much!"

"Ah!" she said dreamily and her hands attempted to close quickly the book she had been reading as if she would hide a page that her thoughts applied to him.

"Wait!" he exclaimed. "Give me that book!"

It was by Edgar Allan Poe, and opened at that bitter lament, "The Raven." Gloria's fingers rested pallidly upon the last three lines of that poem:

> And the lamp-light o'er him streaming
> throws his shadow on the floor;
> And my soul from out that shadow that
> lies floating on the floor
> Shall be lifted—nevermore!

"Don't read such things as that!" he cried out. "Oh, Gloria, you must not!"

Fletcher took the little volume away from her, kissed her, locked his doors, including the one from Gloria's rooms, and wearily threw himself into bed.

There he lay—after midnight it must have been—and he could not sleep. Down on the floor below was a large and invaluable antique grandfather clock with cathedral chimes.

He heard its melodious voice chime one o'clock, softly but solemnly as if it sounded an epochally sad hour in some venerable ecclesiastical pile. Then in the same solemn tone, "two—three—four"—it could not be any such hour! With his predilection for counting things he counted on, until it sounded, "nine—ten—eleven—twelve—thirteen!"

Frozen with terror, he sat up stiff and cold in bed. Was some mystic force, associated with his demon shadow warning him and chanting the very end?

AT length some soothing reason came to the relief of his distracted mind and numb, cold body. He would examine the clock in the morning. In any event, come what might, he might just as well sleep. He covered himself up and peacefully dozed off.

But Fletcher began dreaming immediately, utterly melancholy dreams. No such vulgar terrors as sharks followed him now. No, these were much more poignant and excruciatingly sorrowful. In some strange white country by the sea, he could hear a cathedral booming a vast dirge, while he took eternal farewell of a weeping Gloria, made fantastically beautiful by surrounding blossoms. They were blooming everywhere about her, out of season, and out of reason, for there was snow upon the ground!

Later, in the strange changes of his dreams he was floating in the sea all alone, being carried out—out—and away on the tide to some bourne unknown.

The next morning at breakfast he could not get the clock off his mind, particularly because he had not heard it strike after arising.

"What is the matter with the hall clock?" he casually asked, attempting to appear self-collected.

"It stopped at one o'clock last night," Gloria replied, nervously avoiding his eyes.

Something in her manner caused him to inquire:

"Have you seen it?"

"Yes—but I knew it had stopped before I looked," she explained uneasily.

"How?" he insisted.

"It struck too many times for a clock, then—nevermore. I listened all night."

Half chilled in this sunny spring morning, he went to the office, only stimulated by the impetuous kisses of Gloria still warm upon his lips.

Sitting at his desk and alone, Fletcher took Bland's cablegram of yesterday from his pocket. He read it over carefully several more times. Again he had this scandal-mongering rat Skyles within his hands, and he could do exactly what he wished with him through Bland, if he acted quickly!

The public reads of some murder in the newspaper, some tragedy which the police and the press are never able to clear up, and which forever goes unexplained. Fletcher, from his keen knowledge of life, knew how many of these came about.

The subject of the tragedy was most often blackmailing some one of importance to a point where life became unendurable. As the sorely harassed victim of the blackmailer made one painful sacrifice after another to appease the unspeakable leech, the blackmailer only grew worse in his demands, until the world became too small for the two people to continue to live upon it. Of the two alternatives—to take this rotten blackmailer's life or accept inevitable ruin—some powerful men chose practical and expedient measures, and that ended it. Nothing was left but a mystery, a forever unsolved case for the public.

Fletcher rather imagined that Van Mortimor in his place would thus deal summarily with Skyles, but, of course, this news-scavenger's yellow tactics were directed against Edmond Fletcher and that complicated the matter. Regardless however of what Van Mortimor would do to Skyles, Edmond Fletcher's fagged brain concluded he would handle this as his own private affair.

HE could not conceivably let considerations for the devilish Van Mortimor enter into personal affairs of such paramount importance to himself! No matter what might be expected of him, and no matter what the necessity for it, the idea of his own snuffing out a life was repellent to Fletcher. In his mind, to kill a man under any conditions was about equivalent to destroying a world for as he saw it each man is unto himself the center of a universe.

