ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

MARCH 31

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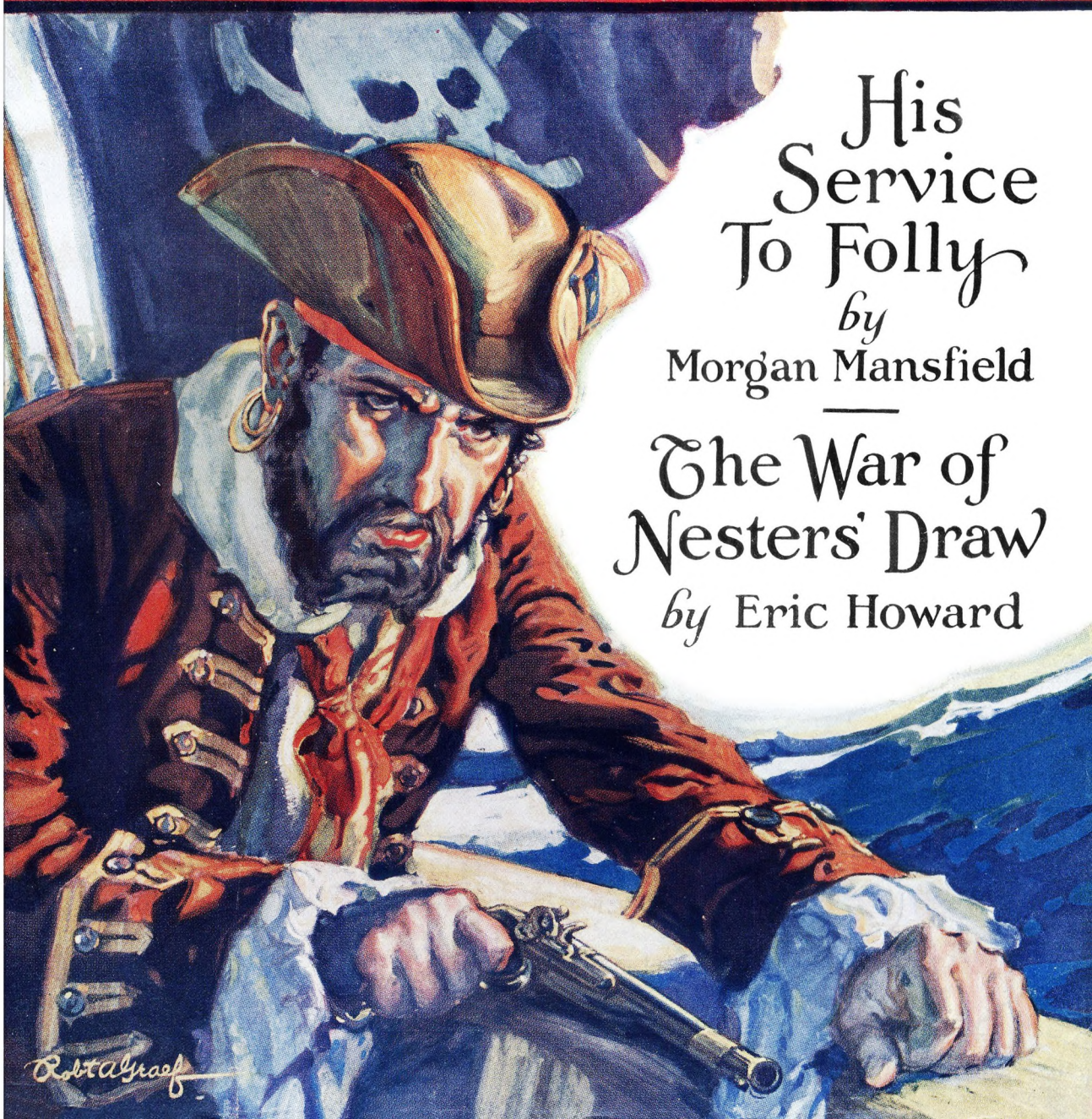

His Service To Folly

by Morgan Mansfield

The War of Nesters' Draw

by Eric Howard

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

MARCH 31, 1928

Classified Advertising

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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.

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 193 — CONTENTS FOR MARCH 31, 1928 — NUMBER 6

In next week's new serial

DAMMING HAIRPIN CAÑON

By C. C. WADDELL

bullets fly and even the flivvers buck as two counties engage in a civil war, heedless of the finish fight being waged between a bunch of grafters and a miner's daughter.

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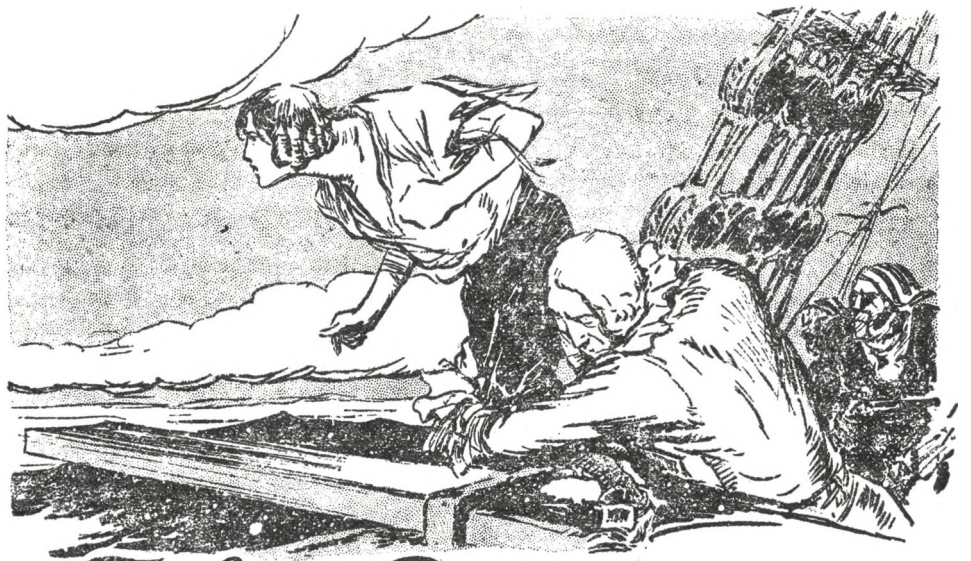


His Service to Folly

By MORGAN MANSFIELD

Primed for high adventure, he had to act as clown for an emperor he despised, and match wits with mighty ruffians

CHAPTER I.

THE BLACK DEVIL.

LIKE a copper disk, the sun had dropped into the shadows of that waste of waters which leads, as the crow flies, to the West Indies. Abeam lay the darkening sea adjacent to storm-troubled Biscay.

A northwest wind blew in off the western ocean. It kicked up a rough cross sea and took the stretch out of the Albatross's sails which had been furled in gaskets while she lay hove to in a southeaster that had blown her out of the English Channel.

A broad beamed craft was the Albatross, built for cargo space, and solidly, to carry the famous Trelawney guns.

"Built," as Master Jack Butts, the mate, had more than once remarked when out of hearing of the captain, "summat along the lines of Noah's Ark."

The northwest wind gave her a fine slant for Havre, and put all hands in good humor after days of bad weather. The crew had gathered on deck in this dog watch after a hard day of toil, to skylark and listen to songs and watch the dancing and antics of a stowaway who, pale and wan, had crawled out of the hold on their second day at sea.

With many another runaway lad, it might have fared badly, but this youth had shown such willingness alow and aloft that already his work had won him a warm place in the rough but honest affections of the crew. And he possessed gifts for amusing them which made him a more cheerful comrade than most.

When night, bat-winged, descended swiftly, the men ambled near. Through the deepening darkness the stowaway smiled, and his white teeth flashed as he broke from a stirring song of the sea into the languorous melody of a French chanson, his fingers stirring a tinkling accompaniment from the strings of a guitar:

"Where nests the rose I plucked to-day
My lady's heart upon,
I'd lay my head, and sighing say,
'Here is the dawn!'"

As he sang, his young body leaned against the deck house in the manner of a yearning swain.

It was strange, perhaps, that gnarled hands of seamen brushed aside lank locks, and their chests heaved in sympathy. Tarry, deep-drinking, cursing sea dogs, they nevertheless found in this boy's singing, and the warmth he imparted to silly love ditties of a foppish French court, some breath-taking thing which recalled tender memories, soothing after the day's work.

And Basil Trelawney sang on, drifting to a sprightly air which set their fingers and toes beating time. Then, tossing the guitar to one of the men who caught it and hung it near by, the stowaway whistled his own measure and danced a jig for them.

"It come a merry day," said one, "when that young jackanapes made up his mind to wipe the coddlin's milk from his mouth and see a man's life."

The chuckle accompanying the mate's comment, started a round of laughter. Basil joined in, but he also doubled his fist and lunged for the great hairy chest displayed through the throat of the mate's open shirt.

"A round of fisticuffs!" came the cry, and the mate was good-naturedly pushed into a circle rapidly formed to face the boy, who quickly stripped to his belt, and whose white flesh was sharply in contrast with the bronzed torso of the giant Mr. Butts, who had at last been badgered into the contest.

The Albatross was laden with guns for the Royalists in France, and would, when the cannon was safely landed, proceed to Cadiz to bring home fruit and wine of the Yuletide cheer of England. When Basil Trelawney appeared on deck and confronted the men, he had been weak with hunger and lack of fresh air in the nauseous stench of the hold.

Almost every man on board knew young Trelawney, who was always loitering about the quay when he should have been with the men of his father's iron foundry, helping to sift and mold sand into which the molten iron shaped itself to guns of war which England needed in her tussle with that impudent usurper of the throne of France, Napoleon Bonaparte.

"It's a misshapen mold was made for the boy," they said of Basil in the town. "Bred by an iron founder he may be, but he's born for high adventure on the sea."

There was never ship left port but Basil was there to watch its sails disappear on the horizon. Never a ship came home but he was there to cheer as her nose swung into the channel. His hands were tar-daubed, and his face was more wind-bitten than grimed with the black smoke of his father's foundry.

Old Squire Trelawney blustered and swore that a changeling had supplanted this son of his old age, but his ranting did not diminish Basil's love of the sea, nor did a long sojourn in France, under the

guise of a tutor in which he visited and learned to love the relatives of his French mother, born Jeanne de Tourraine.

His two years in France had given the boy a chance to acquire those graces natural to his mother. On his return he delighted her by the chests of fine garments he had brought home, and still more by the accomplishments he had acquired, his songs, his dancing, his ease of manners, and what was more to the taste of his father, the antics of a scaramouche.

And for his parents and all the countryside who gathered on occasion to partake of Squire Trelawney's hospitality, he played the rôle of troubadour, and acted parts he had taken in those happy days in France.

But beneath the gayety, his mother's eyes saw depths which savored of that tenderness that comes from a first love affair. And when she saw him sighing over a packet of letters arrived from Rouen, she asked Basil outright if all was well.

For an answer, he put into her hand a letter penned in a delicate feminine script, a missive to which clung a faint breath of heliotrope. Its meaning was all too clear. War, that despoiler of youth and joy, had shadowed the budding romance of Basil Trelawney.

The name on the letter was Violette. And the girl had written at the dictation of her father, that she might no longer entertain his suit since England was now an enemy of her dear France, and she had learned that Basil's father, Squire Trelawney, made the guns which England pointed at the brave defenders of her country.

Affairs in France, she added, went precariously. And troubles came in company. There had come word from the Haitien division of the island of Santo Domingo, that her father's kinsmen there had died suddenly of some terrible plague; and as next of kin, their estates at Grand Pré, which was named for the Tourraine lands in France, now belonged to her father, the Marquis de Tourraine.

He had decided that since they were in such a turmoil in France, to set sail for the island of Santo Domingo, and she was already preparing for the long journey to the West Indies. Her separation from Basil by leagues of ocean rolling between, was an added reason for the ending of their love affair.

She had signed herself with a phrase which carried the knowledge to Basil Trelawney that the letter was written under stern command of her father, and against the inclinations of her own heart: "À toi, Violette."

As she read the letter, the face of Basil's mother went pale.

"I would not be tempted by ever so vast an inheritance to take up residence in that far-away island," she said. "So dreadful tales are told of the uprising of black men there, and slaughter of French, that I should be suspicious that the plague which carried off the De Tourraines there, might be the sword and fire of insurrections."

She saw the look of alarm on the boy's face, and motherlike, tried to soothe the fears she had aroused.

"But it is like a woman to imagine the worst," she added. "Probably this is most likely a maid's way to break off an attachment she had outgrown. 'Tis better so, Basil. You are still young. And young love is like Violette's name-flower, fragile, and quick to fade.

"Thank le bon Dieu, there are tasks for you which leave us honor without sacrifice, such as sending you to fight Napoleon. Never did I dream that my heart would not force me to send my dearest possession to defend the glory of France, until I see my King of France dead and this arch-fiend, Napoleon, on his throne.

"If this had been a war between France and any other country, instead of a bloody glorification of an upstart Corsican, I had been first to send you as a son of my house to wear the fleur de lis.

"Instead, Basil, there is work to do; work that carries us on, that wearies the body but rests the soul, in your father's foundry. The guns of England must be sound and true, that they clear a way for the royal return in France and wipe from the world this infamous Napoleon!"

But Basil did not like the foundry. The acrid fumes of melting iron throttled a

boy who longed for the clean breath that blew across the cliffs and moors around his own home.

Squire Trelawney's house was built upon the rocks. His foundry lay in a valley near the dark mouths of mines from which men emerged black-faced and sodden with weariness, coming from tunnels of earth where there were mules who never breathed fresh air nor saw the light of day, but were foaled and died in the mines.

When in the foundry, Basil felt as he imagined the mules must feel, prisoned underground, one with the ghoul company of men stripped to the buff, leather-aproned to protect their flesh from flying drops of red-hot iron.

He could scarcely breathe because of the fumes. He could only see the streams of hissing iron poured flaming into sand molds. When he could he escaped to lounge on the quay and wish he might go with those ships winging their way to far ports.

The mannerisms he had acquired in France were not the real Basil Trelawney. He had the stout frame of the squire unhampered by flesh, thewed in rippling muscles which flowed under the satin of his skin.

He wore the likeness of his mother, and had her quickness of eye and hand. Basil grasped a sword as she held a pen, so delicately, so true of its mark.

He had learned wrestling in the toughest of all schools, among the hardy, iron-muscled rough-and-tumble miners; and more than once he had been matched, contrary to Squire Trelawney's orders, in their wrestling bouts on a Saturday night, and as often as not, come out the victor.

The letter from France which wakened him from his dream of young love did not plunge the boy into despair, which his mother feared. Instead, it roused his anger that because of a war neither of them could help, the father of Violette should take umbrage at his own father's honorable trade of gunmaker.

Since the advent of William the Conqueror, Trelawneys had been armorers. Their craft, handed down from father to son, had made their name famed for fine workmanship. Because of a magnificent sword of that brand presented to the first King Edward, they had been given a huge tract of land in Cornwall.

It was fitting they should still provide sinews of war for England, and those cannons which were the pride of Squire Trelawney, went away duly marked with the armorer's crest bestowed by Edward the First.

Basil was proud of the sound, honest guns his father sent out, but while he knew every step of their manufacture, he took no hand. It was Basil who kept accounts, a task of figures and penmanship which sorely puzzled the squire, and it was Basil who journeyed to London to interview the war lords who turned to Trelawney guns in their present need of curbing the ambition of Napoleon. Yet he had not wanted to fight until there came the letter from Violette de Tourraine.

For a week or so he pondered the bitterness caused by war, then decided that since Violette was lost to him unless he made a bold attempt to win her in spite of her father's opposition, he would ship on board the Albatross sailing for Havre, and from there make his way to Rouen and see his young sweetheart.

Unfortunately, he spoke to his own father of his plan. The squire leaped from his chair, pounded on the table until wine danced in the flagons, and swore a mighty oath that Basil should not disgrace him and all England by mooning over a French maid; nor should he leave the shores of Cornwall until he first claimed the promise of Mistress Betty Roe, whose father was a lord in good standing at court, and whose fair lands stretched as broad as the Trelawney acres. Basil laughed at the thought of marrying Betty.

"That apple-cheeked dumpling?" he asked, and brought down a second outburst of apoplectic wrath.

"Zounds and gadzooks! Do you dare speak of the wench as an apple-cheeked dumpling? Then I'll see that you bite deep into that apple before you leave the pie, my son. A Trelawney, mooning like a love-sick calf over a French maid.

"By the horse that Peter rode! You'll

go this night and pay court to Sir Richard Roe and ask the hand of his daughter. We'll hold the wedding with that old port that the Albatross will bring back this Yuletide.

"Out upon you! Go dress in those pretties that you wear better than the honest nakedness of a founder in my shops."

And Basil went, but not to pay his respects to Betty Roe. He went, wrapped to the ears against the bitter wind which blew across the moor, down to the quay where already the Albatross was ready for sea.

And, knowing there was no man in Cornwall would willingly brave Squire Trelawney's wrath by giving his son a berth on ship, especially a ship flying the English flag past French shores, Basil dived below deck and hid until the second day out.

The sight of him emerging from the hold brought a shout from the seamen. The captain, summoned from breakfast, scowled and mentioned in harsh terms the fate of stowaways aboard his ship.

"A fine kettle o' herrin' this 'll be," he fumed. Yet in his heart he admired the independence of the youth, and though he scowled and cursed, he ended by turning Basil over to the mate with orders to teach him the discipline of sailors and make a man of him.

"I'll pay for my passage," Basil had offered, only to be cut short with a snort of derision.

"What's a gold crown to me? Or a good red guinea or two, when Squire Trelawney knows you've picked my ship to badger him by your graceless ways? You'll pay, young sirrah, in brawn and gristle and honest sweat.

"Lay aloft and overhaul the main to'-gallant buntline that's chaffin' the sail, and stop it with a bit of twine that 'll break easy. Then turn to with a holystone on the poop deck. A taste of the sailor's Bible will take some o' the spirit out o' young cocks o' the walk like yerself."

But the long day's toil had not disheartened Basil, beyond its rather fearsome memories of swaying masts with himself at the wrong end of an upturned pendulum over humping seas. He had not forgotten his cheerful antics loved by the men on the docks. They hailed him and demanded a song.

One seaman had a battered guitar, and Basil turned clown for their entertainment. The dogwatch ended with a wrestling match in which he took a drubbing with the same good nature he administered a beating. There was good stuff in Basil Trelawney.

But, as he faced the gigantic mate that evening, he drew a deep breath before his lips shaped to that winning smile for which both men and women loved him.

"Faith, I eat little boys like you for breakfast!" mentioned the Gargantua, his doubled fists like smoked hams.

"You may eat me, sir, but you'll have a bellyache that 'll match your size!" yelled Basil. Darting under the raised elbow of the giant, he planted a fist against his chest with resounding thud.

A cheer from the men announced their joy in the unequal combat. The boy would be beaten, half killed, perhaps, but he would show them good sport before he dropped to the deck.

With a rush the mate was after him, flailing the wind where Basil had been, as the boy dodged nimbly aside and pounded a tattoo on the big man's bull neck, before the swinging arms had seized him. The fun was at its height, and Basil still untouched, when a cry from aloft sounded over the noise and laughter.

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?" bawled the captain from the poop, where he had been keeping one eye on the helmsman and the other on the skylarking men on deck.

"About a point on the weather quarter, sir. She's hull down."

"Aye, aye!" called the captain as he went for his spyglass. On deck, the good-natured scuffling ceased. The crew, with sober faces quickly lined the weather rail, for in those troublesome times all ships were enemies until proved otherwise.

There was much pointing of blunt and tarry fingers astern until the stranger was located. The captain steadied the long glass against a backstay of the mizzen rigging and studied the strange ship earnestly.

"That lubber aloft is blind," he finally offered to the mate who had joined him. "She's not hull down by a long shot. She's carrying a bone in her teeth and I like not the looks of it. And stuns'ls clear to the to'gallant yards. Have a look and see what you make o' her."

Mr. Butts took the glass and after a moment swore a mighty oath.

"A long, lean barkentine," he muttered. "An' she's comin' for us like a bull whale at a boat. Ho! She yaws a bit," he went on, his eye still cocked to the glass. "An' I see her ensign goin' aloft. Shiver me timbers! Damnation! It's the skull and cross bones!"

The captain snatched the glass from the mate's hand. The man at the wheel jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the barkentine and drew his forefinger suggestively across his throat, thereby heralding the ominous tidings to his shipmates.

"Pirates! Buccaneers!" cried the men in the waist, who were eagerly watching. To a man they stood by, ready for action, for orders.

Another brief survey through the glass was enough for the captain. He telescoped it with a snap and turned to the mate.

"Sweat up the sails! Lively, now! Stretch them to the last inch. Then we'll pass out the guns and shot."

In the gathering dusk, the captain glimpsed a tiny tongue of flame leaping from the bow of the brigantine, followed by a wraithlike signal of smoke which instantly disintegrated to leeward. It was a signal for him to heave to. But he was not taking orders from pirates, just yet.

With a will the men pulled and hauled on the sheets, on tacks, on halyards, until the canvas became flat as boards. Basil found himself aloft throwing salt water on the sails to swell the fabric so no wind could possibly pass through.

But their labor was in vain. The dullest wits aboard saw how useless. The barkentine was fast overhauling them, sailing two knots to their one. The captain, impatiently pacing the weather side of the poop deck, suddenly halted when he reached the forward rail and called the mate.

"Those cutthroats will be alongside in another hour if we hold to this course, Mr. Butts, so we'll try the ship on the wind. Brace the yards sharp up for the starboard tack."

This maneuver was promptly executed, the weather leeches of the kites trembling in eagerness to bite into the wind. The larboard watch had boarded the foretack and were hauling on the bowlines, when a shot from the brigantine, which was evidently saving her powder for closer quarters, struck the foretopmast just above the cap.

Down came the mast and its gear with a crash, bringing with it all the headstays with their sails, also the main to'gallant mast with its spars and gear. Then the Albatross, with no head sails to balance the main and mizzen, flew into the wind's eye with her after sails aback, helpless and unable to maneuver.

"Axes, bullies. Axes and knives!" bawled the mate. "Cut away the wreckage before these pounding spars scuttle us —if any of you are left alive," he added, peering into the maze of gear about him.

"I'm here, sir!" came the ringing tones of Basil's voice from the deck beside the windlass. Then other men squirmed their way to freedom from whatever place of safety they had found when the crash came. Groans and curses under the wreckage accounted for those of the watch who failed to rally at the mate's call.

There was no time now to rub bruised sconces and bones. Like madmen they hewed and cut through the tough cordage until the fallen spars were overboard and clear of the ship. The small carronade, fortunately undamaged, that was mounted on the to'gallant fo'castle, was clear and ready for action.

When Basil had a moment to catch his breath and look about him he saw the black silhouette of the brigantine on the weather beam. She had shortened sail and was maneuvering for a position to close with her victim, as she leisurely let fly with her guns. Overhead, the shots were screaming as they passed through sails and spars.

"They're saving our hull, damn their eyes!" growled the mate as he rammed

home the first charge of powder and ball in the carronade. "It's our cargo they want, and—" He did not finish.

A block with the rope still rove through it had been shot away and struck the giant mate on the head. Basil felt the hair bristle on his neck as he jumped to the gun, poured powder in the touchhole, and shouted for the cook.

With his long apron fluttering in the breeze, the cook came running from the galley with a red hot poker. Basil trained the gun on the poop of the brigantine, hoping to account for some of the pirate's officers, and when the oncoming vessel was but a half cable-length distant, applied the glowing iron to the powder.

There was a roar that made his ears ring, and answering curses from the brigantine. Basil, the most astonished man of those who were left of the larboard watch forward, saw the barkentine come slowly head to wind, until her square sails were all aback.

The noise on her decks had been feeble compared with the pandemonium that now shattered the serenity of the night. Like men bereft of reason, yet with method in their madness, the pirates, yelling like fiends, rushed to obey orders, spurred on by a voice which rang like a clarion.

Yards were braced sharp up. Head sheets were hauled to windward and with great fore and aft sails slatting in the wind like a continuous discharge of musketry, the brigantine gathered sternway. As she rapidly drifted down on the helpless Albatross, Basil descried her name, The Black Devil:

Le Diable Noir
Port au Prince, Haiti.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMBAT.

THE Albatross's captain sent shot after shot at the barkentine from another carronade mounted aft. Those of the watch not working the gun poured a steady fire from muskets at the enemy, shooting in their eagerness even before the foe was within range.

"Hurrah! Bully boys! Plumb into her innards, betwixt wind and water," shouted the captain after each shot, and the men gave tongue to frenzied cries of excitement. In reality it was too dark to see if the enemy was hit, but with the glass to his eye, the captain cheered the watch.

So far, his marksmen were uninjured, except those who nursed black and blue bruises where the heavy muskets kicked before they caught the trick of holding the butts snug to their shoulders.

As the pirates' shots flew through his sails and rigging, the Albatross's captain shook an impotent fist and shouted:

"Curses on you villains! Would that I had a broadside from those thirty-two pounders in our hold. It's short shrift I'd give you. Aye, even a few of the eights'd send ye all to Davy Jones's locker.

"And it's those guns they're after," he reflected. "If they riddled our hull, we'd sink before they could salvage Trelawney's cannon. But damme! You'll fight for them!" he swore aloud.

"Steward!" he bawled at that functionary who was sweating under the unaccustomed work of powder monkey, "'tis devilish dry work this. Broach a keg of rum and give us a tot. Then serve the mate and his watch for'ard."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the steward between gasping breaths. He scurried through the hatch into the lazarette where the liquor and powder was kept. But Basil and his mates were fated to do without out their jorum of rum, for as the steward reached the steps leading to where the mate and his men were hauling out the bowline, the topmast came tumbling down, which struck him to the deck.

Above the roar of guns, the crash of falling spars struck ominously on the captain's ears and for a moment he felt hopeless. Then the shouts of his men clearing away the wreckage cheered him. The barking of the first gun forward brought a grim smile to the captain's lips.

"Listen to that, ye salt water terrors," he yelled heartily to his men. "The lads for'ard have their guns talkin' to the cutthroats. Quick! Don't let them best ye in throwin' iron."

" Our gun is hot," complained one man.

" Throw more water over it," yelped another, for the captain was engrossed with the strange actions of the barkentine. A shout of hoarse triumph came from his throat:

" By the Lord, my men, we've shot away their rudder, or the steering gear, and they can't control her. Look! They back their foreyards to make her head pay off, but she fails to answer. There's not room. She'll be into us stern first in a minute!" A shriek ended his words.

The ships collided with a tremendous shock of grinding timbers. Gaining momentum at every fathom from the pressure of the wind on her sails forward, and that were now all aback, and by the seas that caught her fair on the bows and rolled along her sides, the pirate vessel came down on the disabled Albatross like an avenging Nemesis.

Stout oak ribs broke like pipe stems. Splinters flew from rail and bulwarks, and the main-yard heavily scored by a shot let go at the barrel. By some miracle the hempen lift at the starboard yardarm held, and the jagged end of the heavy spar tore loose from the sail by sheer weight.

Falling, its outer end held by the lift, the inboard end described a wide circle as it swung and swept a half dozen swarthy swashbucklers of the pirate boarding party into eternity.

" First blood!" shouted Basil joyously, his blue eyes snapping with excitement as he scrambled to his feet from the deck where most of the men of the Albatross had been hurled by the collision. A heavy hand fell on his shoulder and he turned to stare into the face of the mate.

" Don't crow too soon, young Cock-o'-the-walk," growled that worthy. " It's bad luck," he added lugubriously as he tenderly felt a goose-egg on the side of his head with one hand and with the other passed a musket to one of the men. " Shoot, lad!" he shouted. " And shoot fast. The pirates 'll board us."

In the confusion following the shock of the impact, a swart, barrel-stomached ruffian rose to his full height beside the taffrail of the pirate ship. In spite of his ponderous weight he was light as a cat on feet that were incased in gaudy bucket-topped boots.

Grasping a heavy four-fluked grappling hook, load enough for two ordinary men, he heaved it aboard the Albatross. It struck abaft the mizzen rigging and held, clear of the wide gap made by the pirate's stern crashing into the Albatross's side into which the crest of each wave was eagerly leaping.

On one fluke of the grapnel, fluttering proudly in the breeze and lighted by burning barrels of rosin and tar-soaked shakings which the pirates had kindled, was a bright scarlet sash.

It had adorned the fat man's waist, but the big hook had fouled it. Gordo-the-Butt would have been hooked with his sash only for his immense weight.

Luckily for him the tucked-in end of the sash pulled free and Gordo remained on deck, but his two pistols and dirk fell into the sea. His cutlass, also stuck into the sash, dropped straight, and its keen point cut into his boot and all but severed a toe.

" Madre di Dios! What cursed luck! Maledictions!" he bellowed in rage and pain, the big gold hoops in his ears jumping with the movement of his fat jowls as he hopped to the bitts and made the grapnel line fast thereon.

" Lively! Sir Clumsiness!" cut in the rasping voice of a man on top of the deck house. " Get your bullies aboard our prize before she sinks. Such a crew is a mere jawful for you!"

Gordo ground his teeth, but such was his fear of his commander that he answered a respectful and raucous " Aye, aye, sir," as he snatched up a cutlass and rolled along to the waist, favoring his left foot. There, the boarding party was crouched behind the bulwarks waiting for the two ships to close in.

The pirate captain evidently bore a charmed life, judging from the musket balls whistling past him as he calmly waited, stroking his black, kinky beard. True, he kept the mizzen-mast between himself and the men of the Albatross who were now in point-blank range; but he made a good target for Mr. Butts and his watch as, with

black eyes glittering, he watched the two ships come together.

His ruffians met the fire of bullets and dropped dying and dead on deck. A thick coating of sand had been scattered to provide a foothold for the men.

At the mainmast, jammed between the pumps and fiferail to keep it from capsizing, was a rum barrel with its head knocked in. It was still half full of rum and spoke eloquently of the power exercised over his scoundrelly crew before the fight, by their commander.

Sand, blood, and rum made a puddle about this barrel, and a battered tin pannikin lay in the scuppers where it had rolled from the hand of the last imbiber.

Aboard the Albatross, affairs were desperate. It was sickening to feel the sluggish motion of the vessel as she labored to right herself after each roll because of the water fast filling her hold. Both carronades were dismounted by the pirates' guns and lay on deck rolling with her, mute evidence of a gallant fight.

The dead were tossed overboard, the wounded carried below and laid in their bunks. The captain, though desperately hurt, insisted on remaining on deck. His men seated him on top of the cabin with his back against the mizzen-mast, and propped him upright with coils of rope.

" Fetch Mr. Butts and young Basil Trelawney," he ordered in a faint voice, and the three held a council of war, Basil being a participant because the Albatross belonged to his father, and was in such desperate plight. There was little time for parley and scant choice of plans.

Quickly, the crew took positions behind anything offering protection from the enemy's bullets, doggedly resolved to fight to the last. It was better far to die fighting, they reasoned, than " walk the plank " from pirate decks.

The musket fire ceased. The pirate cannon was silent, for the Albatross was sinking, its crew at the mercy of the buccaneers. Seeing nothing but lurking shadows on the Albatross's decks at which to shoot, the pirates saved their shots.

In this momentary surcease of the din magnified by the peaceful creak of blocks overhead, the slosh of seas, and dull thump of wrecked gear bumping aloft, the two ships drifted parallel, head to head, both rising and falling on the same heave of ocean.

Another grapnel was hove aboard the Albatross and its line belayed on the pirate forecastle head, thus keeping them from widening the distance between hulls.

" Boarders away! At them, my tigers! Knife and cutlass, and save your powder!" came the ominous howl of the pirate commander.

Wild yells broke from the boarding party as they sprang up and swarmed over the rail to board the stricken Albatross, and not a rogue among them but chortled over an easy victory.

An armful of fresh shakings was tossed on the fire, and lurid flame lighted the sea as grim ruffians gained the deck of the Albatross without opposition. Then as the red glow shone on the rolling victim ship and blackened the shadows, the pirates halted in amazement at an apparently deserted deck.

" Demonio! Have a care, Señor Gordo! It smells of a trick! Where in the name of saints have the poor rabbits hid themselves?" yelped one cutthroat affected with caution, and who liked not the fantastic shadows moving as he peered.

" All ghosts and goblins ere this, I'll warrant ye!" came an answering cry, and a loud, forced laugh of derision. The sense of uneasiness, even fear, spread rapidly, and the ruffians gathered closer to their leader.

" Maldito!" roared the giant Gordo in disgust. " How should I know where they hide, *me?*" He slapped a broad hand to his chest and scowled at his gang. " Go find them, you dogs. Scatter and drag them from their hole. I, Señor Gordo—"

" Fire!" cried a voice from the black shadow of the main-mast.

A deafening roar from a score of muskets was the answer to this. There was no time to reload. With clubbed muskets, and cutlasses, the Albatross men leaped from their refuges and charged the pirates. There was no chance for a second swing of gun-butts, scarce time for a second thrust of cutlass.

It was a fight with knife, fist, and belay-

ing pin, even with teeth and claws after the first clash, and to the death. No quarter was asked or given. Watching, with a sardonic leer on his yellow-skinned face, one hand stroking his beard, stood the pirate captain on his own deck-house.

The captain of the Albatross was beyond heeding the fight. He had passed away as became a seaman, on a sinking ship, midst popping of muskets, the smell of powder-smoke and clash of steel.

Basil, beside Master Butts, the mate, was using his cutlass to meet an onrushing villain whose keen weapon was raised to slash. Like a streak of lightning, Basil's point pierced his throat and with a half-turn of his wrist and uplifted arm caught the descending steel on his own sword-hilt.

Thin steel darted at the heart of the fallen pirate whose body twisted as it grazed his chest. With arm upraised from his last party, Basil lowered his point and lunged, impaling the rogue as the impetus drove him forward.

"Two!" counted Basil through shut teeth. Before his cutlass was withdrawn he was the vortex of a maelstrom of cursing, fighting fiends. Blows rained on him. As through a mist he saw a blade above him and swung his own at the hand gripping it, that went suddenly limp.

Big Jack Butts had brained his would-be murderer with a belaying pin. Basil caught the knife as it fell, and, swinging it by his last desperate strength, he felt it sink to the hilt in flesh. Then he lost consciousness.

The belaying pin in Jack Butts's hand rapped an intervening skull and made way for its wielder to face the huge-paunched ruffian in red-topped boots, who seemed equally anxious to close with the big mate of the Albatross, judging from his raucous bellowings.

"Maerte!" roared the fat Gordo. "Let me at el inglés!" His thrust at Butts was harmless, for while the hilt of the cutlass was in his hand, the blade, broken at the hilt, lay unperceived by him on deck.

"Clown!" shouted big Jack, showing his teeth in a wicked grin as the fat pirate's arm was stung to the shoulder from a rap with the iron pin on the cutlass hilt, which dropped like a living coal. Like a gigantic frog, Gordo leaped across the dead pirate at his feet toward Butts.

The Albatross's mate tried to brace his feet on deck, but was overwhelmed by the mountain of flesh hurtling like a human projectile with encircling arms. Butts toppled backward on deck with the fat pirate flattening his chest.

Other cutthroats called from aloft to reenforce the boarding party, with roars of laughter and ribald jest, attempted to separate the two giants, but for once in his unholy career Señor Gordo became a buckler and shield. Blows and kicks intended for Butts thudded his body and evoked blasphemous protestations from the overlapping pirate.

The more Gordo kicked and squirmed, the deeper sank the steel-thewed arms of Butts into his girth, until his face turned black red, his eyes bulged, and his tongue protruded for lack of breath. The strain on his spine was near bone-breaking point as his feet beat like elephantine flails.

Then the shrill voice of the pirate captain was heard above the shouting:

"Lively, my bullies! Lay aboard the barkentine. The prize sinks!"

A lively rush of tangling foes ensued. Only the desperately wounded and dead men of the Albatross were left aboard the sinking vessel. There would be lively sport when the survivors walked the plank, unless they chose to join the buccaneers.

With their own wounded shipmates, the pirates hauled and drove their victims to their ship.

Señor Gordo was neither tossed nor hauled. No two men in all that company could pick him up by the heels and shoulders, much less toss him a foot away, and the ruffians who came within range of those wide red-topped boots got kicks which sent them spinning.

"Leave the pig! Come aboard and let him drown with the other swine!" commanded the pirate captain, enjoying the spectacle of his men reeling from the blows of those boots, yet realizing there was small time to clear from the sinking ship.

Yelling uproariously, his men obeyed, all save one swashbuckler who in a spirit of

bravado drew his cutlass and hacked off the end of the ship's fore-brace. Hastily he bent a running bowline in the rope end, and coiled it in his hand. Then, swinging the line like a lariat while his mates loudly cheered, he deftly cast it over the red-topped boots and pulled taut.

There was not a minute to waste. The grapnel hooks had been hauled aboard the barkentine and the distance widened between her and the Albatross.

The swashbuckler tried to drag Señor Gordo from the stricken ship, but the arms of Jack Butts, who still lay underneath Gordo, did not for an instant loosen their viselike grip, though he was fast losing the strength needed for that pressure that would snap the fat man's spine. Butts held steady, hoping to get back his breath and power.

The swashbuckler, unable to move both heavy men, threw the other end of his improvised lariat to willing hands on the brigantine, which held it fast until he swarmed up to lend a hand.

One burly scoundrel struck up a chantey, "Blow the man down, bullies," and to the tune of that ancient sea shout they snaked the two interlocked men across the deck much as they would masthead a tops'l-yard. To their unbounded delight they had their lieutenant safe at the end of a line, and with him the big mate of the Albatross.

Sea water bubbled and spouted through the scupper holes, and was stained red as it crept inboard and lapped at Jack Butts's body. At the same time that he felt himself being jerked along deck, he managed, by freeing his head, to extricate his face from Gordo's suffocating pressure of bosom and breathe again.

The next jerk to the tune of the chantey was through water that almost swamped him and brought to his touch a body already afloat and drifting past, the form of young Basil Trelawney.

Instantly Butts loosed an arm from Gordo, and, grasping Basil's sword belt, held fast as with clash and clatter, followed by hiss of air escaping from the hold, upskyrocketed the main hatch covers.

With his heavy burden, Jack could no longer feel the deck beneath him, but he clutched Basil with one hand while the other arm retained its grip on Gordo. Released from one of Jack's arms, the big pirate drew a great lungful of air mixed with not a little salt water.

Then, while blowing like a porpoise, came the next jerk on the line, and throwing his free arm about Jack's waist he held on for dear life.

But for this unconscious aid, both Jack Butts and Basil would have followed the Albatross, so great was the strain on her mate's arms. As it was, the three men were hauled out of the vortex of the sinking ship, the rogues taking plenty of time to sing their chantey and pass scurrilous jokes anent the weight of their fat lieutenant.

When Gordo was out of the water and they could plainly see the other men, like huge barnacles, clinging to him, searing curses came from their lips, and some were for letting their burden go by the board, but the majority were for landing their load on deck since they had hoisted it nearly there.

"By the holy barnacles of Jonah!" quoth one. "Does not Gordo-the-Butt fetch us two prisoners? It were a scurvy trick to let him drown."

"By the eternal," offered another villain, whose ugliness was enhanced by smallpox pits and "devil-skin" of the tropics. "Of a truth, yes. Two will walk the plank. H'ist away, bullies."

The pirates hoisted with a will and the three men were hauled and dragged inboard to the barkentine's deck. Then the Albatross disappeared in her last plunge, sucking with her everything that floated, seemingly loath to part with old associates in her final struggle to escape a grave beneath the sea.

CHAPTER III.

LE BARON DE BANANA.

WHILE the barkentine lay hove-to, the flares on her deck cast flickering beams on her pirate carpenter and a few scoundrels aft on the poop deck. They were reaving new steering gear and

fitting a new spare steering wheel in place of the one which Basil's lucky shot had annihilated.

The lurid flames lighted ruffians aloft with marlinspike and tar pot, who under immediate charge of the boson were repairing the ravages done to the rigging by the guns of the Albatross. The boson's blistering curses spurred his bullies on, for there would be no rest, no watch below, until all was shipshape and the barkentine on her course.

On deck was a motley gang of wounded ruffians, and the men of the Albatross huddled together under guard, their hands lashed behind them. There was the ominous sight of scarlet streaks reddening the deck sand.

The unfortunate prisoners saw the free stars but dimly, although the night was clear and the sea streaked with broken silver gleams. There was a drip-drip-drip like a tic doloru, ominous as their own heartbeats as they faced the sudden chilling of their warm bodies in the cold waters of the western ocean that night.

Some of the pirates were sprawled on deck. Others reeled and staggered with the heaving planks as the vessel rolled and pitched under shortened sail, their gaudy blood-stained finery in tatters.

Leaning against the shoulder of the mate with whom he had been sparring a few hours before, Basil Trelawney writhed at the binding thongs which held his arms to his side, and panted for breath.

Then at a whispered, "Courage, lad, 'twill soon be ended," from the big man whose bare flesh warmed his own, he lifted his young head and faced the pirates who gathered about waiting that summary farce of a trial by which their captain would consign English seamen to a sea grave.

Blood ran from a cut on Basil's head, matted the brown curls close, and flowed in runnels down the white skin of his shoulders. The fine linen shirt hung in tatters from his belted waist. His face glistened with drying sweat.

But in another moment as the pirate captain strode near between ranks of his men, the boy grinned impudently and his body straightened to its height.

"A good fight, comrades, a better fight than in the old days at home," he said to the men of the Albatross.

"Devil take me, but the lad has guts!" came from a swart villain who mouthed the teeth loosened in battle and spat one onto the deck. But the face of the pirate captain wore an amazed expression as his eyes fell on the white skin of Squire Trelawney's son.

"Sacré bleu!" he swore in astonishment. "A wench! A wench whose skin is less brown than the breasts of Flemish maids. At least here is one prize to serve as a sop to my men who fought for nothing, it seems; a ship lost and not so much as a keg of good wine to wet a whistle."

He laughed uproariously in Basil's face, and there came the coarse laughter of his men.

"'Tis no wench, may the devil shrive me!" swore one rascal whose bowed legs would nicely fit a wine butt. "'Tis a Satan's spawn the sea cast up, captain. Tender o' years, white o' skin, he may be, but he has wrists of oak and the lungs of a shark on the kill, and three of our men he has sent to tread the decks of hell before he goes. A man, if ever one was born of woman!"

"Thanks, friend," said Basil. "I would I had a hand to offer."

His body writhed protest at bonds which kept him from an impetuous gesture of admiration for a generous speech.

"Aye, a game cock. A pity he walks the planks so young!" came from another man, a phrase smacking of the Devon tongue.

"Better go," said Basil, "when life is wine on the lips than turned to the dregs all of you mouth on this ship." He could still smile, although over his blue eyes drifted a cloud of regret that so soon as he had tasted the spice of adventure, its full cup should be snatched away.

"Better to go," his voice snapped like a whiplash, "than remain alive, cowards who kill bound men. But that is the difference between free men and slaves. You, who wear the fetters of fear, bind the hands of men who weld gyves of fear on your souls."

"By the holy toe of St. Peter! He has

a pretty wit," the pirate captain offered. One hand stroked his abundant black beard; its elbow was cupped in his other palm. His gaze was on Basil as he swayed to the heave of the vessel.