The thought weighed so heavily on him indeed, as to resemble the presumption of considering oneself a god in meting out such mighty extinction.

"Neither I nor Van Mortimor is so big as all that, regardless of what he may think about it!" concluded Fletcher. "Maybe I can handle this hound for bad news some better way. Anyway, I'll give him a fair chance for his life! Of course," he soliloquized sadly, "that is more than Van Mortimor is giving me; but such is my decision. It stands!"

Then with trembling hand, but firm resolution he wrote out what he could intrust to no other. There went into his personal code:

BULLARD BLAND,
Bombay,

Just continue splendid work. Get everything you can, all he finds out, and prepare to warn me against the time when he strikes at me. Above everything, do not hurt him. Some occult signs here. Give me anything available on the subject.

S. V. M.

But to Fletcher's amazement and horror, there was no answer to his cable, that day, or the next. As days passed, he cabled again and again, all in vain.

For a month or so complete silence brooded over Fletcher. He gave no more attention to business than was strictly necessary that he might listen all the better. But nothing was heard from Bland! Or Skyles! Or Van Mortimor!

He lived like a wary swordsman ev-

er alert for the first thrust of death, but with him it was worse than that. His sole weapon was his wits, which he must keep ever sharpened against the unseen—for his real and biggest enemy, the brilliant Van Mortimor, himself always invisible, fenced only with the unknown.

Fletcher sought light and public places for safety. He became acquainted with life around exclusive clubs where men stare at one another and all things in perpetual boredom. He took his relaxation, if any he found, in solitary splendor at some showy hotel, always alone, but nevertheless in the brightest dining rooms where he would be closely surrounded by many people, and guarded by a little army of detectives.

In desperation about this time Edmond Fletcher took up a sport, of sorts. But he did not pursue it around the Polo and Racquet Club where his presence would have been so highly appreciated. He went secretly to a private shooting gallery which he had purchased, and he employed the best sharpshooters available to coach him. He spent much time at this and became highly proficient.

But he believed that if he wished to live, he would have to hit a more difficult target than any he found there—and that his test would come very shortly.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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Why Young Boys Do Not Leave School

SCHOOL trustees, teachers, and parents have been pondering for years over the problem of how to keep the youth of the nation in school. And up to the present their pondering has been productive of little in the way of a universal solution.

Now, however, quite by accident a little California school has solved the problem—for the present at least. That town is Galt, California.

It all came about through the efforts of William Rutherford, the "flying schoolmaster," who is principal of the town's high school. He started agitation for an aviation course, and in 1926 started it against much opposition. Now the whole town is with him.

Galt is perhaps the only high school in the country teaching both ground work and actual flying—certainly it is the pioneer. The government had made an offer of furnishing planes to accredited aviation schools and universities. Rutherford stepped forth and made a formal bid for government aid. The government did not take kindly to his request, reasoning that a high school was not "accredited." Rutherford convinced them to the contrary. Some eighty thousand dollars is now represented in aviation equipment, in engines and skyworthy planes.

The school has enlisted the aid of licensed pilots who instruct the students and pass on their practical experience to the pupils.

Just a few months ago the Galt Junior College opened, and even prior to its opening there were three hundred and fifty applications for admittance coming from almost every section of the United States. This was in spite of the fact that the college can accommodate but seventy-five students and that it is intended solely for the sons and daughters of Galt taxpayers, like any other locally supported school. All students desiring this course are required to pass rigid physical and mental tests.

Harold J. Ashe.

Poachers' Paradise

New Jersey poachers, like mosquitoes, are big and bold and hard to scare—as Alf Ringling, genius of the Big Top, found to his amazement

By BOB DAVIS

RINGLING'S, otherwise Barnum & Bailey's Circus, will draw its annual crowds. But Alf, the third of that remarkable family of seven brothers from Rice Lake, Wisconsin, who turned a bale of hay and a trick mule into the most gigantic entertainment on earth, will not be at the gate to receive his friends. A few years ago the Great Ringmaster, to whom a thousand years are but as yesterday, called him away from the pomp and pageantry to pitch his tent among the shades.