" I waste wit on slugs," snarled Basil, panting now as blood drained from his veins and he fought overwhelming weakness.

" Yer wit will maybe come useful in hell," a voice growled.

" Rest assured I'll use it to have the grids warmed for you cowards," the boy retorted.

They laughed. Wounded and hungry for vengeance, they baited the lad to hear his sallies and delayed that grim execution in store for the men of the Albatross.

" Best save yer breath for prayers. There is short time to say them," came from the captain.

" Then I'll save it till I need it—need it more than you. For 'twill not be long before you follow me. Who strikes at English ships will patter useless prayers when my father's guns speak from the decks of honest crafts that will run you down."

He staggered a little, then with an effort stood once more erect. The mists of faintness brought visions to his young eyes turned to the stars. He saw, as if he dreamed, the cliffs of Cornwall, the gold gorse flowers stirred by sea winds, and his mother coming down the sea trail. The pain brought by that vision was greater than the agony of his wounds.

" Have done," he cried. " End this long delay. Or is it cowardice that holds you spellbound? Where is this plank that leads through the sea to the stars? I've sent three of your men to show me the way, and I have only one regret—that better men than I must follow them."

He turned to the men of the Albatross and tried to smile. " I wish my hands were free, that I might touch each of your hands in passing. 'Twould cheer the cruise beyond."

" What name shall we call as you go, cockerel?" asked the pirate captain. " And send it to England to be carved on an empty tomb?"

" Trelawney. Basil Trelawney," he called proudly. " You know that name, who knows the might of England. Trelawney guns have salted England's glory in the blood of her foes."

" Trelawney? Trelawney of the Guns?" came from the captain. " Now perhaps it were well to look into this matter. 'Twas guns we sought to-night when we fouled a weak-armed ship. We know Trelawney guns. All Englishmen know them."

" Take back that lie! You are no men of England who shame her name by piracy. Birth is in more than place. A Moor dropped on British soil is none the less a black-a-moor. And those who change the George and Andrew for skull and cross bones are black at heart and foul their heritage."

" Softly, whelp. I speak of Trelawney guns. Are you in truth the son of that Trelawney?"

" I have said so." The boy's blue eyes flashed.

" Then, a truce. It may be you can buy your own life."

" I dicker not with sea thieves and cowards. I have not asked, nor will I take quarter not shared by my comrades."

The pirate captain stroked his whiskers and arched his eyebrows as though debating within himself the pros and cons of a desperate venture. Then finally he said:

" There is no great need of haste. We will hold council, but not here. Cut the lad's thongs. There is little gained by quarreling. We'll go below and talk."

Behind him Basil heard the running whisper of " Trelawney of the Guns," and he knew the mention of that name had changed the whole trend of the night's adventure.

Close beside his ear the big mate of the Albatross spoke in a loud whisper:

" Hold fast, lad. Some greed of guns they nurse, and some vast respect of your father's name frightens them. Play on that tune, lad."

At a nod from the captain, a burly ruffian stepped forward and slashed the lines that bound Basil's arms. Through the unbound flesh raised in ridges by the thongs the released blood brought sharp pain, at which

he writhed with hands clasped a moment, then turned on his tormentors a look of fury.

"Not a step will I take until these men of the Albatrosss are likewise released," he commanded. "If there is to be talk, 'twill be where they can hear it and know that I am not a traitor. Rather, would I be the first one to tread the path you plan for all of us."

"You seem," stated the captain, "to crave that boon of death."

"No," he said simply and without rancor in his voice. "Life is sweet, but I'm not afraid to die."

"It may be that Trelawney of Cornwall would trade guns for the return of his son," came as a suggestion from the captain, who appeared to consider in his own mind.

"Ask him that, when you bear the news of the death of one of us, and you'll have guns pointed at your foul craft and vengeance enough belched in good round shot to ballast it to hell."

"But, gently, youngster. Guns mean more to us than this parade. Let's have a word."

"Not until you give your own, loath as I am to trust the word of such villains, that the men of the Albatross shall share whatever fate you plan for me."

"That promise I give most heartily," assured the captain. "Meanwhile we will let them cool their heels at this instep of hell. A promise, my young cockerel, until we arrive at some decision."

"Then speak quickly and to the point. I'm weary and my throat is overdry."

A command from the captain brought a hunchback scuttling to hold a flagon to Basil's lips. He drank thirstily and deep, then held it for Jack Butts to drink.

As if he would make a ceremonial pledge of allegiance to them all, as the flagon was emptied he had it refilled and gave each man of the Albatross a drink, then, draining the lees, he tossed the cup to the scuppers, where it struck and bounced, falling into the sea with a faint splash.

"Guns?" he said to the captain, with something of the old gayety in his voice. "I carry no guns on my person. But there is a round dozen on the quay at home—home!" he repeated tenderly. "Trelawney guns. Dear Lord! For just one chance to train them on this ship!"

"Now, those guns on the quay at home might buy life for you, as I have hinted," offered the captain.

"My life is too little a price for twelve Trelawney guns," the boy cried quickly. "Nor would my father sell them so cheap. But with the lives of all these seamen of the Albatross in the balance he might consider the trade!"

A growl of dissent broke from the pirate crew, silenced by a curse from their commander.

"We make no war on Englishmen," he said. "If enough cannon could be forthcoming, we might even sell the lives of these prisoners. Guns, with the Trelawney name on their butts—twelve guns!"

The change of front had come so quickly that Basil could scarcely believe his ears. But he did not for a moment trust the pirates.

"Twelve guns?" he asked. "Why do you need so many? With such a load this ship would bristle like an angry cat. You have many guns. Why add twelve more?"

"A matter of a commission intrusted to me," asserted the captain, "by the Emperor of Santo Domingo."

"Napoleon?" asked Basil quickly.

"Not so. A black emperor who rules the island and is lord over the whites whom he once served as a slave. Has that tale not yet reached England?"

"We heard something. But the news was meager. We heard of an uprising of black men, almost incredible of belief."

"'Uprising' is a womanish word. The black men overwhelmed the island like a dark cyclone. Guns are needed there by this Henri Christophe, Emperor of Haiti. This ship was sent to secure guns which are scarce enough since the little Corsican made himself Emperor of France, and boldly twists the tail of the British lion."

"Henri Christophe? I had not heard that name."

"You'll hear it in good time. All the world will know the name of Henri Christophe and his lords, the Dukes of Marmalade and Limonade, and—" The pirate

captain bowed from his waist and swept a hand with its tattered wrist laces to his breast in an exaggerated eloquence of gesture. "In me you behold, Le Baron de Banana."

For a moment Basil stared, then his laughter came merrily, joyously, breaking the tensity of silence about him.

"This Henri Christophe spreads a feast about his court, a human feast, but of bellywash by their names: Marmalade, Limonade, Banana."

He laughed again at the scowl on the captain's face. "But no doubt they are well named. No seaman worthy of that term would have blundered so hugely by sinking the Albatross loaded with guns of war for which he scoured the high seas, Sir Baron de Banana.

"And for those guns I claim my father's price. They were to have helped soldiers of England clip the wings of Napoleon. They must be paid for.

"But I am willing to name the price. That will leave you free to seek those guns warm from the molds which rest on the quay at Trelawney, ready to be placed aboard ship."

He cleared the huskiness from his throat and continued.

"Suppose, for the loss of the guns aboard the Albatross you give me the word of Baron de Banana that my life and the lives of my comrades shall be exchanged. In turn, I give you my word, the word of Basil Trelawney, that no other price will be demanded."

"A devil's curse on such talk! Those guns are fathoms deep. 'Tis guns that I can unload at Bonnet á L'Evevue, I barter for."

"A brave chance you have of taking them whether I live or die," cried the boy. "But take no word of mine. Sail in between the cliffs at Trelawney and see the reception awaiting you."

"'Tis probably a fortress, armed with guns of this same make," commented the baron amicably, now that Basil showed only defiance in the face of his dilemma.

"Sail in, and learn," was all the answer he got.

"Softly, softly, young sir!" The baron pulled at his black beard, and from over his shoulder Basil caught the whispered advice of Jack Butts.

"Drive a hard bargain, lad. He's turning the other cheek with the mark of your wit red on the first half of his face."

"Softly, if you will. If I am to sell you guns, I name the price. Take it or leave it. Dead seamen make but poor ghosts to barter with.

"Yet I am willing to talk further. You want guns, M. le Baron de Banana. We have Trelawney guns. The price of them loaded aboard your ship is twelve hundred guineas. The lives of the Albatross's men and my life is the price you pay for blundering in sinking our ship, and guns that were to help England.

"My own life I offer freely as a pawn. For you will not dare enter the channel mouth of Trelawney Sound. But I could go and speak to my father, present to him your case, and do what may be done to drive the bargain for you.

"I shall offer him from you, twelve hundred guineas. My comrades must be landed as soon as I arrive again at your ship with permission to load the twelve guns.

"And if I fail—for Squire Trelawney must have his own time to explain to the war lords of England and may refuse your offer—if I fail I will come back to your ship, a prisoner. And you may then pronounce sentence on me and the men of the Albatross."

"Young sir, you drive a hard bargain," growled De Banana.

"I am in hard straits, M. le Baron. I am, you must perceive, between devil and deep blue sea!" He swung an arm and pointed to the great oak plank which had already been hauled to the open gangway; then he bowed to the pirate captain.

"What if your father refuse an offer?"

The boy's body stiffened, his chin was held high. "I have given my word to return to you. I can offer no more than life for my failure."

"A thousand pities we sank the Albatross," remarked the hunchback, who had brought wine to Basil. "There were guns to be had and we lost them. I like not

this plan to skirt the shores of Cornwall, where wild black Cornishmen lie waiting such a prize as we carry in the hold to pay for guns."

"Belay that talk!" warned a cutthroat with sizzling oaths. "Share and share alike is served of the loot. 'Twas under that agreement we set sail on this cruise. Who cares a curse whether Christophe mans his fortress with guns or sugar cane?

"I saw the red trail where his men passed, the fair French maids slaughtered in cold blood after worse. Did France and England know what I have seen of Christophe's work, they'd let no guns go to this Zanzibar negro who lords it over Santo Domingo."

Basil heard, and turned a face grown gray under its brave mask of courage. He remembered that Violette had set sail for Haiti, and that her letter had mentioned an uprising of blacks.

He had caught only a breath of that horror of the slaughter from this talk of the pirates near by, but it was enough to fill the boy's heart with dire foreboding and fear for the maid he had wooed and almost won in the garden of her father's house at Rouen.

"Your talk makes me repent the generosity of my offer," he said. "I regret passing my word. For now, I do not want the guns of Trelawney to go to this black Emperor Christophe. War between black men and white is worse than war between France and England. You had better shove out that plank. For Englishmen do not buy their lives at the price of white men against black."

"One moment—" The baron stepped closer, disconcerted at this change in Basil's manner. "You made me the offer in honor and I hold you to those terms."

"But when I made it I knew nothing of the circumstances of your need. That alters things, M. le Baron. Shove out your plank and clear a path. I'll show you how 'tis walked, nay danced upon—a rigadoon."

He turned and ran toward the plank end, and there with one had lifted high, and his toe pointed to step a measure, he sang in a voice hoarse from the stress of emotion under which he labored, that same love song he had lilted earlier in the evening to the men of the Albatross:

> "Where nests the rose I plucked to-day
> My lady's heart upon,
> I'd lay my head and sighing say,
> 'It is the dawn.'"

From the pirate captain came a sharp command and vigorous gesture, and like a shadow creeping, cat-footed, toward the rail, came the hunchback. He leaped and his long, apelike arms caught the boy's body and held him fast.

"You gave your word," shouted the captain when Basil was dragged before him, "and I'll see that you keep it. Below with him, Gefondo! And see that he is well treated. Bind his wounds and feed him. We sail for the guns of Trelawney."

CHAPTER IV.

LIGHTS OUT.

FOR Basil Trelawney the lights went out when the arms of Gefondo, the hunchback, closed about him. It seemed to the boy that he had danced to the end of the plank and then seas of unconsciousness carried him deep into that tide which flows between life and death.

He was carried below to the cabin and laid on a couch, but his blue eyes did not open until his wounds were being dressed by that man who had spoken of the atrocities he witnessed on Santo Domingo Island.

Brandy forced between the set jaws of the boy brought no struggle of protest at its fiery breath. The hunchback, crouching at the foot of the bunk, looked at the surgeon in alarm.

"He must not die, Ranselaar," he muttered, "else we lose our chance to end a wearisome cruise. My very bones are cold in the gray winds of these northern seas."

"Rather, you long for the warm nests of the Haiti forests, and arms of mestiza girls, and the spice of that adventure which life at the court of Christophe gives the beasts he gathers about him.

"This wind is bracing to red blood. Did you ever see an eaglet fledged in hot

lands that wore so well its plumes of courage as this Cornish boy who held a crew of cutthroats at bay; aye, and bargained as no other man had wit or courage to bargain with that spawn of Satan who calls himself ' Baron de Banana '?"

The surgeon spat, as if he mouthed something distasteful.

The hunchback, who had been chaffing Basil's wrists, desisted to burn feathers under his nose. They had loosed his belt and cut the garments from his body.

He lay, covered to the chest with a pall of crimson velvet snatched from a locker, and above that ruddy fabric his flesh was blue and on his pale cheeks the long, curved lashes were like thick silk fringes.

Ranselaar took from his own pocket a timepiece of chased gold, and, opening the case, held its crystal to Basil's lips, then viewed the glass in some alarm.

" His breath is light. A toss-up, Gefondo, if we are not too late. He had lost much blood; a pity, for it is good red blood."

He plied the boy with brandy, and the hunchback's efforts were redoubled in an attempt to warm the youth's flesh with his palms. There came a light sigh, the flutter of dark eyelashes and his breast lifted and fell. Ranselaar slipped his arm under Basil's shoulders.

" If I knew a name that would call back your wandering wits, lad, I'd say it. So fine a youth must have set many hearts a-flutter. Or—could it be a dearer word—perchance, the word ' Mother '?"

He spoke it softly, and as if he had not uttered it in many years. And Basil seemed to hear. His lips moved. Bending closer, Ranselaar heard him speak:

" Mother, she is almost as beautiful as you—my Violette. And she will need me now. They say they tell of dreadful things happening in Santo Domingo."

" Violette! So that's her name! In Santo Domingo. Then, God help this Violette if she has set foot on those dark shores."

They held wine to his lips, and Basil drank and tried to sit erect. Then, shivering, he drew the crimson velvet close to his chin.

" I am cold, sirs. And this room is strange. Where am I?"

" 'Tis my own cabin, young sir. My name is Ranselaar. Have you forgotten the fight, and your bargain with him who styles himself Baron de Banana?"

" Ah, yes. I remember. We head for England."

He seemed to doze, and Ranselaar, satisfied that his sleep was natural, waved the hunchback aside. Left alone with his charge, he, too, dozed in his chair until nearly dawn. Then Basil wakened him by calling for water.

" You were the man who spoke of Santo Domingo and what happened there, sir," Basil said. " I know a lady who set sail for that island. I am concerned to hear what may be told. Yet, I would not keep you from sleep to satisfy my curiosity."

" I've had enough sleep. One learns to snatch sleep afoot in these troublous times. Still, aboard this barkentine we are safe enough. They make no secret of their likes and dislikes, and act accordingly. It is ashore at Santo Domingo that sleep is an enemy, and closed eyes are an invitation to death."

" Is it so bad as that?" questioned Basil.

" Worse! I was in the port, in that cantina where Henri Christophe once wiped slips and carried food to British seamen, when the conflagration broke out. There had been whispers aplenty, and loud talk of black men on the quays, and fires of voodoo meetings in the jungle.

" But the French and Spanish overlords would not take heed. The blacks were their slaves, and most of them were well-treated, cared for as well as horses, well fed, allowed vast liberty. I think myself, they are not far from apes, or the great gorillas of the African forests which spewed them forth; a kick, and you uncover the beast.

" Hundreds of years of bondage does not change their jungle blood. And they bred with the Indians of the hills and added Indian cunning to their own molten heat and wickedness. I saw only a part of what they did, but it was enough."

Ranselaar's eyes were dark with memory as he continued:

"These sea pirates are human beside those blacks. I know of one estate of which it was said, 'Happy as a negro of Gallifet'; but the overseer of it would not take warning, and one day he rode forth and found the blacks up in arms and the body of a white child for a standard.

"They hewed men in pieces. They took white women—and at dawn they left them red blots on the jungle trail. And it is not over. That started long ago under Toussaint. But Toussaint is not the ruler of Haiti. Henri Christophe, one of his lieutenants, is emperor there.

"And he had wisdom enough to save French engineers from the carnage and forced them to build him a fortress, the like of which is not possessed by any king of our age. It is a wedge-shaped pile of huge blocks of masonry, pointing north, impregnable and fitting the cliffs as a bonnet fits the head.

"I saw his blacks hauling stones to build it, such great loads that they fainted and fell and were killed on the spot for fainting. I saw his men stagger as they hauled those burdens, and every tenth man was shot to death to point a warning to the others."

The voice of Ranselaar was quiet and earnest, compelling belief by its intensity. Basil leaned on one elbow, his gaze on the man's face as the surgeon slumped in his chair, fingers gripping its arms as if he was overcome by memory of horrors he had seen.

"And I saw Sans Souci," he went on, "the palace which Henri Christophe built for his wives, and filled with all the treasures he could gather. There are fountains playing in the sun, fruit trees laden with lusciousness, women serving that black emperor, who has already allowed good living to undermine his great generalship.

"And no man knows the tale of the great wealth that lies hid in those palaces, the diamonds, the pearls, the gold and silver, piled in great ingots like pig iron."

From the deck above came the sound of commands shouted in gruff tones, the hurried tramp of feet, the thud of coiled line thrown down, and the shrill squeak of blocks sadly in need of overhauling.

Then all sound was drowned in the din of slatting sails coming into the wind as the barkentine bobbed her curtseys to a new tack by climbing the head seas. The deck furnishings of the cabin gradually assumed the opposite angle, and the ensuing peace was rudely shattered by a hoarse voice:

"Steer full and by, you swab. And keep the weather clew of the royal lifting."

Ranselaar broke the silence he had perforce maintained throughout this racket:

"They have finished their temporary repairs, and let us hope we are headed for your home in Cornwall."

"Amen," offered Basil with feeling; "but please go on with your story, *monsieur*."

"I spoke of the splendor of Sans Souci, but I did not tell you of the fear that crouches over it like a nightmare, abiding ever at the head of Henri Christophe. And to combat it, he wants guns to compel loyalty that he has lost since he ceased to lead his men and has retired to voluptuous living among his women.

"He worships, some say, as worship those voodoo followers who slaughter white children at their jungle gatherings. And he is now as much hated as he was once adored."

"Adored? Such a man, adored?" Basil interrupted.

"Aye. A mob, mad for blood, adores a guillotine, as we know. And Christophe is a guillotine, and the white people of the island are his Royalists."

"Then why do white men serve him? This Baron de Banana?" Basil smiled at the name.

"'Twill show you the quality of Christophe, that he names those whom he lifts to favor, as 'Marmalade' and 'Banana.' This pirate captain of ours was born Walter Schneiffer, an outrage on a sound Bavarian name, for he is some sort of mestizo, part negro and Heaven alone knows what other origin.

"He was poor enough until he licked the boots of Christophe, who outfitted him for this cruise with an order to fetch back guns for Christophe's fortress."

Basil looked at Ranselaar and drew a deep breath.

"Pardon the question, sir, but I am curious. You speak against this Christophe. Yet, you serve his minion, this baron."

"You are under no compulsion to believe the tale I tell, but I returned from Cap François and found my wife dead, and by her side the dead postilion who tried to save her life. They caught me as I was leaving the ruins of my own home and took me prisoner.

"I had been an engineer in the French militia, and Christophe saved my life so that I could help build his fortress. One lives, you know, in spite of everything, when revenge burns high."

He drew deep breath, and his cheeks flamed red.

"I care nothing for life, only that each breath of my lips would serve one end. The plans, the thoughts I keep, no man will ever know. And I think my wits served to quiet the suspicions of this Christophe, for when he elevated the guttersnipe Schneiffer to a baronetcy, he sent me with him on this quest for cannon, a cruise which I hoped would lead to England or France, where when my tale was told, 'twould move stone hearts to tears and gain for us in Santo Domingo an army that would wipe the island clean.

"And you have unwittingly served my purpose which is, I think, Heaven blessed. Let but this ship touch English shores and I have an answer to my prayer. I ask no faith, nor need to ask it from you; but a few hours back you babbled the name of a woman who sailed for Santo Domingo."

Basil's breath caught. He seemed to see that trail of blood left in dark jungles by the butchery of white women.

"But she is scarce arrived. And her father is a French marquis. Surely, they dare not—"

"Christophe dares anything," interrupted Ranselaar. "If she be ugly, she'll have the mercy of a quick death."

"She is beautiful," murmured Basil; "a flower."

"Then you'd best find an English maid and forget if you can. We sail for Cornwall to get guns. You've given your word to secure them, or return to death. And they'll kill you fast enough."

"Let them," cried Basil. "My body is worth just nothing. I would have jumped into the sea rather than sell my soul with those guns, but something—"

He brushed a hand over his brow and it rested on the brown curls clustered tight to his head above the bandages. "Something whispered: 'This is not the end; there are deeds to do and a jungle trail to follow.' And since your talk I know that trail leads to Santo Domingo.

"I wonder, sir, if 'tis the fortunes of this Henri Christophe I chase after, or if fate demands that I stay in England. 'Twill depend on my father's mood. When he hears the tales of which you tell, I'm not sure he will sell guns to these minions of a black emperor."