In his lifetime Alf Ringling was one of the great idealists of his generation. He lived solely for the purpose of collecting the comforts that normal men crave and for the joy of dividing them with his friends. He gathered with the one hand and distributed with the other. It required the income of a circus to gratify his mania for generosity.

In his later life he purchased five hundred acres in Pound Ridge, New Jersey, and with the help of his wife designed a colossal pudding stone palace which was two years in the building. He filled it with books, furniture, rugs, pictures and objects of art from all over the world; all the comforts of civilization under one roof. Here his friends came and made themselves at home. To complete his broad scheme for the perfection of country life he opened the limits of a small pond into four hundred acres of beautiful waterways, which he stocked with bass, perch and pickerel.

This was nothing less than an open challenge to New Jersey's most proficient poachers. And when a New Jersey poacher unlimbers his tackle there is no depth of piscatorial depravity to which he will not descend. They came to the Ringling waters like May flies, and were in a fair way to clean the place out. Driven to desperation, the genial overlord got himself an assortment of placards upon which flaunted this significant announcement:

POACHERS WILL BE PROSECUTED TO THE FULL EXTENT OF THE LAW

Piffle and tut, tut! Angling antedates the Constitution; why worry about the law? And so it came to pass that the poachers propagated and the proprietor protested; but all to no avail. The thing was becoming a joke, until one beautiful fall afternoon Alf, from the arbor of his garden, spotted one of New Jersey's leading hard cider poachers seated comfortably in the branches of a fallen chestnut tree that extended fifty feet or more into the best bass hole on the lake.

"I'll get that bird," muttered Alf under his breath, "and get him good. Come with me. This is going to be a sensation." Equipping himself with the well-known "stout walking stick" he made his exit from the opposite side

of his hacienda and by a circuitous route reached the scene of the poacher's operations. A man up a tree on dry land is one thing, but a man on a tree in ten feet of water is another.

"Stand by and watch me jar this party," said Alf in a low but firm voice. We climbed over the roots of the chestnut and stood on the horizontal bole, not twenty feet from the poacher.

"HOW'S the fishing, pardner?" asked the circus man in a most cordial tone of voice.

"Well, if you ask me," answered the fisherman, casting sixty feet to the left with a graceless side swipe, "it was rotten up to half an hour ago, when they began to take the topwater. I slammed three on the nose in about fifteen minutes. Whoppers! Two to four pounds."

Smash! "There's another." He struck the fish hard and began to reel in. "Cummon, you. And come a whoopin'." He lifted the fish quickly, unhooked it, pushing the stringer point past the captive's gills. As it glided down the cord and disappeared a great commotion was set up underwater. "Cast your eyes on this," said the angler, lifting four fat, squirming bass into view and then dropping them back again.

"Leaping wild cats!" exclaimed Ringling, in the professional vernacular. "Whadja catchum with?"

"One of them Heddon plugs. Perch markin's, shovel nose. They eats it alive."

"What 'll you take for one?"

"What 'll you gimme?"

"Dollar."

"Come again."

"Seventy-five cents anywhere."

"Go and get 'um. You can't grab none from me at them prices. These is baits."

"One fifty?"

"Umph, umph."

"Two dollars. Hurry up."

"I ain't in no hurry. Make it three, stranger."

"Sold. What 'll you take for the fish?"

"Three more."

"Gimme 'um." Alf walked down the tree trunk and secured his purchases. Six dollars passed as in the twinkling of an eye.

"And listen, mister," drawled the poacher, "whenever you wants bass I'm here for to sell 'um—with baits."

"Isn't this lake posted? What are all these signs stuck up around here?" asked Ringling, recalling his intent to make a sensation.

"Oh, them is jokes, which I have read—but can't see."

We backed off the chestnut and strolled to the castle.

"That guy," said Alf as we regained the hilltop, "would make a great clown. He doesn't know how damned funny he is."

"I thought it was your intention to jar him," I suggested, just to make conversation.

"So I did, but I hadn't the heart. When we get back to the house I want you to step into the library, where you will find a copy of the New Testament. There are several references to fishermen. One in particular. Taken by and large they are pretty good people. In any case we'll have bass for supper to-night."

By common impulse we looked across the lake in the direction of the fallen chestnut tree at the precise moment when the poacher was in the very act of lifting from the water another string of fish that he flopped across his back, and with which he disappeared into the woodland.

Alf blew a low note from his lips as though playing a solo on the slide trombone. "You can talk about Izaak Walton, Doc Henshell and Harry Van Dyke," said he, "but I claim to have right here on the premises the world's only Complete Angler."

THE END.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

TALBOT MUNDY won for himself a sure place in ARGOSY with "When Trails Were New." Incidentally next week we start an unusual and exceptionally Elizabethan serial from his pen—and after that a novel laid in romantic India.

Among the many comments on "When Trails Were New" were these:

Amarillo, Texas.

Having just finished reading the last chapter of "When Trails Were New," I simply had to drop you a line to let you know what I think of that wonderful story. It was a very interesting story, and I enjoyed it very much. Let's have some more on the same order from Mr. Mundy.

I also enjoyed "The Raider," "Thirty Years Late," "Golden Burden"—and to be real truthful about the matter, almost every story printed in the ARGOSY.

I always read Argonotes and think the department is fine.

I say leave the ARGOSY as it is, but please only one Western a week.

MRS. H. G. WOLCOTT.

Saginaw, Mich.

I just finished reading "When Trails Were New," by Talbot Mundy, and feel it my duty to congratulate Mr. Mundy upon the way in which he handled this story, especially the last installment, as the scenes were laid in territory with which I am thoroughly familiar. I was raised in southwestern Wisconsin.

My great-grandfather came to Wisconsin a few years before the Black Hawk uprising, and I have often heard my grandmother tell of their fear of him. How they would bar the doors of the cabin during the daytime when the men folks would go into the fields to work, and of how it seemed every wolf howl at night was a lurking Indian scout calling to the rest of the band. But while Black Hawk was fleeing before the troops, the nearest he came to their homestead was fifty miles to the south. He crossed the Wisconsin River as he made his way northward and then turned west in an effort to reach the Mississippi. True to Mr. Mundy's story, the final battle was staged on the bluffs of the east shore overlooking the Father of Waters and on an island in the river which is now called Battle Island. Black Hawk's left wing, as mentioned in the story, made a desperate stand in what is now known as Battle Valley, a very narrow valley running down to the Mississippi. They left a trail of dead and dying across the southern part of the State in their retreat.

The left wing slowly retreated toward Battle Island, covering the progress of the squaws and children as they crossed Battle Slough. Just as all had reached the island except the braves covering the retreat, steamboats appeared on the scene, and as the last braves made a desperate attempt to swim across Battle Slough to reach the main body of the band, they were raked with canister and grapeshot from the cannon mounted on the vessels. Practically every brave was killed, either by the fire from the boats or from the rifles of the soldiers. Then the cannon were turned on the island, which was raked from one end to the other, killing alike the men, women, and children. It was a fiendish massacre on par with Black Hawk's depredations on the Fort St. Pierre. While the whites might have been justified in doing this, it was a terrible slaughter.

After it was all over, the settlers of Wisconsin again returned to their homes and firesides without the fear of being awakened in the gray hours of early dawn by the war cry of the Indians and to find their cabins in flames.

Black Hawk was a fine general, as Lincoln said in Mr. Mundy's story. He possessed a shrewd, keen mind, but a misconceived sense of honor. He was born, apparently, under an unlucky star. While he led an active, hostile life, he was destined to unrest even after death. His bones were dug up and placed in the capitol at Madison, Wisconsin. When that building was burned a few years ago, the bones were burned with it.

I have been all over the old battlefield just south of Victory, Wisconsin. I have camped on Battle Island, and I swam the Mississippi River in nearly the same place Black Hawk made his escape nearly one hundred years ago. As you stand on the high bluffs of the east shore overlooking the bloody battle ground it is hard to imagine the conflict enacted there so many years ago. At the foot of the bluffs runs the broad State Highway with autos speeding back and forth. Just beyond the highway is the double track of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway, connecting Chicago with the Twin Cities and the Northwest. And beyond that is Battle Slough, then Battle Island and the mighty flood of the Mississippi as it sluggishly flows southward. And across the river are the purple hills of Minnesota, to which Black Hawk fled. It is all so peaceful now.