There was silence between them for the space of a good half hour, during which Basil lay on the couch covered by the crimson robe, and the engineer surgeon slouched in his chair. The thoughts of both were busy with problems of that jeweled island where Columbus's bones rested, and the torch of rebellion was a star on the black brow of slaves.

"It is near day," said the surgeon at length, "and we are many good sea miles nearer Cornwall. God send that no ill wind intervenes between us and England."

"You mean perhaps, to desert this ship?" asked Basil.

"I mean to tell your father just what you do in buying your life at this cost of lives on Santo Domingo, lad; I am your enemy!"

Basil looked at the face of the man before him. It wore features chiseled by life into stern lines of suffering. The brows were bunched, with puckers over the nose bridge. This Ranselaar had been a handsome man before pain had aged him.

His hands were those of a gentleman, soft fingered despite their strength when they bound Basil's wounds. The shirt he wore was of fine linen, and diamonds glistened like tears on its hand-embroidered pleat. His coat was of fine broadcloth; his shoes of Cordovan leather, soft as a lady's glove.

Basil saw by the light of a candle burning in a silver holder, the cabin walls pol-

ished to satin gloss, and a crucifix of ebony on which gleamed a golden Christ. Stark simplicity and lack of adornment distinguished the room, except for that crimson velvet which covered him.

It seemed to Basil that the tale to which he had listened was a part of that nightmare which began when he danced to the plank and flung his challenge to the pirate crew, to leap overboard and end the bargaining. For now he had left the matter of guns, even of life and death, and had reached a place where he was needed to defend the honor of a woman and lend his wits to protect her life and all that was dearer than life.

Violette was in this Santo Domingo where there was a black beast loosed, ravaging the land. Basil was no longer free to choose or set aside the gift of life.

Having kissed her finger tips in happy France, he had unwittingly pledged himself to serve her through good and evil for all time. And evil had befallen. If what Ranselaar said were true, she might need the wits and strength he had to offer.

Yet this ship was sailing to Cornwall. And he had bargained to save his life and the lives of the Albatross's men, and he must not falter in that task.

He flung an arm across his eyes to shut out sights conjured by weakness and fever and the tales told by Ranselaar.

"Six days we sailed to come this far," he murmured. "How long, dear God, how long before I see the shores of Santo Domingo? And why could not our course have been pursued so that by chance I had intercepted her?"

"Lad"—the voice of Ranselaar came softly muted—"if I had left Cap François an hour sooner than I did on a long distant day, I might have lifted my own sword in defense of what was to me dearer than life. But it was not to be. We question fate, but ne'er receive an answer."

Anon through their talk came sounds of hammering on deck as repairs progressed, the crash of seas on the barkentine's bows, the creak and groan of her timbers as she rolled and pitched in the head seas.

Each hour took her nearer Cornwall and farther from the island of Santo Domingo; and for Basil those hours were seared by visions of the tales he had heard. He could not draw back from keeping his oath, nor could he hasten the end of waiting.

He almost blessed the languor of weakness which kept him drowsing in the surgeon's cabin, and night and day came and went until he lost count nor cared to keep tally.

He went on deck at length, a little abashed at this, his first sight of the men whom he had defied so impudently, so brazenly on that first night aboard. But they greeted him with broad grins and slapped his shoulders, and with many a doughty curse let him know they held no ill will.

He looked about for the men of the Albatross, and not seeing them, concluded they were prisoners. Then, without asking permission, he made his way below to the hold and called their names, where he found them among the pirates and was greeted heartily.

They had not forgotten how he warmed their hearts by his gallant courage, nor their unbounded admiration for the wit which had driven a bargain that seemed likely to prove their salvation. Only for Basil they had been fathoms deep long since.

Big Jack Butts was at the wheel steering. Close by was Gordo-the-Butt, standing on one foot. The other, swathed in bandages, he held in one hand as he leaned against the taffrail.

"Maldito! Hombre," he was saying pompously, "again do I claim you had not as much chance as a piece of salt pork in a shark's jaws. But for that thrice-accursed rope about my ankles you'd—"

"Your backbone would have snapped like that," interrupted Jack with a joyful grin. He had let go the wheel to snap his fingers and illustrate his comparison, but caught sight of Basil, and another fight was postponed.

"Ho! Blow me tight! If it isn't Master Basil, alive and kickin' again!" He shook the hand which Basil offered, and added feelingly: "Damme! But you're a sight for sore eyes!"

"Carramba! 'Tis the game cock of the Albatross!" exclaimed Gordo in his raucous voice, meant to be welcoming. "Of a truth am I pleased to see you ready for another fight, señor!" and he gayly saluted Basil in piratical fashion, with his forefinger drawn across his throat suggestively.

Basil laughed, and expressed regret that Gordo was not in like condition.

"The Tub-o'-guts kicked his toe against a ringbolt in running from me," offered Jack, pointing his thumb at Gordo.

Gordo ground his teeth, puffed out his cheeks, and rolled his small pig eyes under scowling brows as he cudgeled his brain for a fitting retort to this monstrous lie.

"Maledictiones!" he began, but hostilities were averted by a fourth member of the group who had been long enough overlooked. The keen north wind had put a sharper edge on his normally vicious temper. He spoke in a voice so much like that of Gordo, his master, that the fat rascal immediately ceased his stutterings to look and listen in admiration toward his pet.

"Awk—sway away—sangre de santos—sway away and stretch his neck," offered the piratical bird, by name Henri Christophe. His mention of hanging a man to the yardarm was as casual as though such events were usual in his ancient life.

"Maldito! He sailed with the almirante," stated Gordo in prideful voice; "with Morgan, in the Red Scourge."

The emperor, thus encouraged, stropped his beak on his perch and settled his wind-ruffled plumage, then slewing about so that one beadlike eye was focused on Gordo, he sang harshly:

> "Of all the trees I care to see,
> The gallows tree is the tree for me."

Eight bells, four o'clock, were struck on the ship's bell, which put a stop to the parrot's villainous repertoire. Gordo was relieved by the boson, and an Albatross seaman took the wheel from Jack Butts. That old salt cast envious glances at the parrot, which was now riding Gordo's shoulder. The bird held a morsel of leaf tobacco in his beak, and was maintaining a precarious perch as his master hopped below to his room.

Basil followed Jack forward to the fo'-castle where, seated on a brass-bound camphor-wood chest, he listened to what had happened on deck while he lay ill of his own wounds.

"At first," said Jack, "they shoves us all down into the forepeak, where we lay in bilge water the rest of the night, fightin' rats with our feet. Come daylight, they drags us on deck one at a time, an' the lashin's is took off our arms. All but old Bill.

"You remember old Bill, Master Basil? Him what the cannon rolled on at home and twisted his foot so's his toes was trained aft 'stead o' forrard? Bill's missus washes clothes fer the young miners, an' lives in that little stone hut at the inshore end o' the quay."

Basil nodded in silence, too sorry for these men to trust his voice to speak.

"Bill always wus unlucky," went on Jack, and cast furtive glances into the shadowy corners of the fo'castle where swaying garments might conceal pirate eavesdroppers, "an' now Bill's gone aloft fer the last time. Bill's shark's meat."

Jack's shipmates confirmed this statement with emphatic nods and muttered phrases. Their gloomy aspect portended dire calamity.

"How come you to know that Bill was dead?" asked Basil.

"They let on to us that Bill is in the sick bay along o' the wounded pirates, but the very next night they was a corpus went over the side. Whose was it, if it wasn't Bill's? For them pirates go to hell sewed up in their hammocks, with a round shot at their feet, slid off a gratin' with the Jolly Roger coverin' them, all shipshape and pirate fashion.

"But this hulk was hove overboard like a dog. Who was it, if it wasn't ol' Bill?" Jack paused for breath. "After that, I will say that they treats us fair decent. We're split into watches and works along o' the pirates. I bin standin' the watch o' Gordo-the-Butt till he hops on deck this mornin', and I'm disrated to quartermaster."

"And the captain?" asked Basil. "Have you seen him?"

"Drunk," answered Jack succinctly. "This northwest wind has held steady. It's gettin' warmer now, and I'm wagerin' a southerly breeze by sundown. And"—he went on, smiling for the first time—"we were in the latitude o' the Lizard at noon, and sh'u'd pick up the light before midnight."

"So?" said Basil, and he fell to musing. He was torn between two tides; affection for these men he meant to land safely on English soil, and regret that in so doing he must commit a worse crime by sending guns to Christophe. He hated the thought of a meeting with his father, who would see this crisis as the result of his own folly in running away to sea, as indeed he saw it himself.

Yet if he had not gone there had been no rescue of the Albatross's men, none of the whiplash now driving him somehow to find a way to that far island where Violette was gone. He began to see the whole affair as one of those inexplicable games played by fate with men as pawns.

He talked in low voice to the men, and they lingered on his words. Day ended and night fell, and still he remained below until there came a sound of running feet on deck, and the pull and haul as the barkentine came about, and a voice called down the hold:

"Young Trelawney! We've sighted coastwise lights. The captain needs piloting in these waters, and 'tis time you prepared to pull ashore. Can wield an oar?"

"A brief farewell, my friends," he called softly, "until we meet in sight of the lights of home. Aye!" he answered the voice of Ranselaar. "I can pull an oar. You mean that they are sending me alone, trusting to my word?"

"Not alone, for I go with you. They trust me to fetch you back."

Then, as Basil's head emerged, an arm was slipped through his, and the surgeon's voice was lowered.

"And I warn you that I shall do all in my power to keep you safe ashore and leave those cannons where they now are. I helped save the little life left in you once. However, I'll take it without compunction if need be, to keep those guns from reaching Christophe. 'Tis only fair to warn you."

"Thanks," said Basil dryly, "I'll do as much for you, mayhap, some day. I'll at least warn you before I do worse."

CHAPTER V.

THE GUNS OF TRELAWNEY.

WHEN Basil Trelawney went down the Jacob's ladder into a lowered boat dancing in the uneasy sea beside the Diable Noir, he found Ranselaar sitting in the stern sheets wrapped to the ears in a greatcoat of dark fur, the collar of which was clasped by a jewel that shone richly in the flare of cressets on deck. The wind blew from the sea and the tide was flooding, two circumstances in their favor.

Basil took up the oars and pulled until it seemed as if his arms were loosened in their sockets, before Ranselaar broke silence between them.

"Another hundred feet, lad, and we hit the rock."

But Basil was familiar with that coast. Turning the skiff abruptly, he skirted the cliffs and headed into quieter waters of a cove which split the rock and rounded to a small quay on which lights wavered and shadowy bulks of merchandise waited handling in this lonely little port.

A horn-sided lantern bobbed up and down in the grasp of some one on the wharf, and a voice called across the dark water:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" answered Basil, his shout ringing clear as he pulled close and tossed the boat's painter to a hand which caught and made it fast. Then he leaped to the quay and bent to lend a hand to Ranselaar. The man with the lantern shone it on his face and stood with his jag sagging in vast surprise.

"Basil Trelawney! The squire's son! He will be glad to have ye back, boy. An' it's a sound hidin' he's promised ye. 'I'll dust his coat,' he swears, day in and day out."

"My mother, what of her?"

" She watched the sea for your return. But where is the Albatross, lad?"

" Off Biscay, Daffer. Sunk by a pirate."

" Zounds! Ye laugh at an ol' man."

" A wry guffaw, then. You'll hear the tale to-morrow, Daffer. Now I must hurry to see my father."

He caught Ranselaar's arm and hurried him along the familiar path, leaving the old man gaping after them. They did not speak until Basil turned in at the great gates of his home and trod a winding pathway through the park where night shadowed thickly among the tall trees and hedges.

Lights shone from mullioned windows of the house and spattered gold on evergreens brushing the eaves. Basil lifted the knocker and sent a rat-a-tat-tat sounding. The man who opened the door gasped, and then cried aloud:

" My lady, 'tis the young master hisself. 'Tis Basil!"

Basil pushed past him and ran to the living room, where a woman had risen from her chair, dropping the satin she was embroidering, and stood staring as he swept the hat from his head and sprang to take her in his arms.

" My boy! My boy!" she crooned, a cry of pain and delight that mingled with his own:

" Mother! Mother mine!"

Laughter and talk wakened the squire, who dozed before the fire. A silver-coated dog leaped to Basil's shoulders and twisted his powerful frame in joyous antics. But the squire seemed unable to believe his son had returned. He rubbed his eyes and cleared his throat raspingly, then whipped a silk kerchief from his pocket and loudly blew his nose.

" Jackanapes! Scapegrace! A fine laughing stock you've made of me. What excuse have you to offer for this disobedience?"

Yet he smiled and wrung Basil's hand and clapped him on the shoulder, then drew a chair toward the fire and filled a glass with toddy that steamed in a bowl on the table. Basil returned to the hall, where Ranselaar lingered and brought him into the room.

" I've brought a friendly enemy, sir, by name of Ranselaar. And between us, we've a tale to tell which cannot wait. But first, what of the guns ordered to France? Are they ready, sir?"

" Aye! Hungry already for more cannon, eh? They're on the quay this last week, as I said they would be."

" Good! Then hearken, sir. I've sold them for you; but not to France. Have you heard of the trouble in Santo Domingo?"

" A deal too much to credit. But what of the guns? What of the Albatross?"

" Just a moment, sir, until I tell you of what led up to the purchase of the guns on the quay."

Basil began his tale as he sat on the arm of his mother's chair, his fingers fondling her curls. She looked young enough to be the boy's sister.

The squire could not conceal the love shining in his eyes for those two, his wife and son, although he tried to bluster, tried to scowl, and ended by listening with gradually fading color to the tale Basil told, corroborated by nods of assent from Ranselaar.

" So, sir," he said when the tale was finished, " the men of the Albatross are out there on the pirate barkentine, and are prisoners. And I've given my word of honor that you will sell those guns on the quay to Henri Christophe, Emperor of Santo Domingo, for twelve hundred guineas."

The lady of Trelawney was white with fear as the tale ended. She caught her son's hand to her lips, holding it fast. She arose and stood gazing at him, her fingers lifting the skirts of a jacket of mulberry velvet worn in shiny spots and stained by sea rime and mustiness where wine had been spilled on it.

She loosened the soiled shirt of striped silk, and as her fingers touched the flesh of Basil's throat and she felt his warm skin she burst into tears and flung her arms around him.

" Such fiends, to treat you so, my son. Come and change these pirate rags for dress befitting your station. Then you shall eat. They'll have starved as well as abused you. And what is that mark which mars the ringlets I love?"

Her fingers on his scalp felt the crumpled edges of his wound, and her cry was shrill and sharp. She pulled the squire from the chair where he sat talking to Ranselaar and darkly brooding on his troubled thoughts, and made him hurry the meal.

Then she went with Basil to his room, where she took fine shirts from a chest and fetched brave garments from pegs in the great oak wardrobes. Below, at the bellowing of the squire's voice, servants scurried to spread a feast for the young master and his guest.

Squire Trelawney returned to hear from Ranselaar a tale which greatly puzzled his brain and wrung his heart. Ranselaar spared no intimate detail of that fight at sea in which the Albatross was sunk. The old man's eyes glistened, and he ripped out many an oath of admiration over the quality of Basil's share in the battle.

"I must leave the rest of the story until Basil is here to listen," ended Ranselaar. "For it is only fair to voice my complaints to his face."

Meanwhile his mother had fastened Basil's laces with her own hands and helped him buckle a sword belt about his waist, adding a dash of lavender essence, a touch of powder on his cheeks and hair, then stood admiring him, her hands clasped in adoration.

Then she ran down to see that food was plentiful and well served, and Basil turned to the bed where lay the garments from whose quantity of fine things he had chosen a suit of black velvet with a gray waistcoat embroidered in small pink roses.

The stoutest of the remaining garments he folded and packed in a portmanteau, and with them placed a brace of pistols. Snatching up the locked handbag, he opened the window and dropped it on the ground below.

He had small taste for pirate clothing, dirty, wine-stained, and ill-smelling as it always was. He went downstairs and found his parents and Ranselaar waiting for him and already seated at the table.

"I have no time to eat, nor the appetite, father," he said with a sad smile. "I must return at once and see that the guns are taken on board."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I cannot, forsooth, sell guns to a black usurper to slaughter white men and women with. Art mad, my son?"

"Sometimes it seems like a mist of madness," the boy replied. "But 'tis all quite true, as Ranselaar will tell you."

Then they heard from Ranselaar the same tale he had told Basil about the uprising of black men on Santo Domingo. But if he had tinted its horror for Basil, he now dyed it deep in grim color of blood and flame that had been the baptism of fire which seemed to shine in his eyes as he spoke.

Basil's mother gasped with fear and wept without restraint. Squire Trelawney fidgeted in his chair and looked from the guest to his son. His tense fingers broke the long stem of his church-warden pipe, and he kicked the pieces of clay toward the fire.

"Well, what am I to do?" he demanded at length. "Here are the men of the Albatross, men of my own town, who must die unless I commit this infamy of selling guns to a black emperor who slaughters whites. And my son telling me that he gave his word I should sell the guns. 'Sdeath! but it puts a man in sorry plight."

"You'll not let Basil go, Richard," called Dame Trelawney. "My dear lord, you'll not sell guns and shame our blood. Basil is a child; he is not yet of age. His word means nothing."

"Mother! The men of the Albatross must die, and I die with them, unless the guns are sold to Christophe's pirates. There is Trent and Fitzherbert; there's Evans and O'Loon, father of your own maid. Do you think I could bide safely here at home, knowing my cowardice had murdered them?

"And there is my given word—the word of a Trelawney. You'd not have me a liar as well as poltroon?"

She sobbed aloud in distress, and tears shone on Basil's lashes as he saw his mother bowed in her chair, her white hands held before her eyes, tears shining as they dropped on the soft red silk of her gown.

"And, if I let the guns go, you'll stay at home, Basil?" roared the squire.

Basil shook his head.

"They'll not pay the twelve hundred guineas until the guns are safely landed at Santo Domingo," he said. "I must go to fetch back the gold."

"A curse on gold! I'll give the guns to save the Albatross's men. I'll swear that the pirates thieved them, and man a ship to follow and catch them on their way south. I'll sink the buccaneer before she is out of sight of the Lizard's Head."

Again Basil shook his head.

"I cannot stay at home, father. For in Santo Domingo is a maid of Rouen—a girl that— And you've heard from Ranselaar what happens to white women in that far-away island."

"Damnation!" blustered the squire. "This whim of your mother, to send you to France, already reaps a harvest. This love—"

"No. It is not alone love for Violette which sends me, but love for all women, that is born in love for my mother. And 'tis not only a question of the guns concerns my going, for with or without those cannon I must return on board the pirate ship.

"Only, if I get them the guns, they will spare my life and I can devote it to finding Violette. Without them, I die. Mother, speak for me! Plead with my father to sell these guns!"

Ranselaar's face was grim. On Basil's cheek the red color played like flamelight darts and retreats on a blank wall.

"Sir, let my word, the word of a man ripe in years and heavy with bitterness, carry weight with you. Keep your son here at home," said Ranselaar. "He's far too reckless to wander free in these times. If fighting calls him, France offers a fine brawl for a boy, and under military discipline his ardor might prove useful."

Anger flamed in Basil's cheeks and sparkled in his eyes.

"What right have you to hamper me, Ranselaar?"

"I wish I need not remind you that my small skill kept life in your body, boy," said the Dutchman.

"I value that service very little if it was only to end in keeping me here. And we will discount the debt I owe if you have courage. It weighs too heavy on me."

He ran to the end of the room, where swords of fine Damascene steel hung crossed between heads of deer and trophies of old hunting lords of Trelawney, and, stepping on a chair, he snatched a brace, then, bowing politely, offered the hilt of one to Ranselaar.

His mother screamed and flung herself at his breast.

"My son! You'll break my heart. Almost I regret having so dear and brave a child. And our guest is right. You're far too reckless to leave home."

"Put by this buffoonery!" thundered the squire. "I hear the sound of wheels crunching the gravel. Methinks it will be Mistress Betty Roe and Sir Richard, her father, come to welcome you from your wild escapade, Basil."

As Basil looked at Ranselaar he saw nothing but misery in the sad gray eyes of the Dutchman. His own gaze fell before that look.

"I regret that I must refuse a brush with you, lad, for it would be rare sport. But it is not the first time I've played a coward's rôle to serve an end."

There was no chance for further speech, but a bustling at the door sent the squire forward to shake the hand of Sir Richard Roe and kiss the red cheeks of his daughter, godchild of Squire and Dame Trelawney.

Basil laid the swords on a chair near the window and went forward to meet Mistress Betty, who dropped a curtsy, her fingers lifting the voluminous blue satin skirts of her dress, her face framed in a flaring hood banded with chinchilla.

"A fine tale I hear, Trelawney. Old Daffer comes first with news that the runaway is home. Then I hear that your guns are being loaded from the quay on board a strange ship, and the men of the Albatross working under lash to hasten the loading."

"W-what?" roared the squire, and turned to his son. "Have you played a trick so scurvy on me, sirrah?"

Basil ran to the window, and, drawing back the velvet hangings, he flung open the sash. Wind cooled his cheek and cleared the confusion of his thoughts. He saw lights dancing in the direction of the quay and the leaping flames of smoldering tow in cressets on the pirate ship. Dark shapes obtruded between him and their glare as tackles swung the guns of Trelawney from their place on the quay.

" Ranselaar," he cried, aghast, " De Banana has sailed into the harbor and is indeed taking the guns."

His mother sat spellbound in her chair. Mistress Betty looked wide-eyed from one to another, her red lips trembling in sympathy.

" Sir," said Basil, turning to his father, " 'tis only forestalling the inevitable. You will know some day that it was the only way left me, when I come home again to relate what befalls. I cannot stay, in honor. I cannot break my word. I must disobey you.

" Sir Richard "—he turned to the tall gray man who looked from one to another in amazement—" Sir Richard, my father must explain for you these happenings. I have made trouble for him which only I can clear away."

He stepped beside Betty Roe and lifted her soft hand to his lips.

" 'Tis hail and farewell, sweet Betty. I wish I could tarry to dance a measure, and perhaps run a race with you on the moor, but a sterner mistress calls me."

Jeanne Trelawney sprang up, two spots of color burning on her cheeks. She stamped her small foot until the diamond buckle on her shoe flashed fire.

" Richard, my lord, forbid this wickedness. Lock the doors and call your men to keep this foolish child at home. How could one boy defy a pirate crew and sink a ship on which he sailed? Would he escape alive?

" And am I to break my heart because of this mad folly of a boy's whim? Richard, has my word lost weight with you, and must I scream and call to servants while my lord sits dumb and will not lift a finger to save his own son?"

She ran to the door before Basil could catch her hand, and called in a high voice: " John Derwent, call your men and lock all doors. Come at once and imprison the young master in his room."

" Aye! We'll have done with all this parley," growled the squire, and wheeled like a great bull, crashing over a chair as he reached for Basil's arm. But Basil turned and ran to the window, leaped to the sash of the one he had opened, and there paused a moment for one last lingering look at his mother.

" Au revoir, sweetest mother. You'd not have me break a Trelawney's word, nor leave a maid of France to perish. I'll bring her when I come to you again.

" And father, best stay close indoors tonight. We'll take the guns, but only you and I know that your consent is given. Folks will think the pirates stole them. And to-morrow will see the men of the Albatross safe ashore. Farewell, mother, mother mine."

He heard her despairing cry as he leaped to the ground.

He heard the deep barking of the dog ending in a mournful wail as a dog will howl at the approach of death. For a moment his courage was gone and his heart failed him.

Running to the deep shadow of the trees, he looked back and saw his mother at the window casement, light shining on her hair, her arms outflung as she called to him:

" Basil! Basil!"

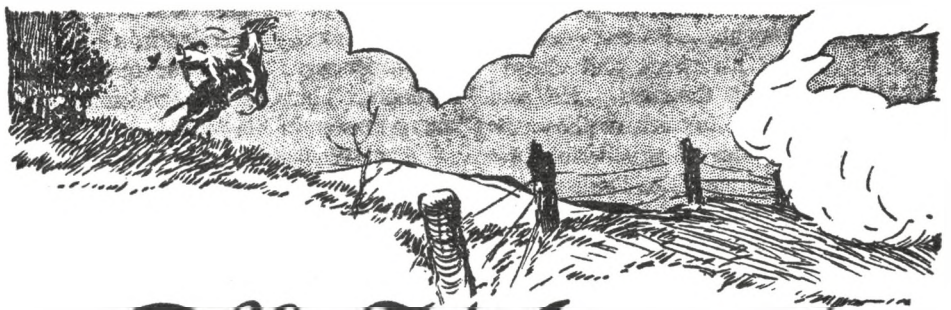
The wind, that night, also had a voice, and the sea called. He seemed to hear in the rustling of those few leaves left on overhead branches the voice of Violette, saying the words she had written in her last letter:

" A toi—to you."

He stood a moment gazing at his mother as if to take with him the last picture of her framed there in the window of his home.

" To you," he sighed softly, and resolutely turned his face away. Snatching up the portmanteau that he had dropped out his window, he ran swiftly down the path which led to the quay.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The War of Nesters' Draw

By ERIC HOWARD

Author of "Go Armed!" "For Fifty Thousand Dollars," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

JEFF PARSONS brought a huge fist down with a bang on the inoffensive top of his desk and glared at Harry Dawes, his foreman.

"We've got to!" he said decisively. "That's all there is to it!"

Dawes was a man of about forty, with a lean, humorless face, deep gray eyes and a thin-lipped mouth. He appeared to be emotionless; his employer's dramatic declaration won no response from him.

Standing up, he leaned against the desk and looked down at the larger man.

He saw that the rancher was angry, thoroughly angry, to a degree that only old Jeff could achieve. The heavy veins stood out on his full, muscular throat; his face was a dark red; his eyes were at once brooding and fiery.

Jeff pushed back the Stetson from his thick gray hair and looked up at his foreman.

"No, sir!" he declared. "I don't aim to be held up. And I don't aim to lose any more money—at this time. I've lost enough. Whatever possessed those fools in Washington— Hell! Washington's twenty-five hundred miles away, and yet some little, piffling under-assistant secretary back there, some dinky little misfit that never was out here and don't savvy conditions, some such fellow has authority to do a thing like this."

"Yeah," agreed Dawes, puffing at a slender cigarette.

"Yeah!" said Parsons. "That's government for you, all right! As if we hadn't suffered enough already! Four years' drouth, the worst the country ever saw, and then the drop in beef! Range all gone, water all gone, cattle dying everywhere! And then the war. And all of 'em begging us to save our cattle, produce more beef. And the price shoots up again. And we work ourselves sick, mortgaging every darn steer in the outfit, and then—then what happens?"

He paused for breath.

"I'll tell you," he went on as Dawes offered no comment, evidently understanding that his question was purely rhetorical. "I'll tell you. The price drops to nothing, and the market is shot to smithereens. And the range is as bad as it can be. We've got to save ourselves some way. So we ship our herds to Mexico, to get some good range. And what happens there?

"We lose everything but our undershirts. And the banks bust on us like a hurricane had hit 'em. And here we are, high and dry, broke and busted, and in debt besides, trying our damnedest to get going again. And able to do it, too, if they'd let us and our range alone. But do they? They do not!

"No, sir. Some little squirt back in Washington gets the grand and glorious patriotic idea that the thing to do is to open up all this range for homesteaders! Yeah! Land for the returned soldiers! Sure. Me, I'm all for the boys that fought over there. I'd give any one of 'em anything he asked for, and welcome. But why wish this range on 'em for farming purposes? Nobody knows. Only the fellows in Washington think it's their patriotic duty to provide land for the ex-soldiers.

"Well! And such land. What can you raise on it? Not a blamed thing but loco weed and cactus. What's it good for in the way of farming? Not a thing. It takes fifty acres of it, *with water*, to support a cow. And they give 'em homesteads of six hundred and forty acres, *without water*, and expect 'em to make a living.

"Did you notice very many ex-soldiers settling here? You did not. Those boys have got a little sense. They came, and saw, and beat it. But the range was still open to settlers. Well, who came? All the blamed riffraff of sixteen States! And settled. And fenced the land. And swore for each other that they'd put on the necessary improvements. And got title. And ruined the range! Hell!

"These damned nesters are just living on beans and salt pork, those that ain't starving to death, waiting for us cattlemen to buy 'em out. They've got us fenced off. We can't graze on their land, and not only that—our cattle have to go ten miles to water where, before, they only had to go two! That's what their fences have done.

"Waiting for us to buy 'em out! With what? What have we got? They call us cattle barons, and a lot worse'n that. They make out we've waxed fat and rich off this public domain. And they aim to hold us up. And we're all as broke as they are.

"What are we going to do? I'll tell you! We're going to get rid of 'em, the whole kit and caboodle of 'em, or—we're going to lose everything we own."

"Yeah," agreed Dawes, somewhat under the spell of his employer's unwonted eloquence.

It wasn't often that old Jeff Parsons used so many words or so much breath. But now his anger was thoroughly aroused; there was no immediate action he could take, and his emotion therefore sought expression in speech.

The situation that he complained of had reached a crisis. It was general throughout the cattle country of the Southwest. At the same time, one might have found a hundred other big ranchers raging and fuming in the same way.

All that Jeff Parsons said was perfectly true. The end of the cattle industry—which had been driven from range to range before the never-ceasing tide of hopeful settlers—seemed in sight. Now the settlers were even pouring into this remote part of western New Mexico, where the land would support only cattle and sheep, would produce no crops because of the short summer season and the almost total absence of water.

Jeff Parsons's own range—he owned the strategic water for miles around and his cattle grazed on the intervening land—was being invaded and fenced. Already so much land within his range had been fenced off that his herds could not travel the long distances to water.

It was true, too, that the settlers had nothing to gain. Without water, and plenty of it, their land was valueless.

Few of them made any pretense at farming. Those who did merely produced a little immature corn, some puny potatoes, or beans that were thoroughly dehydrated before they left the vines.

Fences were the cheapest form of improvement, and could be put up in less time and with less labor than anything else. Dig a few post holes, cut down a few cedar or piñon trees, stick them in the holes, stretch two or three strands of wire, and you have a fence.

Then get a couple of neighbors who have done the same thing to swear that you have improved your property, and you will "prove up" on it. The simplest of cabins will do for a house, and any stock that you may own can run wild or be quartered in a log corral.

Thus the settlers acquired title to their homesteads, and a benevolent government patted itself on its back in commendation.

Most of the settlers were, as Jeff Parsons said, riffraff. Helpless and hopeless, they had drifted out into this section, in the hope of acquiring homes. Desperate, and often almost penniless, they held on, keeping their fences in repair and hoping that the cattlemen would buy them out.

Few of them believed that the cattlemen were as poor as they claimed to be. Banks had failed everywhere throughout the West, and the great herds had been decimated; but the homesteaders insisted, with the stubbornness of the very poor, that the big ranchers were men of wealth. They looked enviously upon them.

"We've fooled around long enough with that old idiot in Nesters' Draw." Jeff Parsons banged his desk again. "We're going to cross his land whether he likes it or not. That's all there is to it."

"He'll be there, shootin'," observed Dawes mildly.

"We can shoot, too," snapped Jeff. "I'll be damned if I'm going to have cattle die of thirst because that old fool fenced off six hundred and forty acres of useless land. And if anybody sees him watering his mangy stock at our tank, shoot him!"

"He's a danged good shot hisself," said Dawes. "'Member how he got Dinky Parker in the forearm, after Dinky had the drop on him?"

"Yes, I remember," growled Jeff. "I remember how he took a shot at young Jeff, too. If he'd killed the boy, I'd have got him—if it took me the rest of my life!"

"Yeah. Only I kinda think, boss, young Jeff sorta rode over him, like. I think mebbe I could 'a' handled the old codger, if I'd talked to him 'stead of Jeff. Old Bailey ain't a bad hombre; jes' stubborn."

"He's in the way!" announced Jeff. "And we've got to get rid of him. If we could cross that land, and the next two places beyond, we'd have a short cut to water. We'd be able to save our steers. If we don't, I'm broke. And I'm not going to die broke and leave young Jeff and Sue with nothing!"

"I always sorta hoped that old Bailey would give up," said Dawes softly, "like

them other two did, up beyond. I was up there the other day. You'd never know anybody ever lived there. Them places are part of the range again, for fair. The other nesters have stole everything there was—building logs out of the houses, fence posts an' wire. There's nothin' left."

When abandoned the homesteads quickly reverted to their original state. Newcomers took whatever they needed from the deserted ranches, and in a short time there was no sign of cabins or fences.

"That's just it!" insisted Jeff. "Old Bailey's the only one that's stopping us. Get rid of him, and we've got water."

"Might be the best way would be to buy him off," suggested Dawes. "I'd hate to see the old fool hurt any."

"Buy him off—what with?" roared Jeff. "Good Lord, man, I've got two notes to meet on the first! I've got interest to pay! If I sell a single steer now, I'll lose money on it. I couldn't buy him off—even if I would."

"That's where he's stubborn," sighed the foreman. "He jes' can't believe that. He jes' grins an' nods his head an' says you'll pay him what he asks. Besides, he's sore at young Jeff. The boy riled him, and he don't feel friendly to any of us."

"Huh!" snorted Parsons. "Where's Jeff now?"

"He was out by the corral when I come in," said Dawes.

"Tell him I want him. And remember, Dawes, we're going to settle with Bailey! There's no other way!"

When his foreman had left the little room that he used as an office, from which he had once directed the flourishing business of the ranch, old Jeff scowled down at the papers on his desk. Most of them were evidences of his indebtedness.

One was a letter from a bank in which he had had a large deposit. It informed him that he would receive five cents on the dollar, after duly signing the inclosed receipt.

Jeff got up and paced the floor of the little room. The large frame of the man was that of a fighter. With head down, chin resting upon his breast, he looked defeated.

But as he stopped before the window and looked out toward the corral, his head came up and his jaw was thrust out. His fists clenched, and for a moment it looked as if he might have proved a very formidable antagonist.

Then he relaxed and smiled. He saw his son approaching the house. There was the light of pride in his eyes as he watched the boy. Presently young Jeff entered.

He was almost as tall as his father, but not as heavy. He appeared to be in his early twenties. There was a resemblance between the two men, a resemblance of features but not of expression.

Old Jeff, unworried by debt and trouble, was genial, cordial and expansive. In the old days his hospitality had been famous throughout the State.

About his son there was a kind of sullenness that bespoke an ungoverned temper. The fact that his father was a big man in the country had given the boy an air of superiority that did not become him.

Always able to get whatever he wanted from his father, young Jeff had become overbearing toward others. The punchers tolerated him for old Jeff's sake, but he had no real friends among them. He had fought with several.

Dawes, the foreman, had several times come near whipping him. He could have done so, easily enough, despite the young man's height and build. Dawes had something of a reputation as a fighter.

But whenever he thought that young Jeff needed a whipping, Dawes had walked away from temptation, thinking of old Jeff.

The rancher was blind to the traits in his son that annoyed nearly every one else. The boy was, indeed, the apple of his eye; he could do no wrong.

"What do you want?" asked young Jeff as he entered.

"Son, we're going to get rid old old Bailey. We're going to do what we used to do—we're going to drive him off!"

"Is that all? You should have done it long ago."

"I know it," nodded his father. "But I wanted to avoid trouble. I figured he'd give up and get out. I didn't want the old

fool hurt, even if he did wound Dinky Parker and took a shot at you. But we can't wait any longer. We've got to have water. So we're going to run him off. Only—I don't want you mixed up in this! That's why I asked you to come in here.

"Me and Dawes, and some of the men, will go over there and have a showdown with Bailey. We'll give him his marching orders. And if he don't take 'em, we'll start him on his way. But it seems like he's particularly sore at you, so you stay here!

"I don't want any trouble, and I don't want to hurt the old codger. I'll even pay him what his shack is worth, but I won't buy the land. I can't. And he's only trying a holdup on that anyway. We'll go over there this afternoon."

"If you'd let me," growled young Jeff, "I'd 'a' fixed him long ago. I could run him off alone. And I'd like to—I'd like to get back at him for that shot he took at me! The bullet went right through my hat."

"Son, you'll stay here, as I say. I'm doing this."

His father's words were final, and after a moment young Jeff nodded and walked out. The rancher watched him as he swung off down the lane.

Jeff Parsons was feudal minded; he had been a cattle baron, a man who controlled thousands of acres of range and thousands of cattle, who dominated his realm with a firm but kindly hand. Although he was now almost a bankrupt, his habits of mind persisted.

This was *his* range, because he was the best man to handle it. He meant to keep it; he meant to win back his kingdom; he was fighting to restore what he had lost. No foolish old nester, like Rufe Bailey, was going to stand in his way.

As he looked at his son he smiled again. Some day all this would be young Jeff's; the boy would step into his father's shoes and take his place. He was going to leave the property to him unencumbered, free of debt, a veritable kingdom. That was old Jeff's driving ambition.

And Sue, too. Jeff was his only child, but Sue was as dear to him as if she had been his daughter, instead of the child of his dearest friend, John Henshaw. He would see that Sue was always taken care of. And if, some time, Sue and young Jeff would marry, his dream would be complete.

He sighed. He doubted if they would marry. Sue and Jeff fought often, almost as if they were really brother and sister. But perhaps— Old Jeff sighed again, and then sat down to figure a way out of his tangled indebtedness.

II.

Old Rufe Bailey leaned across the bare table in his little, rough cabin and pointed an impressive index finger at his young visitor. Rufe was a sandy-haired, sunburned, scowling old rascal; now and then he burst into raucous laughter, thus punctuating his sharp, terse speech.

"Say, young feller, I'm offerin' you the chance of your lifetime!" he insisted, the index finger held like a weapon. "Buy me out, settle down, and make somethin' of yourself!"

Then came a sharp burst of laughter, in which his young companion pleasantly joined, and Rufe eyed him eagerly.

"Will you?" he demanded.

The other man looked out of the one window and studied the land that fell away from the shack and rolled up toward the foothills.

He was a pleasant-faced, keen-eyed, smiling chap. On the table lay his dusty Stetson; outside stood his horse, nibbling at a little hay.

"Right nice location," he drawled. "How many head o' cattle you got?"

"Not 'nough to make a herd, even," acknowledged Rufe. "Jes' ten steers, three cows an' their calves—if nothin' ain't happened to 'em. An' two horses. Course, I'd have to take one o' the broncs, to git out on. But six hundred and forty acres, mister! An' all that land up beyond, that ain't settled on, for pasture. An'—"

"Water?" asked the other, Jim Stanton.

"Sure! Plenty agua! Right up across the ridge place, the finest spring you ever did see." He chuckled heartily. "'Course, old Jeff Parsons, that owns the Circle J.

he claims that water. But can he git it? No. He can't cross this land, and there's no other way up there. You can see how the gulch comes down, can't you? Anybody gittin' to that spring, from this side, has got to cross this here land."

"Huh!" observed Jim Stanton thoughtfully. "I'd have plenty of run ins with the Circle J people, eh?"

"Oh, I guess not," Rufe assured him, his face bland and innocent. "Jeff ain't needin' the water right now, I guess, 'cause he ain't tried to git to it lately."

Another sudden burst of laughter, as Rufe recalled shooting at young Jeff and the latter's unceremonious and undignified departure.

"But I figger thisaway," he went on. "You could let him cross your land, to water, an' he'd let you use his water for your stock. Fair enough, huh?"

"I guess it would be," nodded Jim. "Would he do it?"

"Why, sure!" proclaimed Rufe. "Why wouldn't he? Old Jeff's a reasonable feller. An' besides, you kinda got the drop on him, ain't you? You can use the water whether he lets you or don't, but he can't git to it unless you say the word. Easy!"

"Well," drawled Jim lazily, "I ain't so eager to start ranchin' it."

"Listen! You can't lose. Lordy, it ain't as if I was askin' much. I ain't! I'm givin' it away! But I jes' got to git out. I got to git to a doctor, that's all, and git fixed up. I'll bet there's a chunk o' lead in my hip as big as your fist. I never did b'lieve they got it out.

"Lordy, I don't want to die out here. Buy me out, young feller, an' you'll never regret it. You'll be makin' a good deal for yourself, an' you'll be helpin' me besides. An' look-a-here—what you goin' to do with that money you won if you don't invest it?

"I know!" Rufe nodded sagely. "You're goin' to squander it on riotous livin', that's what! Sure you will! Why not invest it, like everybody advises a young feller to do, an' make somethin' of yourself?"

He paused and eyed Jim hypnotically.

"Besides, you'd be helpin' me to git proper 'tention, an' mebbe save my life. I ain't askin' for sech help, mind you, if I wasn't offerin' you the best investment you ever saw."

Rufe's argument was a clever admixture of appeal and reason. Jim Stanton, with an easily won roll of bills in his pocket, was impressed.

He never did retain money long, he acknowledged to himself, and maybe the old boy was right. Why not invest it?

It might be fun, for a change, to settle down on a little place of your own, like this. And what if he didn't make anything out of it? He didn't stand a chance of making anything any other way.

Besides, the old-timer looked kind of sick. It would be a good thing to give him a boost, help him out of the country, to a doctor's care. And the price he asked seemed reasonable enough.

"All right," Jim nodded, looking out over the rolling land with some pride of ownership, "I'll take it."

Old Rufe pumped his hand up and down in hearty gratitude. Inwardly, he was chuckling.

He had known, almost as soon as this strange young cowpuncher drifted across the horizon, that here was his chance of getting out at a profit. Rufe realized that he couldn't fight old Jeff, once the rancher got started.

He was waiting for just such an opportunity as this. It came so easily, and he had managed it so well that he was very well pleased with himself.

Jim Stanton, new to this particular stretch of country, but a thoroughly experienced cowman in other parts, was like most other youngsters of his profession. Money meant little to him, except that he liked to spend it; and he was given to quick, perhaps unreasonable. decisions.

In this case he was purchasing old Rufe's place more because he wanted to help the old-timer than because he wanted the place.

It was like Jim to decide any important matter by a toss of a coin or a turn of a card. And he might as well spend his money in one way as another.

With a good half of Jim's roll secreted

in his shirt, old Rufe saddled up one of his horses, thrust a few belongings into his saddlebags, and departed from Nesters' Draw. He chuckled halfway to the railroad, thirty miles distant. There he sold his horse and departed for a small city.

Part of his story, at least, had been true. There was a chunk of lead in his hip, and it required medical attention.

After he had gone, Jim Stanton surveyed his new possession.

Accustomed to working on large ranches, where ten thousand acres was merely another pasture, Jim wasn't impressed by the extent of his domain. Still, it had its points.

The land lay not far from the mouth of a cañon. The two abandoned homesteads were between his property and the water that Jeff Parsons claimed.

Jim saw that he might have trouble with Parsons, but he was not unused to trouble. He understood very well what a big cattleman thought of nesters, and to a great extent he shared that opinion. However, he wasn't exactly a nester.

He was a cowpuncher, temporarily settled down. Any settling down would be temporary with Jim.

He rode out and found his stock. The tiny herd wasn't a bad start, and he could build it up a little. He stood to make some money, certainly more than he would make working as a hand on one of the ranches. Also, he would be his own boss.

Jim nodded thoughtfully to himself. He congratulated himself on having made a very good deal. He had bought the place for little more than the cattle were worth; with any luck at all, having water and plenty of range on the abandoned homesteads—he would lease that land from the absentee owners if possible — he would make some money for himself.