E. H. HOUSTON.

WAY down on the farm—and anxious to write letters—is this reader who invites correspondence from other ARGOSY fans:

CARSON, IOWA.

I started reading the ARGOSY sometime in 1919 and have not missed a copy since. Have read several other books, but for all around variety of stories the ARGOSY can't be beat.

I read some letters in Argonotes kicking about certain stories that some reader didn't like, but do you suppose they ever stopped to think that the story they didn't care for, somebody else thought very interesting and the other way around?

There are some stories that I don't like, but I don't read them.

You know the beauty of radio, the music that doesn't appeal to one, one may tune out, so why not pass up the stories that don't appeal?

There surely can be but a very few stories that don't appeal to everybody.

Why not put in a section for the readers that want to correspond with one another, to list their names and addresses?

I would like to correspond with some of the readers, especially those living in the East, Texas, and the West Coast. I will try and answer all letters that I receive.

My home is in the southwestern part of old Iowa on a farm, to my notion, the garden spot of the world. EVERETT COFFELT.

FROM one of Uncle Sam's men in Hawaii comes this suggestion for a larger ARGOSY:

Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY since the day they were combined, and previously read nearly every copy of *Railroad Man's Magazine*, *All-Story*, ARGOSY, and all. I first started reading, fifteen years ago back in Fort Worth, Texas, where my father ran a news-stand at one time. Have seldom missed a copy when I could get it. There have been times when I could not get hold of one, so at the first opportunity I managed to do so.

This is the first time I have ever written to you, but I felt that I would like to say a word as to the magazine. I prefer the magazine as it now stands. Of course, there are some stories that I don't care for. A larger magazine with more serials and novelettes would be acceptable, I am sure, to the majority of ARGOSY readers, and the raise in price would not affect it very much. I prefer it now to any magazine on the market and each week make a rush to the Post Exchange to get my copy. It is then passed around among my buddies, and I can safely say that the magazine is read completely through by thirty-five or forty men out of sixty who read it in this place. They all agree with me that it is a fine magazine, and here's hoping that it will stay the same or be enlarged in the near future.

Yours for the ARGOSY.

PRIVATE HARRY S. FORD.

MORE pleasant words about W. Wirt's story, "War Lord of Many Swordsmen," and for his crime stories:

Vicksburg, Miss.

A weekly reader since 1906 says ARGOSY gets better and better.

I know of no better way to convey my appreciations for the splendid stories I read in the ARGOSY than by asking you to draw a mind picture of "The Horn of Plenty," "Full and Overflowing."

The motive prompting this outburst is genuine appreciation for Mr. Wirt's story, "War Lord of Many Swordsmen." Believe me, here is a story that I consider one hundred per cent. Mr. Wirt knows his Southern colored folks and, having spent some six months in China, I can add that he also knows his Chinamen.

Inveigle him to write a real "Down South in Dixie" yarn, using the same characters.

H. F. LATIMER.

Dallas, Texas.

I have been reading the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY for several years and have always enjoyed the novelettes of John Wilstach and Kenneth Perkins.

As regards favorites, I think your three best bets are Wilstach, Perkins, and MacIsaac. I do like the crime stories of a new writer of yours, W. Wirt. MRS. MARY TAHOLOR.

Looking Ahead!

Those were merry, rollicking days in old England when Elizabeth was queen—and when a good sword and a stout heart were all one needed to face the world and seek one's fortune. And a merry rollicking tale is

HO FOR LONDON TOWN!

by TALBOT MUNDY

In this realistic tale of Elizabethan days Will Halifax, the hero, rubs elbows with Shakespeare, Drake and many other celebrities of the day, making this interesting and romantic page of history live again for us. Don't fail to start the novel next week in

The ISSUE OF FEBRUARY 2nd

HORROR ON OWL'S HILL

by THEODORE ROSCOE

will be the complete novelette in this issue. A strange and unusual tale it is—one that will grip you and send the thrills up and down your spine.

The Feature Short Story

ONE BOMB IN THE NIGHT

by EUSTACE L. ADAMS

A tale of the Western Front and war in the air.