"The old-timer was right," he said. "Settle down an' make somethin' of yourself! Boy, this is where you begin!"

He rode back to the cabin, unsaddled his horse, and turned him loose in the corral. The horse, which he called Bozo, was a very friendly and reliable animal. Jim had owned him for a year, and had put him through all kinds of paces.

Bozo was the best cow pony he had ever owned, with more speed than most, and he also had a remarkable endurance. He seemed never tired, and on one or two occasions Jim had been compelled to ride him at top speed for hours at a time.

"Bozo, this is home!" Jim grinned as the horse nosed his shoulder. "You ain't never had a home before, an' neither have I. Ain't it grand? All fenced and a mile square, jest a nice little playground for you. How about some oats, huh?"

Jim devoted himself, a little later, to cleaning up the cabin. Old Rufe hadn't been a very neat housekeeper.

Jim proceeded to sweep and scrub until he had the single room spick and span. He wasn't a stickler for cleanliness, but when a place got too dirty he either cleaned it or moved.

It was while he was putting the finishing touches to the cabin, whistling as he worked, that he saw a horse coming up the lane. He paused and leaned on the worn-out broom.

As the horse came nearer, he saw that its rider was a girl. And as it came still closer, he saw that she was the prettiest girl, to his view, he had ever seen.

She had the bluest of blue eyes, like the sky, he told himself. As she stopped, she smiled, and then laughed.

He didn't know it then, but she laughed because his face seemed to have taken on most of the dirt of the cabin.

"Where's Rufe Bailey?" she asked.

"I don't know," grinned Jim. "I guess he's on the way to Agua Fria. That's where he started for."

"Oh! When's he coming back?"

"I guess he won't be comin' back," smiled Jim. "Y' see, I bought him out, lock, stock and barrel. I been sorta cleanin' up. Bailey wasn't exactly finicky about his house. Did you want to see him, miss? Did he owe you money or somethin'?"

"You bought this place?" she asked, her eyes widening. "Whatever for?"

"Why not?" he countered. "It's kinda purty, an' Bailey had some stock. Like he said, I thought I'd settle down an' make somethin' of myself. There's nothin' in punchin' somebody else's cows."

"Do you think there's anything in homesteading—here?" she inquired, still smiling.

"I reckon so," nodded Jim.

Then he observed that she wasn't smiling, that there was a frown between her clear blue eyes, and that she was studying him with a new interest, even suspicion.

"My name's Jim Stanton, miss," he said easily. "I've been over in the Guadalupe country, mostly. Are you a neighbor?"

"I'm Sue Henshaw," replied the girl. "From the Circle J. Jeff Parsons—I call him Uncle Jeff—was my father's best friend. I live there. I—I came over to tell Rufe Bailey to get out."

"To get out? How come?"

"Uncle Jeff's fooled with him long enough. He won't stand for a holdup. And he's got to have that water up there," she pointed up the cañon. "There's only one way of getting it — through Bailey's land. Your land, you say."

"Yes, ma'am, my land it is," Jim nodded. He smiled again and looked up into her serious face. "Your Uncle Jeff jest orders a feller off when he wants to, eh? Or does he send you to do the orderin'?"

"Oh!" the girl's cheeks flamed. "He didn't know I was coming. I—I didn't want to see old Rufe Bailey hurt. That's all."

"And you'd advise me to move on, too?" asked Jim.

"Yes! The sooner you do the better. We need this land. It's no good to you without water. What are you here for? Just to hold up Uncle Jeff?"

"I haven't met him yet," answered Jim. "I'm here to raise some cattle. I reckon I can do it."

"Without water? With only this land for range?"

"Oh, I can git enough water up there—for my little herd," Jim said easily. "And I guess I can use these three sections for grazin'."

"You cannot!" protested the girl, her eyes flashing. "That's Uncle Jeff's water!"

"Which he can't get to!" amended Jim.

"He'll get to it, all right!" she snapped. "And if you dare to water your stock there, look out! I don't know why you're here, or what you intend to do. But if you're trying to hold up Uncle Jeff—if you're like all these other nesters—I advise you to move on—*now*."

"Well, I reckon I'll stay awhile," said Jim.

"Oh, I hate you—all of you! Stubborn, unscrupulous! Wait till Uncle Jeff comes!"

"Sure, I'll wait right here, ma'am. You can tell him I'll be waitin' for him."

The girl whirled her pony and rode off.

"Gosh," muttered Jim, "she sure looked mad enough. An' at first I thought she looked right pleasant. You never can tell. Huh! Looks like they aim to run me off."

He scratched his head and thought deeply.

"I wouldn't wonder that was why that old cuss wanted to get away! No, sir, I wouldn't wonder. This old cowman, Jeff Parsons, now, he may be a real dangerous hombre. Yes, sir. Jim, I reckon you're goin' to get into more trouble. It sure seems like there ain't no peace an' quiet any place no more!

"Oh, well," he sighed. "If they's trouble, why, there'll be trouble. Usually where there's trouble, there's some considerable fun, likewise. But gosh! I reckon old Jeff Parsons ain't plumb unreasonable! I reckon we can get together, all right."

III.

It was quite late that same afternoon when old Jeff Parsons, Dawes and two of the punchers of the Circle J rode over to the Bailey homestead. They had been away from the Parsons ranch house all day.

Sue Henshaw had returned home, her cheeks flaming in bitterness toward the newcomer, to report to her Uncle Jeff. But she had not found him. Nor was young Jeff about.

Sue deeply resented Jim Stanton's presence. She could understand the attitude of Rufe Bailey. He was an old man, trying to hang on to what little he had acquired, hoping that sooner or later Jeff would compromise with him to avoid trouble and he would make a little money.

Although Bailey hated young Jeff, he

had always been cordial and friendly to Sue. It was because she felt a responding friendliness that she had gone to warn him.

In that there was no disloyalty to her Uncle Jeff. She would always be loyal to him. But she did want to see trouble averted. And now, she assured herself, there would be more trouble.

She didn't believe that Jim Stanton had bought the Bailey ranch. Why should he buy it? He was obviously a cow-puncher, familiar with conditions of the range; he could readily see that the Bailey place wasn't worth owning.

The simple explanation of the matter did not occur to Sue. She didn't know that Jim was just the sort of careless young cow-puncher who would spend his money for anything if he were properly urged. She didn't know the sort of appeal Rufe had made to him.

So she leaped to another conclusion. She decided that he had not bought the place, that he was simply a wandering, trouble-seeking gunman. That was it!

Old Rufe, himself afraid of further trouble, had called him in to fight for him. Doubtless old Rufe had assured him that if he offered a little resistance they could succeed in holding up Jeff Parsons. Doubtless, too, he had offered the wandering adventurer half the spoils.

That would be like Rufe Bailey, and it would be like this man she had met. She knew the type. He was the sort of cow-puncher who would work only a short time, then depart and spend his money wildly, afterward seeking some desperate way to get more.

There had been men like him on the Circle J—soft-spoken, easy-going, smiling. But she had seen them grow suddenly, coldly angry. She had seen their eyes blaze and their guns leap to their hands.

She decided that Jim Stanton was that sort of man; he had bold, trouble-seeking eyes. There was something about him, despite his drawl and his smile, that suggested he loved to fight.

Well, wait till Uncle Jeff met him!

"I'll be waitin', ma'am, right here," she heard his words. "Yes, ma'am, you can tell him I'll be here."

Sue rode on, to inform her Uncle Jeff of what had happened. But she discovered that she had missed him, that he was already on the way to the Bailey homestead.

As he had promised, Jim was waiting for Jeff Parsons. He didn't know that the rancher was on his way to visit him, but he was considering his newly acquired property and the trouble that he had bought with it from all angles.

He was reasonably sure that he could come to a compromise with Parsons. Still, he didn't know the rancher, and he might prove unreasonable. In which case, Jim meant to be equally unreasonable.

"Bozo, old horse," he said aloud, leaning over the rails of the corral, "we're going to stay right here, unless we get good an' proper inducements to leave. Yeah! This is our home an' we're goin' to keep it. If this feller Parsons comes along, fair-spoken, and fair-minded, we'll talk business with him. But if, as that there Sue gal seemed to figger, he aims to give us the bum's rush, he's got another think comin'. We ain't goin' to sell this little rancho unless we make a profit. We're sorta in the real estate business now. Yeah!

"An' if we stay here for six months or so, we'll stand to make a little cow-money. Besides which, we won't have to work very hard an' that's an inducement. Likewise, it's right pleasant here, now that the shack's cleaned up. Uh-huh, we stay.

"Now mebbe Mr. Parsons, Esq., is one o' these high an' mighty cowmen that thinks he owns the world. In which case, we gotta show him diff-rent. Mebbe he's got some regular he-fighters on that ranch of his. Bozo, ain't you scared? You ain't? Well, so am I!"

Jim laughed to himself, and then, imitating a Fourth of July orator, he went on:

"Yeah! We stand on the constitutional right of a—a free-born American citizen! Every Englishman's house is his castle! We got guns for defense, but nobody can make us migrate."

Bozo gazed at him wonderingly, out of large, limpid eyes.

"Old horse, I ain't drunk!" Jim assured him. "Golly, I'd like to talk horse language, sometimes. I sure got a lot to tell

you. Say, did you get a good look at that gal? If she hadn't been so fightin' mad, she'd 'a' looked beautiful! An' at that I kinda liked her spunk! Yeah!"

He turned suddenly at a sound behind him and leaned against the corral. Four men were riding up to the cabin.

"Hm!" said Jim. "Mebbe these fellers are the ambassadors from the Circle J."

They were. Jeff Parsons rode ahead, with Dawes beside him. The two punchers followed. The men were armed.

"Howdy!" said Jim, as they drew near.

To himself he said: "That 'll be Jeff Parsons, the big feller in front. The old-timer ridin' next is likely his foreman; I'll bet he can sling a gun some. An' the other two likewise don't look crippled up with rheumatism. An' none of 'em look like they was feelin' funny. Jim, you're sorta outnumbered, looks like."

"Where's Bailey?" demanded Parsons, without any other greeting.

Jim explained that he had bought the place and that Bailey had departed. He saw Jeff's eyes narrow, glowing with suspicion.

Jeff, sizing up the man before him, was leaping to the same conclusion that Sue had reached. He didn't hesitate.

He leaped from his horse and walked directly up to Jim. They eyed each other.

"I'm giving you two days to get out!" declared Jeff. "I've fooled around with Bailey long enough. The day after to-morrow I cut these fences and we drive our stock up the cañon. You get!"

"Yeah?" asked Jim mildly.

"Yeah! I was going to give Bailey something for his cabin. The land ain't worth a dime to anybody but me. But now I won't pay for the cabin. What'd he tell you? Tell you you could hold me up? The two of you figgered to split what I'd pay, eh? Well, you get nothing."

"You sure make it hard on a man," observed Jim slowly. "Sorta short notice you're givin' me. Here I am, all cozy an' comfortable, with a home of my own an' a little herd of my own an' you come along an' tell me to move on. Couldn't you give me a little more time, mister? Couldn't you make it two years instead of two days? That'd give me a chance to—"

Irate, Jeff knew that the solemn-faced man before him was mocking him. His hand edged toward his gun, and then he withdrew it.

"Two days!" he repeated. "The day after to-morrow we cut your fences! You get out!"

"Seems sorta cruel an' illegal," observed Jim. "Course, I reckon you're an awful big man around here; mebbe the sheriff takes his orders from you. But I guess I can't oblige you, mister. I reckon two days ain't enough time. Two years now—"

"Listen to me!" roared Jeff Parsons. "I've got to have that water—*now*. I'm going to have it. No damned nester is going to stop me. No half-baked gun-slinger hired by a nester is going to stop me. You've got no water here. If you use my spring I'll shoot you. If you don't use it, you can't stay. You better go now."

"Well, you sure make it plain, all right," admitted Jim. "You sure declare yourself outspoken enough. An' I reckon you'd shoot a man, too, that was drinkin' your water. I reckon you would. But now, if you'll listen to me, same as I have to you, why, I'll try to be just as plain.

"Mister, I own this land all right an' proper. What I own I keep, if I want it bad enough. It's sure tough on you that I own it. It's tough on me that Henry Ford owns his automobile fact'ry. If he didn't, see, I might. That's the way it goes.

"Now, if you got any kick comin', you better take it up with the proper authorities, 'cause this ain't the complaint department. An' I'm tellin' you this: anybody seen cuttin' my fences will be shot. As for your water, why, I can git to it an' you can't. So the agua seems to be all mine. An' there we are—I'm goin' to get shot if I use your water, an' you're goin' to get shot if you cut my fence! You might call this here skirmish the war of Nesters' Draw."

Jim's half-humorous counter-threat was not received by Jeff Parsons as he had hoped it would be. It was Jim's intention to present the matter in such a way that Jeff would suggest a compromise.

Jim had a stubborn pride of his own; he would go so far and no farther. He would give Jeff a chance to be reasonable, but he wouldn't argue with him. There was only one way in which he could meet a threat; that was with another.

Jeff had gone far past any thought of compromise with a nester. Jim was just another one, trying to hold him up. He wouldn't stand for it.

Only Dawes was able to see a little of both sides. He had sized Jim up accurately enough; had Dawes been in Jim's shoes, he would have acted in the same way.

"Now look-a-here," said Dawes, for the first time taking a part in the conversation. "Look-a-here now! Can't we figger out some way—"

But Jeff was already on his horse.

"The day after to-morrow!" he said. "If you're not gone by then, I'll see that you do go."

"I'll be here, mister," Jim promised.

Dawes gave it up. He didn't like to talk, anyway, and the rôle of peacemaker is usually a vocal one. Relapsing into his usual silence, he rode away at Jeff's side.

Jim looked after them until they were lost behind the first hills. Then he turned again to Bozo.

"Oh, the bad men!" he chuckled. "Hear what they said, horse? They're goin' to make us move! Oh! Oh! What shall I do?"

Still laughing, he walked over to the cabin and began going through the provisions for some delicacy that would tickle his palate.

"Don't want to leave all the good things behind," he said, "when they have us on the run. No, sir. Eat hearty, Jim, you got only two days left."

Before he ate, however, he examined the rifle that stood against the wall near the door. And he also patted his holster affectionately.

IV.

YOUNG JEFF PARSONS was not in the habit of disobeying his father, but his obedience was of the letter, not the spirit. When his father told him that he was not to be one of the party to call on Bailey, he resented it.

He had his own quarrel with the homesteader. Bailey had shot at him, and it wasn't his fault that his aim had been a trifle high.

Young Jeff considered the matter sullenly all day. Late in the afternoon, he decided to ride over that way, just in case trouble started. If there was gun-play, he would be there to join in.

He cut through Jim's place at a point to the south, where the property line followed the cañon, and then rode on up through the abandoned homesteads above. He made his way to the spring, where he found Jim's cattle.

He was there, in fact, while his father was threatening Jim. At sight of the little herd consuming the water that was needed by the Circle J, Jeff's anger rose.

He drew his gun and fired. He killed two calves before the others stampeded and fled out of range. He would have killed them all, but he decided, instead, to go down and see Bailey.

Whatever his father had said didn't hold now. Bailey had been warned often enough. It was time for action.

Old Jeff and his men had been gone half an hour when the boy rode down the trail and approached the corral. The sun was low on the horizon line and the house and corral stood in the shadow.

Looking down from a hillside, young Jeff saw Bozo in the corral. At the distance and in that light, he thought it was Bailey's old saddle horse. Bozo nickered.

Riding down, shouting, a mad impulse swept over Jeff. Bailey needed a good scare.

He let out a Comanche whoop and started firing his revolver. At first he aimed in the air, thinking only to frighten the old homesteader. But when Bozo leaped, Jeff swung around and fired at the horse.

From the horse came a cry of fear and pain, almost human in its intensity. Then Bozo quivered and fell to the ground.

At the sound Jim leaped from his chair and seized his rifle. Heedless of danger, he dashed out and saw that his horse was dead. He saw, too, the horseman coming down the hill.

He raised his rifle and fired. Young Jeff,

his yells suddenly stopped in his throat, fell from his plunging horse. He lay still where he had fallen.

Jim looked round for others of the attacking party. He saw nobody. A little puzzled, he walked into the corral and looked down at Bozo.

His eyes smarted as he knelt beside the horse that had been his companion on many journeys.

"Bozo, I got him," he murmured. "I got him, old horse."

Then, walking slowly, glancing from right to left, he went on up the hill to where Jeff lay. The latter's horse had run away.

Jim looked down into the face of young Parsons. Then he kicked him in the ribs, and Jeff groaned.

"Oh, you ain't dead yet?" said Jim. "Who the hell are you?"

The attack had been unexpected. At first Jim could not believe that the man before him was from the Circle J.

Old Parsons had given him two days' grace; even in the heat of anger, Jim didn't think that he would attack before that time had passed.

Bending over the wounded man, Jim discovered that his aim had been a little too high. The bullet was lodged in Jeff's left shoulder, a few inches above his heart. He heartily wished that he had killed the man.

Only Jeff's serious wound prevented a continuation of the fight. Jim would willingly have exterminated the killer of his horse.

"Who are you?" he asked again.

"J-Jeff—Parsons," moaned the youth.

Looking down, Jim saw a resemblance. Old Jeff's son, of course. He seized his arm.

"Did your old man—send you shootin'?" he demanded.

"No," answered the other, feebly. "Pa didn't know. I just came to settle Bailey." He pulled himself upright. "Who're you?"

Then he fell back again. Jim saw that his heavy shirt was dark with blood. He was bleeding badly. He seemed to be drifting off, losing consciousness.

Jim's anger melted away before these signs of weakness. Laying his rifle down, he slipped his arms under the other man's body and, rising, he carried him gently down to the cabin.

There he laid him on his own bunk and tore away the shirt from his wounded shoulder.

Quickly he bathed and dressed the wound. Young Jeff did not recover consciousness, but remained in a coma.

Jim walked out again, picked up his rifle, and paused beside his dead horse. He regarded young Jeff's deed as little short of murder; he wished that he had been truer of aim. But, since the man still lived and needed care, he would treat him decently.

Afterward, when Jeff recovered, he could settle his score with him.

Jim took out his wrath in violent, unexpurgated cursing.

"If any —— —— —— —— thinks he can shoot my horse and get away with it—a horse like little Bozo, he's mistaken!" he growled. "The war's on, all right, an' they got me outnumbered. But they ain't got me licked. I'll be —— —— —— if I'll take orders from any —— —— range hog! The next Circle J critter that comes through my gate gets filled with lead!"

V.

But he didn't shoot the next representative from the Circle J. It happened to be Sue Henshaw, and she came riding up the lane while he was cursing.

Sue suspected that young Jeff's absence from the ranch meant trouble. She knew the boy much better than his father did. She knew the grudge he bore toward old Rufe Bailey, and she knew what his attitude would be toward the new owner of the Bailey place.

She had tried to find him on the ranch. When she failed, and was reasonably sure that he had not gone to town, for he was on horseback, she concluded that he was going to take a hand in the Bailey business.

Bailey had told her the truth about their earlier encounter, and she believed him. Young Jeff had been shooting at Bailey's cattle when the old man had sent a bullet through his hat. Then the boy had fled;

later, he told his father that Bailey's attack was unprovoked.

It was lies of that sort that caused Sue to regard her suitor with unfavorable eyes. Every now and then, in a casual fashion, he asked her to marry him. She refused. Behind his glances there was always an intimation that, if she did not marry him, she would be penniless after his father's death.

It was almost as if he said: "Don't expect anything from me after the old man dies, unless you marry me."

Still looking for young Jeff, hoping to interfere with any violent attack he might have planned, Sue rode to the borders of the Circle J. There she met old Jeff and his men.

The rancher told her, in a few bitter words, of his run-in with the fellow who claimed to have bought out Bailey. When he reported Jim's stubborn refusal to move on, something of admiration for the nester came to the girl.

"It means a fight," old Jeff said. "This feller's no Bailey. He's most likely a gunman. I reckon we'll have to kill him 'fore it's over."

"Or get killed tryin'," observed Dawes, solemnly. "The way I see it, boss, that feller's young an' foolish. Like as not he craves to fight. Might be better to let him water his stock for the privilege of crossin' his land."

"Hell!" snapped old Jeff. "Make terms with a nester? Not me. That 'd only cause more trouble. Funny for you to say a thing like that, Dawes—a fightin' man like you."

Dawes had a reputation as a fighter, but as is so often the case with men who are proficient with their fists or their weapons, he never got into a fight if there was any way of avoiding it. Mild and meek looking, slow to wrath, you would never have suspected his skill with a six-gun or his extraordinary swiftness with his fists. Now he relapsed into silence.

"Where you goin', Sue?" asked old Jeff.

"I—I was lookin for Jeff," she answered. "I think he went up to the north pasture. I'll ride on a way, and if I meet him we'll come back together."

"All right," nodded old Jeff, very well pleased.

Perhaps, after all, Sue liked his son; perhaps their quarrels were just the regular lovers' quarrels. He had set his heart on their marriage, although he would never urge Sue to accept Jeff unless she did so of her own choice.

And whether she did or not, she would inherit just as much of his estate. He had always planned to provide for her.

Sue rode on, positive now that young Jeff meant to cause trouble at the Bailey place. It would be like him to go there against his father's wishes, without his father's knowledge, and to undo what his father had done.

It was like Uncle Jeff to give the new owner two days in which to move. If young Jeff showed up there, he would start shooting at once.

The girl realized the state of her guardian's finances, and also understood his worries. Thoroughly loyal to him, as his son was not, she felt some responsibility for young Jeff's actions.

If she could keep him from doing anything wild and rash, she would to that extent be shielding his father.

She thought little of Jim Stanton, but when she did think of him her blood tingled. She was angry at herself as much as at him.

She was angry at the effect he had upon her. She thought she had judged his character fairly, and she told herself that she despised him. But, in spite of everything, there was something compelling about the man that she liked.

She recognized in him, even when she refused to acknowledge it, the same thing that Dawes had seen. It bothered her.

She rode on until she came to the Bailey homestead. From the corral she heard shocking, unprintable words, uttered by a man whose anger was fiendish. Other than that, there was no sound.

"Oh!" she cried, suddenly a little afraid of being alone with this man.

Jim turned swiftly, dropping his rifle, and his revolver snapped into his hand.

"Oh," he said in turn, evidently a little abashed, "it's you. I thought—"

He holstered his gun and took off his hat.

"I—" He blushed and stammered a little. "I—I hope, miss, you didn't hear what I was sayin'. If you did, I'm sure sorry. I was—plumb angry. Some—" He seemed again about to burst into ungoverned profanity, but he checked himself and went on: "Some—man—if you can call him that—up and shot my horse, my Bozo. Killed him. For no reason that I know of. Just up an' shot poor Bozo where he stood. I—It's sure enough to make a man swear!" he defended himself. "Only I didn't know you was within hearin'."

"Who did it?" cried Sue.

But she already knew who did it. It was young Jeff Parsons, of course; young Jeff had killed the horse. The deed was like him. She realized that she had come too late.

"Well—" Jim hesitated. He wanted to spare the girl if possible; he had no desire to hurt her by telling her Jeff's name. "Well, I shot him, too," he laughed bitterly. "So we're sorta even. Only I didn't kill him—quite."

"Where is he?"

Jim glanced toward the cabin and, without waiting for him to answer, Sue slipped from her saddle and ran to the door.

She saw young Jeff lying in the bunk, still unconscious. She ran to his side and knelt down.

"Oh, Jeff, why—"

Jim followed her inside.

"Know him?" he asked.

She nodded. "He's Jeff—young Jeff—Parsons. I thought he'd make trouble. I came—hoping to stop him. Uncle Jeff told him not to come here again."

"He won't—again," said Jim, dryly. "I'm glad to hear your uncle didn't send him out—horse shootin'. A horse killer, the way I see it, is worse'n a horse thief. I tell you, miss, I sure wished I'd killed him. That Bozo horse o' mine was like a friend. You'd oughta see him—how he used to greet me if I'd been away for a few days. Gosh! A man't got a right to fight 'bout most anything, if he feels like it, but he should do it man-to-man. Why didn't he try shootin' me, 'stead of Bozo? Bozo wasn't even armed!"

His scorn, and the sincerity that lay beneath it, rendered Sue defenseless. She suddenly had a new conception of the man before her.

He wasn't what she had thought him. She did not for an instant doubt his words, knowing Jeff as she did. And she could understand the anger that had followed his discovery of the dead horse.

It was enough to make him hate everybody on the Circle J, enough even to justify that terrible cursing.

"I'm—sorry," she found herself saying in spite of her loyalty to old Jeff. "But uncle didn't know."

"I figgered he was a square sort of fighter," Jim nodded. "Not like his son. Well, you can tell him this feller's here. He ain't in danger, I guess. Lost a little blood, but he won't die. I fixed him up so I can kill him when he's well.

"Your uncle can come an' get him, or send for him. An' after they've taken him away, you can tell 'em not to come back. When I come here I didn't figger on gettin' mixed up in a war. I didn't reckon I'd have to fight horse killers. A man that 'd shoot a horse the way he did would step on a baby kitten jest to see it die.

"When I come here, I didn't aim to fight anybody. But you can tell 'em over to the Circle J that now that they've declared war I ain't no neutral. I'll be waitin' for 'em to cut my fence, an' the next time my aim won't be off."

Before his cold scorn the girl shrank back. He looked now as she had seen Dawes look, once or twice. He was a man who would fight to the last ditch against any odds.

It would mean bloodshed, death and disaster. They couldn't conquer him, not without a long struggle. And in that struggle some one would be killed—perhaps old Jeff, perhaps the boy on the bunk, perhaps Dawes, or one of her uncle's men.

She shuddered as her imagination pictured what would inevitably follow such a range war.

This man before her was alone, but he was a fighter. Lesser men alone had terrorized communities.

Perhaps other nesters would join him.

The feud would grow and spread. Cattle and men would be killed.

Jeff Parsons would never give up, nor would Jim Stanton. Each had his grievance, each his pride. Sue shuddered again.

She was afraid. She looked up into the quizzical eyes of the man before her. He was smiling now, and his fury seemed to have passed.

"Lordy, miss, I didn't aim to talk so to *you*," he apologized. "The Parsons ain't really your kin, an' you ain't in this fight. You just tell your uncle to come an' get this feller an' take him home. Old Jeff an' I can cuss each other plenty, without draggin' you in. But mebbe you know how a feller feels—when somebody up an' kills his pet horse thataway."

"I know how I'd feel," Sue murmured.

Then, with another glance at the man on the bunk, she went to the door, walked out, mounted, and rode away.

VI.

As soon as Sue reached the Circle J, she reported to her uncle what had happened at Bailey's. Old Jeff burst out into violent rage.

He refused to believe that his son had killed Jim's horse as Jim said. It was simply, he insisted, an unprovoked attack on the part of the nester.

"I'll get him for this!" he cried.

Then, realizing his son's danger, he seized the telephone and called the nearest doctor, in a town many miles distant.

"Doc, this is Jeff Parsons," he shouted. "Come right out here. My boy's been shot. Hurry!" Then, leaping to his feet, Jeff snatched his hat and stormed out of the house.

"Dawes!" he called.

The taciturn foreman walked up from the corral.

"Dawes, that damned nester shot Jeff! We're goin' right over. You an' me. I've called Doc Sparr. When he gets here, have one of the boys hop in his machine and come over with him. If we can move Jeff, we'll bring him home. Get the car out!"

"How come he shot him?" asked Dawes.

"Says Jeff killed his horse first. Lying, of course. Unprovoked attack. A dirty nester trick."

Dawes made no comment. Instead, he walked over to the shed, under which rested a high-powered touring car. Sue joined her uncle.

"The horse was dead," she said. "And certainly Stanton didn't kill his own horse. Jeff must have shot it."

"Maybe he did. But not the way that nester says. Jeff ain't going to ride up and kill a horse, just for fun!"

"But—" began Sue.

The car rolled out of the shed, and old Jeff hurried to join Dawes. Both men wore holsters and guns. Sue hurried after him, and, acting on impulse, jumped into the car.

"You're not going, Sue!"

"Yes, I am!" she said calmly. "The doctor may need me."

"Then come with him—after we've settled that nester."

"Don't waste time! I'm going now!"

Dawes had already started the motor. Now, in second gear, the car leaped forward, with old Jeff still protesting against Sue's presence.

"I know a little about first aid," she insisted. "Stanton bandaged the wound, but Jeff may need me."

Dawes piloted the car with a recklessness born of familiarity with the rough road, making excellent time. Old Jeff turned round and ignored Sue.

"Seems like to me," observed Dawes, "this feller mebbe ain't so bad. After all, he's sorta takin' care of the kid. And he told Sue what happened. Mebbe, boss, we'd oughta go slow. This here is a kind o' truce. I reckon he won't fight while we're pickin' up our wounded, an' we hadn't oughta either."

"Truce, hell!" muttered old Jeff. "There'll be no truce when I meet him."

"But, Uncle Jeff," shouted Sue from the rear seat, to make herself heard above the roar of the engine, "you told Jeff not to go there. He had no business there. He must have started the trouble."

"He did not!" cried the rancher. "My son ain't a troublemaker! It's that damned nester. I'm going to capture him

an' turn him over to the sheriff on a charge of attempted murder. I oughta kill him, but there are other ways of getting rid of him."

Suddenly Dawes swung off the road and turned into the Bailey ranch. There was a single light in the little cabin.

Leaping out of the car, old Jeff drew his gun and marched to the door. He flung it open and saw his son lying on the bunk. There was no one else inside.

"Find that damned nester, Dawes!" he ordered. "I'll take a look at Jeff."

The boy had recovered consciousness and was suffering pain. He turned and twisted, seeking to find a more restful posture.

"Hurt bad, boy?" asked old Jeff, standing beside him.

His son opened his eyes and looked up. His eyes were feverish. He groaned.

Sue had followed Jeff into the cabin. She knelt down beside the wounded man, and examined his bandage. She saw that it was clean and properly applied.

"The nester's at least taken good care of him," she nodded.

"And I'll take care of him!" said old Jeff. "It's lucky for him the boy ain't hurt worse. Dawes find him yet? The dog's probably hiding out, afraid to show himself."

Dawes, as a matter of fact, was not looking for Stanton. He knew better than to seek an armed man in the dark. The way he saw it, this was a truce, and it was certainly not the time for him to start fighting.

If the nester's story were true—and it sounded true enough to him—the kid had deliberately killed his horse. No wonder Stanton had shot him!

But Jim Stanton was not hiding out. Instead, he was coming down the hill back of the cabin, himself in a towering rage.

He had gone up into the pasture to look for his one remaining horse, in case he needed it, and had come upon his cattle. They had returned to the spring, and the two cows were bawling for their calves. Jim discovered the dead calves.

He caught the horse, then—a rangy, aged roan—and rode him bareback to his cabin. Not only had young Jeff Parsons killed Bozo, but he had also destroyed two calves.

Ignoring the car that he dimly saw before the cabin—he did not see Dawes—Jim burst through the door. Old Jeff whirled on him, his revolver aimed.

Jim made no attempt to draw his own gun. His quarrel, just now, wasn't with the old man; it was with the boy on the bunk.

"How's he comin'?" he gestured to Sue. "I just found out he shot two of my calves before he got Bozo. When's he goin' to get well—so's I can shoot him?"

Old Jeff had advanced upon him, and thrust his gun in Jim's ribs.

"We'll take you back to town," he said harshly. "The sheriff 'll handle you."

"Uncle Jeff! Don't!" cried Sue.

Involuntarily, the old man turned to look at her. In that instant Jim Stanton moved—to one side. At the same time he caught old Jeff's wrists in a grip of steel. The gun fell from his fingers.

"Dawes!" he barked.

Jim stooped to recover the gun, and Dawes stepped into the cabin. His right hand rested easily on his holster.

"Leave it lay," he said.

Jim straightened, a slow smile on his lips. He shrugged slightly.

"I told you to come an' get him," he indicated the lad; "but it seems like you've brought your whole army."

Old Jeff was holding his sore wrist. "Cover him, Dawes. I'll tie him up, and we'll turn him over to the sheriff."

"Now, boss," said Dawes. "I reckon we don't need to give the sheriff no trouble. Ask the kid there if he shot this feller's horse."

By this time young Jeff had struggled up on one elbow, the better to see what was going on.

"Sure, I shot him," he admitted. "I thought he belonged to Bailey."

"And two calves!" added Jim.

"Yeah, two calves—Bailey's calves," growled young Jeff. "I had a right to shoot 'em—they were at our spring."

"Sure you had!" agreed his father. "I told this damned nester he couldn't use that water!"

Neither Jim nor Dawes had made any

move to draw his gun. Jim still carried his own in his holster.

"You gave me two days," he said now, "before the fight was to start. But I ain't kickin' about that. I'm just tellin' you this: it 'll take more'n you an' the sheriff to keep me from settlin' with the feller that shot my horse! He come ridin' down like a drunk Apache, shootin'. I wouldn't 'a' minded if he'd been poppin' away at me or the cabin, but when he shot Bozo—well, I'm damned sorry I missed his heart! And next time I won't miss."

"Cover him, Dawes!" snapped old Jeff.

At the same time, the rancher stepped forward to seize Jim's guns. Dawes, rather unwillingly, drew his own.

But as old Jeff advanced, Jim sidestepped, whipped out his revolver, and sank the barrel of it in old Jeff's paunch. By moving quickly he had placed Jeff between himself and Dawes.

"Cover him, Dawes!" he mocked the older man. "Yeah! An' try to keep him covered. Experts have tried, an' failed."

Sue cried out.

"Stay over there, miss, beside that feller!" Jim went on. "Dawes, drop your gun. That's right. Now, folks, since peace is sorta restored, we can talk amiable. Mr. Jeff Parsons, take your no-good, lyin', horse-killin' son home an' patch him up. When he's all patched, let me know an' I'll start workin' on him again."

"The doctor's coming here," cried Sue. "We can't move him."

"Oh! All right, miss. Just make yourself at home. Use this place for a hospital all you want. But when you can move him, take him away. I ain't used to 'sociatin' with anything so low as he is. And I'll be goin' now, so the doc can work on him in peace an' quiet.

"Now, Parsons, if you're a man of your word, we can call it a truce for two days, like you said. Then the war can start. But don't talk foolish about sheriffs. There ain't goin' to be any sheriffs mixed up in this. This is a private war. Well, adios!"

"I'll—" began Parsons.

But Jim had already vanished in the night. Old Jeff turned on Dawes.

"Why didn't you shoot him?"

"He got outa range," answered Dawes mildly. "Boss, I think we'd oughta go slow. Looks to me—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of the doctor, who began at once to probe for the bullet lodged in young Jeff's shoulder.

VII.

THEY took young Jeff home the following morning. His father was too much concerned with the boy's condition to think further of his feud with Jim.

But when the doctor pronounced young Jeff out of danger, the old man had time to reflect upon what had happened. He did not recognize the fact, but it was really his pride that was injured.

Jim Stanton—cow-puncher, nester, a nobody—had dared to defy Jeff Parsons, the biggest man in the county. Old Jeff would not stand for that.

He brooded about it all that day, passing to and from his son's bedside. When Sue and Dawes both attempted to reason with him, he refused to listen.

"To-morrow morning," he insisted, "we are goin' to cut his fences! No damned nester is goin' to stop me!"

Dawes, knowing his employer, shrugged his shoulders and walked back to the bunk house. The younger punchers were not worried; they didn't care much what happened, so long as it provided action.

But Sue could not help thinking of the man in Nesters' Draw. Alone, he would attempt to fight off the invaders. Uncle Jeff was bound to win, sooner or later; but before he achieved victory, the lean, hard newcomer would have caused considerable damage.

He would take vengeance upon them for the killing of his horse, even if it meant his own death.

She could picture him waiting, with rifle ready, inside his cabin, firing away at the enemies that outnumbered him. She could picture his mocking, defiant smile; his calm, nerveless taking aim; his bitter laugh as he got one of the invaders.

Then—they would get him. Dawes or her Uncle Jeff, or one of the others, would have that man's blood on his hands.

She put her hands over her eyes to shut out the picture her imagination drew. But she could not shut it out. That man, that nester, Jim Stanton, meant too much to her.

She had seen the moisture in his eyes when he promised to kill the man who had shot his horse. She knew that there were depths of tenderness beneath his hard exterior.

She couldn't bear the thought of his being killed. He had no chance of winning against them all. Yet he would relish the fight.

At young Jeff's bedside she had heard the boy's boasting. She knew, from what he had said, that Jim's account of Bozo's death was true in every detail. The killing of the horse was heartless and brutal. Young Jeff gloated over it proudly.

On the morning of the second day, before the herd was ready to start, Sue slipped out of the house to the corral and saddled her own pony. In her blouse she had tucked a small roll of bills, all she possessed.

She rode out alone, and headed for the hills. She knew a trail that would take her to Nester's Draw.

She must see Jim Stanton again, and beg him to leave. Otherwise— But she could not bear the thought of what would happen otherwise.

Not long after she had started she heard the shouting that meant the herd was under way. She would have to hurry. Stanton would prove stubborn.

From a rise she looked down upon his little cabin. She heard him singing a rollicking trail song, and her heart beat rapidly.

She rode down to the cabin and dismounted. Inside, Jim was preparing his breakfast. Sue knocked on the door. When Jim flung it open, he was not in sight. Instead, he stood at one side, his hand ready.

"Oh!" he laughed. "It's you! Howdy and also good morning. I thought mebbe your uncle was comin' to give me some more movin' orders."

"May I come in?" asked Sue. "I want to talk to you. Go ahead with your breakfast."

"Have some coffee?" he questioned. "Bacon, flapjacks and coffee are on the bill of fare. What 'll you have?"

"Nothing, thank you; but you go ahead." She was quite nervous. "They're coming over," she told him. "The herd's started now. They're going to cut your fences."

"Yeah? Old Jeff's keepin' his word, eh? Well, just so they don't interrupt my meals—"

"Won't you please go?" she pleaded suddenly, tugging at her blouse. "Look! I don't know how much you paid Bailey for this place, but I'll buy it from you. This is all I have, but—"

Jim pushed his plate away and looked at her. He shook his head.

"What for? Why should I sell this place? And, as you asked me, why should you buy?"

"I—I don't want to see any more trouble. I know what will happen. Some of you will be killed! I've seen things like this before. My own father—" She broke off, and then, after a moment, she added: "You won't lose anything. I'll pay you what you paid Bailey. This is all I have now, but—"

He shook his head, frowning.

"I sure hate to refuse you anything," he said earnestly, "but I can't do that. Golly, they'd think I'd run away! It 'd get around that Jim Stanton had run away from a fight—and then where'd I be? I wouldn't have a friend left."

He laughed easily.

"Besides," he continued, "I guess this little war won't be as deadly as you figger. I don't want to kill anybody unnecessarily. I was sure mad enough to kill young Jeff, and I aim to beat him up good and proper. But I reckon I won't kill him now. How's he doin'?"

"He's all right. He's still in bed, but he'll be up before long. I—I thought I might get you to leave. You men are all alike. If you'd only— Uncle Jeff won't listen, and you won't—"

"Well, you see how it is!" he shrugged. "He won't let anybody use his water, and I won't let anybody cross my land! We are both right. And when two people are

both right, they've just got to fight. There is no other way of settlin' things."

Sue recognized the hopelessness of talking with him. She saw that she had come on a fruitless errand.

"I reckon nobody 'll get killed," he said easily. "Don't you worry about that. All I aim to do, miss, is to stampede the herd for 'em. That 'll require killin' a few cattle, maybe, but I guess I won't have to kill anybody else."

"But don't you see," demanded Sue—"don't you see what that will lead to? Don't you know what Uncle Jeff will do? They'll kill you!"

"Well," he shrugged, "that's a chance I've got to take. They'll try, likely enough. But I don't think they'll succeed. I been up against some real good fighters before now. And, anyway, if I ain't worryin', why should you?"

He looked smilingly into the girl's eyes as he spoke, but before her gaze his smile faded. There was a sincerity in the blue depths of her eyes that he could not meet lightly.

She was pleading with him, and it was almost impossible for Jim to resist such an appeal.

"Miss," he said earnestly, "if there was any way of avoidin' trouble, I'd do it—for you. But I just can't back down. I ain't made that way. And your uncle won't either."

Surprisingly the girl burst into tears. She was angry.

"You men—you're stubborn and cruel! You don't care if you get killed. We—we women—care."

Jim could not have explained what he did then. It seemed to him that she was a child who must be comforted. He rose and went to her side.

Before he realized it, he had taken her in his arms, and she was sobbing unrestrainedly against his shoulder.

"There, there!" he said in the usual futile masculine fashion.

The girl lifted her tear-stained face. She seemed even more beautiful that he had first thought her. His arms tightened about her, he leaned over and kissed her lips.

"Oh, girl!" he murmured.

"Jim!" she answered.

Her heart beat triumphantly. She knew now why she had ridden over to see him. She loved him!

She loved his slow smile and the recklessness that went with it; she loved his courage, even his stubborn pride. He was a nester—and she had hated all nesters—but she loved him.

"Jim!" she said again, freeing herself.

"You've got to go now," he told her. "You shouldn't have come over. They'll be here soon. You can't stay. We've—got to settle this. You can't be here—when they come."

"I'll stay!" she cried. "I'll sty by your side."

"No, you've got to go! Afterward— I will come for you—after we've settled this business."

She clung to him again.

"There won't be any afterward," she sobbed. "Oh, Jim, won't you leave now—for my sake?"

"I'll do anything you say—but that. Don't ask me to do that, Sue! I can't!"

"Oh!" she sobbed.

From outside came the shouting of the cowpunchers in the distance. The herd was coming!

"Hurry, Sue! You've got to go!" cried Jim.

He kissed her again fiercely, then led her from the house. He helped her into her saddle. As she looked down at him her eyes were blinded with tears.

"Go up the cañon, Sue," he told her, "and home over the hills. I'll come for you—afterward. Don't worry."

The girl, hardly knowing what she was doing, rode away. Jim looked after her for a moment, then darted into the cabin and seized his rifle.

They were coming. He waited. When they cut the fence in the hollow below the cabin, he would fire.

It wouldn't take much to stampede that herd; the cattle were half wild anyway. And, once stampeded, the men would be too busy to give him much trouble.

He was glad Sue was going home. If there had been any way of avoiding the fight—but there wasn't. Clouds of dust,

kicked up by the restless cattle, were already in sight.

The invaders were coming!

Jim rested his rifle on the window-sill and waited until they reached his fence.

VIII.

ONE of the Circle J punchers, riding ahead of the herd, got off his horse when he came to the fence. Jim watched him as he snapped the three strands of barbed wire that marked his property line. The bead of his rifle was on the man, but he did not fire.

Again on his horse, the puncher rode back and joined old Jeff and Dawes. The first steers advanced cautiously through the opening in the fence.

Jim fired. Two steers dropped in the path of the herd. The cow-punchers yelled. Old Jeff cursed. Jim chuckled.

"All together!" he heard old Jeff call out. "Drive 'em through, boys!"

The herd advanced, yip-yipped by the punchers. Jim continued to drop steers in its path, but the Circle J men drove the others through the opening, at the same time firing in the direction of the cabin.