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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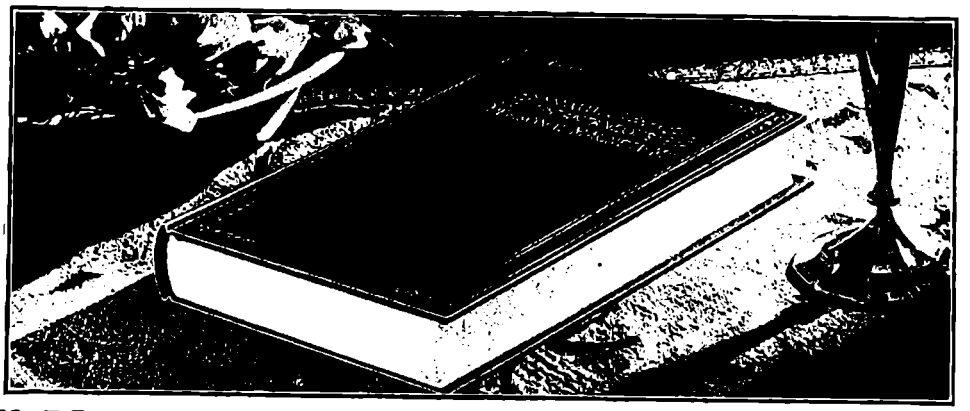

Will You Read It 5 Days FREE—to Prove It Can Multiply *Your* Present Income?

A STRANGE book! A book that seems to cast a spell over every person who turns its pages!

A copy of this book was left lying on a hotel table for a few weeks. Nearly 400 people saw the book—read a few pages—and then *sent for a copy!*

In another case a physician placed a copy in his waiting-room. More than 200 patients saw the book—read part of it—and then *ordered copies for themselves!*

Why are people so profoundly affected by this book?—so anxious to get a copy? The answer is simple. The book reveals to them for the first time how any one can develop a Magnetic Personality *instantly!* It explains how to gain *overnight* the personal charm that attracts countless friends—the self-confidence that insures quick success in any business.

It tells how to draw people to you at once, irresistibly—how to be popular in any society—how to overcome almost at once any timidity you may have—how to be a magnet of human attraction, well-liked wherever you go.

Best of all it tells you how to accomplish these results *instantaneously!*

Whence Comes this Uncanny Volume?

Forty years ago, Edmund Shaftesbury, student of the human mind, set out to discover the secret of Personal Magnetism. He applied his discoveries to his friends. Results were astonishing! His methods seemed to transform people into *entirely new beings!* Shaftesbury's fame spread. Great men came to him. His students and friends embraced such names as Gladstone, Queen Victoria, Edwin Booth, Henry Ward Beecher, and Cardinal Gibbons.

Until recently Shaftesbury's teachings have been available only to people who could pay $25 or $50 each for instruction books. Now, his wonderful teachings have been collected into a single volume, at a price *within the reach of all!* And furthermore, Shaftesbury has consented to reveal hundreds of new discoveries never before put into print.

Book Tells You

- How to develop a Magnetic Personality
- How to use certain Oriental Secrets
- How to gain perfect nerve control
- How to read people's feelings by watching their mouths
- How to read people's thoughts by watching their eyes
- How to develop a magnetic eye
- How to make your face appear 20 years younger
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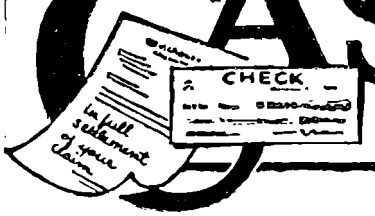

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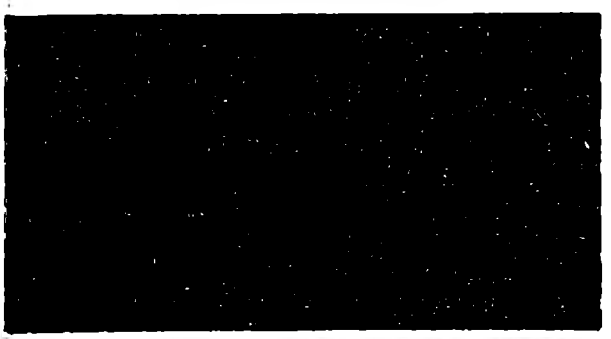

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