One bullet sank into the window-sill below him, but Jim smiled grimly and went on shooting. He was going to stampede the herd.

He was successful sooner than he had expected. The maddened cattle plunged in all directions, and the Circle J men were unable to hold them. Then, as if they had decided where to go, they formed a mighty phalanx and headed up the cañon.

"Let 'em go!" cried old Jeff. "The fence up there'll stop 'em. Now we'll settle this nester!"

At that moment there came a scream of terror, and every one stopped. Jim almost dropped his rifle.

"Uncle Jeff!" somebody called.

"My God, it's Sue!" said Jim.

Heedless of danger, he dashed outdoors.

There stood Sue alone, her horse nibbling unconcernedly at the grass halfway between her and the cabin, in the path of the maddened, fear-crazed steers.

"Uncle Jeff!" she called again.

Dropping his rifle, Jim ran for her horse. Out of the corner of his eye he could watch the approaching stampede.

Sue stood as if paralyzed. But she had seen him coming.

"Jim!" she cried.

And he saw her sway and then fall to the ground. She had fainted.

All this he saw as he ran forward. He caught the reins of her rearing, frightened horse as the animal looked up to see the stampede. One of the lines snapped, but he managed to hold the horse with the other.

He gave a leap and landed in the saddle. As he did so he heard a bullet whiz over his head.

"Don't shoot, you fool!" he heard Dawes cry.

And then, spurring Sue's pony, he rode head down in her direction. Even as he tried, he told himself that he could not make it.

The herd was almost upon her. In another moment she would be under their flying hoofs.

Jim rode between her and the herd, somehow controlling the frightened, plunging horse. If he could do nothing else, he might shield her with his own body, he thought.

The distance seemed interminable, the horse's movements painfully slow. But he was, of course, riding incredibly fast. The dust from the herd circled over him. He knew they were upon him. But, at that instant of helplessness, he knew that Sue was beside him.

He swung down from the saddle, caught her around the waist, and drew her up with him. His horse plunged madly on, trying to pitch. "God, if I only had Bozo!" he thought.

But he managed the horse while he drew Sue higher against the saddle. Her body was limp. He held her in an embrace that must have bruised her.

He did not realize that he had succeeded—that he had saved Sue from death—until he had ridden a half mile beyond danger.

Then he pulled his horse to a stop, got off, and held the girl in his arms.

He leaned over her pale face and kissed her.

Sue shuddered and opened her eyes. She smiled.

"Jim!" she whispered. "Jim!"

Her arms went round his neck and she leaned against him.

He felt her trembling. "There, there!" he said futilely, his eyes moist. "It's all right!"

"Jim, I love you so!" she whispered. "I was afraid—they'd kill you. I started home, but then I thought of one last chance—I thought I would beg Uncle Jeff to give in. I rode down to meet him, but they had already cut the wires. I was too late. I had got off my horse to stop them from cutting the fence. I was walking down when you fired. And then—it happened so suddenly—I knew the danger I was in." She laughed a little. "I—I was scared stiff!" she added.

He was still holding her in his arms when old Jeff and Dawes rode up. Old Jeff had fired at Jim when the latter leaped on Sue's horse; but he had only fired once, for Dawes had knocked his revolver from his hand.

"Don't shoot, you fool!" Dawes had cried. And he had added: "He's the only one that can git to her—if he can!"

The men had watched the rescue, themselves helpless. It had seemed years to old Jeff before the girl was safe. And when she was secure in the arms of the nester, all of the Circle J men sighed with relief.

"That feller can ride," observed Dawes. "An' shoot some, too. Yeah, I reckon he's all right."

Jim Stanton stepped aside from Sue when old Jeff rode up. He looked up into the eyes of the old rancher, a quizzical smile on his face.

"Well," he said, "I guess you've got me licked, mister. You did cut my fence, didn't you? I reckon I can't stop you from crossin' my land now."

Old Jeff slid from his saddle. One arm encircled Sue's waist. He thrust out his other hand.

"Put her there, son," he offered. "You might 'a' stopped us, at that, if you hadn't had more important things to do. But—well, I don't aim to fight anybody that did what you did. Sue's like my own daughter."

Jim gravely shook his hand.

"I didn't care much about fightin' you," he admitted. "Only you put it up to me like I had to. But what I figgered was—if you'd let me water my stock up there, I'd give you a right o' way through here. An' no hard feelin's."

Old Jeff nodded. He was willing now to compromise with a nester.

"Hell!" grunted Dawes. "That's what I tried to tell you all along."

"Another thing," said Jim. "Sue and I—well, we've got awful well acquainted pretty quick. As a matter of fact, we aim to get married."

"Well, I'll be—" began Dawes. "Why, you ain't knowed each other— Sue, don't get reckless!"

"We *know*," said Sue. "Uncle Jeff, you have got to consent."

It seemed to old Jeff that this put an end to all his hopes. He had counted on Sue marrying his son.

But now he saw that that was impossible. And he recognized her freedom to choose her mate. She had chosen a good man, a man he liked, when all was said and done.

"Well," he said, "maybe you better wait till you're grown up, Sue. But if you are *sure*—well, ain't I always let you have what you want?"

"Yes, you have." Sue stood on tiptoe to kiss his rough cheek.

When old Jeff and Dawes had ridden back to join the others, Sue and Jim stood hand in hand beside her pony.

"There's only one thing I'm regrettin'," said Jim.

"What's that?"

"That you won't let me beat up young Jeff when he's well again."

"No, I won't." Then she added shyly: "But maybe you won't even regret that."

"I know I won't!" he declared, putting his arm around her. "I won't want anything else—when I have you."

THE END

Restless Guns

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EYES WEST!"

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

NORMAN TRENT, an Easterner not as much of a tenderfoot as he looks, and Ronald Ingram-Browne, his English friend, leap from their train in New Mexico when they see a cowboy chasing and shooting at a girl bride, whose wedding procession they had witnessed a short time before. Trent kills the cowboy when the latter attacks. He learns the girl's husband, Sam Lane, was killed a few minutes earlier and had himself shot the cowboy's two companions when they attempted to abduct the bride. All four men had been employed by Rance Buxton, who controls that lawless section of the country. The train pulls out, leaving Trent and his companion stranded. Small, beautiful and with fiery-red hair, Althea Evans Lane is an enigma to the two men. A strange combination of young girl and hard-boiled woman of the frontier world, she warns them against trouble from Buxton and advises them to keep their mouths shut. They ride in her buckboard to Split Cañon, where they meet her father, a blind man of evident refinement and education. The girl gives the sheriff, Buxton's henchman, an expurgated account of the shooting, and at her insistence, Trent and Browne announce their intention of leaving the next morning. While they are dining in the hotel that evening Trent is insulted by Brad Upton and knocks him down. Upton follows them from the hotel and is badly wounded in the ensuing gun battle. His friends want to lynch Trent, but the sheriff and Buxton interfere and arrest Trent.

CHAPTER V.

MAJESTY OF LAW.

NORMAN and Ronald were locked in the calaboose, a two-story frame building adjoining Mose Dudley's gambling establishment. It was a frail and insecure bastile from which escape was purely a matter of inclination and perseverance. The iron bars, bolted to the wooden window frames, had been renewed a score of times, as prisoners removed them for convenience in taking departure. But the more practical and experienced malefactors disdained such laborious tactics, and usually opened a door and walked out. If a new lock happened to present difficulties, it was not uncommon for the parting guest to burst off a section of the prison's match-board wall, a process even simpler than the picking of a lock.

Hugo Bebb, the marshal, had an office

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on the ground floor of the building. His deputy and prison guard, Bud Ridley, lived there, and slept in one of the four upper rooms when all were not occupied by prisoners.

Bud Ridley was more familiar with the prison than any other official, for he had been incarcerated there fourteen times, by his own report, and had escaped eleven times. He was peculiarly fond of Split Cañon, as his home town, and when he returned there after a stretch of five years in the penitentiary for highway robbery and manslaughter, Hugo Bebb had enlisted him as a deputy and guard, believing him well qualified for the post from his familiarity and experience with crime.

During their first week in the calaboose, Norman and Ronald discussed the matter of escape, and Bud Ridley offered practical suggestions out of his wealth of technical knowledge. He warned them, however, that they had first to elude his vigilance, for he was proud of the silver star pinned on his waistcoat, and intended to make a name for himself as an enforcer of the territorial laws.

Brad Upton was reported as clinging tenaciously to life, against heavy odds. It appeared from reports that reached the captives that even the wounded man's friends entertained a furtive hope that he might die, in order that summary justice should be meted out to the two strangers.

Death seemed necessary to prosecution. A miss was always as good as a mile in the eyes of the law and the public. A man was murdered, or he was not, and a person who failed to accomplish a homicide well begun was not worth bothering with.

"I think we could get away with very little trouble," Norman told Ronald, as they discussed their situation, "but I doubt the advisability of it."

"I, too," agreed the young Englishman. "It seems hardly the sporting thing to do, on the whole, once you've surrendered yourself to the law. Criminals do it, quite naturally. They're in the business of crime, like our friend Ridley. But if a gentleman is arrested on charges, it seems the decent thing for him to accept the conditions and wait for honorable acquittal."

"If Upton dies," said Norman, "the fat's in the fire. I shall try to get into communication with New York immediately, and have Eastern lawyers sent here.

"They would not tolerate the usual crooked procedure of these frontier courts, and, if necessary, they would appeal direct to the Federal Government for justice.

"On the other hand, if he lives, I believe we shall be allowed to go away without much further trouble. Escape, unless we were entirely successful, would increase the prejudice here a hundredfold. If we were run down they'd make nothing of shooting us on sight. Even the amiable Bud admits he would take pride in blowing our brains out."

"Extraordinary people, these Westerners," mused Ronald.

"We can't begin to sense the utter cheapness of human life out here," observed Norman. "Men actually slaughter one another without real malice. Sheriff Pat Garrett, who killed Billy the Kid with a shot in the dark, was once one of the Kid's friends, and for a long time they joked with each other as to which one would succeed in killing the other. Garrett was a conscientious sheriff, and the Kid was a bandit, but they played out their business like a game of checkers and the sheriff won."

"Rather sporting, at that," exclaimed Ronald.

During that week no reasonable privileges were denied the prisoners. Tobacco was furnished by Bud Ridley, for a consideration, and the food was abundant and wholesome, though Bud did not excel in the culinary art.

Althea Lane—the only person in Split Cañon whom they could regard as a friend—brought a tray of tempting delicacies to them, and was freely admitted to their cell.

"You are paying for what you did for me," she said regretfully. "You know now how unsafe it is for any one to visit a town like this, no matter how much he minds his own business. You can't live here without fighting for your life.

"My father has gone unharmed, simply because of his affliction; and it's not so much pity as it is contempt that has

saved him. A blind man is put in the class with crazy people and idiots, and no attention is paid to him."

"You have managed to live here," Norman remarked with interest, "and I haven't heard that you were ever actually molested until the day of the wedding."

"There would have to be a good reason for that," she declared. "I have been protected by the friendship of Mr. Spindell, of the mine. I worked in the general store, and that's owned by the mine people.

"Mr. Spindell is respected and feared because he can put out his hand at any time and call the Federal Government to aid him. He has money and power, and if anything happened to him, New York and Washington would move out to New Mexico to see about it. If things go badly for you and Mr. Browne here, I shall see Mr. Spindell about it."

"Please don't!" cried Norman, a little more emphatically than he intended. "I mean, please don't say anything about us, unless we're in great need of help, Mrs. Lane. You see—well, there are reasons."

"You don't have to tell me why," she said. "I'm not curious about other people's business. I guess I'm different from other women in a lot of ways.

"If there's anything at all I can do for you," she added, turning to leave the cell, "please let me know. It would make me feel better if I could do something in return for what you did."

"If you don't mind," answered Norman, "you might mail a letter for me, if you can get it out of town without the knowledge of Marshal Bebb, or any one else."

Althea seemed always to say the surprising thing.

"That will be easy. Eunice Bebb is going to Bitter Springs on the stage tomorrow, and she'll mail the letter there. She—"

"Eunice Bebb?" challenged Norman blankly. "Bebb?"

"The marshal's daughter. I was going to tell you about her. She's a nice old maid, but living in Split Cañon so long has made her sour about some things. She spends her time trying to circumvent her father, and if she knows that you don't want him to see the letter, she'll die to keep it out of his hands. She's one of the few persons that I trust at all—and the only woman."

"It's in your hands, then," agreed Norman, satisfied. "There's nothing mysterious or strange about the letter. It's to my father's office in New York, telling them that I've stopped off for awhile on my trip to Santa Fe, and can't be reached by mail or telegraph. You understand, I'm sure.

"If they failed to reach me after several attempts, the wires would be set humming to locate me, and there'd be a lot of trouble and anxiety. It might be embarrassing for me, so I've taken the precaution. I got the letter ready yesterday."

She took it, hid it carefully in her blouse, and left the jail without further conversation.

Bud Ridley came into the cell to gossip and inspect the tray of food that she left.

There was some chicken with chili pepper, Mexican style, some savory enchiladas, and a bunch of grapes. Bud commended the girl's taste in selection and her ability as a cook, and, without invitation, appropriated at least a third of the offering to his own use. There was neither excuse nor apology, and he assumed an air of conscious beneficence in leaving so much for the prisoners.

"*Noblesse oblige!*" murmured Norman ironically, with a furtive glance at Ronald.

"Don't mention it, brother," replied Bud airily.

"How is Upton coming on?" Ronald inquired.

"Bad—bad!" said the guard. "I just heard the doc say he don't think he'll live the night through. That don't chirk you up much, hey?"

"I hope he'll live, I'm sure," said Norman gravely, "but I'm not complaining, whatever happens. You don't shoot at a man point-blank and then curse your luck if he dies."

"If they give you the rope," said Bud cheerfully, "you'll prob'ly be here or over to the county jail a month or two after the trial."

"Are you trying to add to the terrors in store for me?"

"If 'twas me," said Bud sagely, "I'd say let 'im croak. Unless a mob gets yer, you have a big chance to get away—break jail. But if Brad lives and they let you off, he's plumb sure o' gettin' you before you're out of the territory. He's an ornery critter, Brad is."

Later in the day there were further unfavorable reports of Upton's condition. He had rallied encouragingly near noon, regaining full consciousness and talking lucidly with the physician and some friends. But there was a relapse with the sudden rising of his fever, and the doctor declared that he was sinking rapidly, and there was little hope.

Hugo Bebb visited the prisoners suddenly and appeared nervous and worried.

"There's going to be plenty of trouble if Brad dies to-night," he informed them. "I've talked with Buxton, and he says the boys at the ranch are all het up.

"Rance Buxton's a hard-headed man, and he's in favor of letting things set as they are. He says if the boys take things in their own hands and settle your case out o' court, it 'll save the government money and trouble, and justice will be done. But I don't hold with that. I'm not in favor of lynch law.

"Somehow, I've got the idea, gen'lemen, that you're both of yer pretty well connected. We can't always be bothered lookin' after the interests of bums that drift into town, but I don't want no decent fellers to be treated too rough here while I'm marshal.

"I don't want no city lawyers and detectives coming in here to raise a rookus over the way I enforce the laws. I kind o' guess you've got friends that would be pretty mad if anything happened to yer, hey? Mebbe your folks would take it up with President Arthur himself. Think so?"

"The legal rights of any United States citizen should be sacred in the eyes of an officer of the law," Norman declared noncommittally.

"Her majesty's government guards the rights and the safety of any British subject, no matter where he may be," said Ronald Ingram-Browne impressively.

"Sho! I never thought about that!" exclaimed Bebb. "You're one o' them British subjects, ain't yer? I had to fill out a whole lot o' papers one time because a Johnny Bull from Canada died up to the mine. Turned out he got pickled with redeye and fell down a shaft.

"I got a whole lot o' letters and papers from some kind of consul, and it appeared that the feller was from England, and the queen was settin' up nights waiting to hear what happened to 'im in the States.

"I've always done my duty as a public official, I have, and I'm going to take you gen'lemen over to the county jail right off. The boys will be comin' in from the RX soon as it's night, and there's no telling what they might do.

"I'll put it up to the county officers, and that's all anybody can expect o' me—Chester Arthur or Queen Victo-ry, or anybody!"

"We're ready when you give the word," said Norman. "I'm not anxious to stay here and fight it out with all the men of Buxton's ranch. Your principles do you credit, marshal."

"Better come right along," said Bebb anxiously, oblivious to the irony.

The jail was empty when Norman and Ronald left by the back door to mount horses that were waiting in the yard, and Bud Ridley was detailed to accompany the marshal to the county seat with his prisoners.

Norman and Ronald had never been handcuffed, and in going out to ride over the rugged roads to the county jail, eighteen miles away, the marshal deemed it sufficient to warn them that they would be riddled with lead if they attempted escape.

He led the way on his pony down a rough path parallel to the main street, with Bud guarding the rear of the little procession, and they left the town by a mountain trail that joined the main highway some three miles out.

There was no demonstration of local objection or farewell. Bebb regretted that they were forced to start by daylight, when

some residents were sure to see them, but he was not visibly apprehensive of interference or pursuit.

CHAPTER VI.

PURGATORY.

THERE was a bright full moon that night, and it contributed not a little to the safety of the prisoners on their way to the county jail. Moon and stars appear to draw nearer the earth in the clear atmosphere of the Southwest, and as the party emerged from the hills and crossed alkali plains, the light was like that of a moonlit winter landscape in the north.

While admitting no tangible fear, the marshal halted from time to time and looked back, making a minute survey of the silvery panorama and watching all questionable dark patches in the distance till he was satisfied that they did not move.

It was a hard trail, unfavorable to rapid progress, and the captives were disappointed when the marshal announced near midnight that they had still five miles to go.

He halted again for observations, and gave out instantly, with appropriate imprecations, that there were moving objects not more than half a mile away.

"Buffalo, I guess," suggested Bud Ridley, wheeling his pony and squinting through the moonlight.

"No, giraffes!" snapped Bebb crossly. "Buffalo don't stick up in the air like that. There's men over there, and they're comin' over here, almighty fast!"

Without more discussion he put his horse to the gallop, yelling at the others to follow.

Hugo Bebb was obviously scared. He had a reputation for courage and some fighting ability, but in New Mexico the whole year was open season for sheriffs and marshals when there happened to be a difference of opinion between them and their fellow citizens. There was a considerable party riding hard down the trail, with but two armed men in the fleeing quartet.

"They're crawlin' up on us, marshal!" yelled Bud, turning in his saddle to glance behind him.

Bebb called him a liar, but thrashed his pony with the quirt and spurred it furiously.

A Mexican adobe hut loomed up before them at one side of the trail, a small, square structure with a flat roof, from which roof poles projected through the baked mud walls.

"We stop here!" growled the marshal, reining up his pony. "I'm not goin' to turn tail to ol' Rance Buxton an' his cockeyed mavericks. I got a belt of ca'tridges, and I'll drop 'em fast as they come up. This place is a regular fort."

Norman and Ronald were not accustomed to the sport of man hunting, and it was a little bewildering to be thrust into the rôle of the hunted. They offered no suggestions to the marshal, and were quite willing to obey his orders.

"This is easy, marshal," remarked Bud optimistically. "Remember, I kep' you and your posse off six hours before I quit, the time I was sent to the pen, and only had one gun and a big rock in front o' me."

The marshal dismounted, led his mount to the hut, and pounded vigorously on the stout plank door. An evidently scared and sleepy Mexican bade him begone. He promptly shook the barrier on its hinges with furious kicks, then applied his shoulder to it and forced it open.

"Come on!" he yelled to Bud and the prisoners, "and bring them horses inside."

Urged by fear and necessity, they complied with the order, and quickly accomplished what seemed like the impossible. The one room of the hut was not large, and a fire of mesquite branches smoldered in the middle of the floor, the smoke spiraling about until it found the hole in the roof which was the only apology for a flue. Round the fire were grouped two men, a woman, five children, a pig, and a dozen chickens.

The men cursed fluently until they looked into Bebb's revolver barrel, then fell to whimpering and protesting, but in a moment the place was packed like a full hamper with the new arrivals and their ponies.

The marshal stamped out the fire, to

make room, and then boosted Bud through the hole in the roof to mount guard and keep a lookout.

The deputy quickly reported the galloping horsemen near the hut, and Bebb looked to his two revolvers and stuck them loosely in his belt at the front.

He posted himself at a window slit in the adobe and prepared for a parley with the enemy.

The cowboys circled the hut, hooting and cursing, but halted presently and prepared for action.

"Come on out, Hugo!" called a deep bass voice. "Best thing for you is to go on home—you an' Bud."

"That you, Red?" inquired the marshal.

"Yep, it's me," answered the spokesman. "Here's Fishbone and Luke, too, and about twenty o' the boys. Come on out; we ain't aimin' to hurt *you*."

"Where's Rance?"

"The ol' man ain't here, Hugo. He ain't botherin' himself with a couple o' dudes that we can finish off in five minutes. Folks would laugh at 'im."

"Brad dead yet?"

"Mos' likely, by this time. That don't matter nohow. It's time New Mexico was cleaned up. It's these crazy dudes comin' in here, thinking they can shoot, that give New Mexico a bad name. Got to make an example of 'em. Come on, Hugo; we got to get back before mornin'."

"Now, you look-a-here, Red Jukes," said the marshal, with heavy dignity. "I'm running the affairs of my office in such a way that Chester Alan Arthur could come out from Washington any time, and look into my record, and say: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'

"I ain't looking for favors nor popularity, but when you plant me—to-night or forty years from now—I want folks to say: 'There lies one honest, upright town marshal who never feared any one but his God.'"

"Now, everybody up, ter sing the doxology!" jeered the spokesman. "What's been bitin' yer, Hugo? Seem like one o' them dudes is kin to President Arthur, an' the other's the Prince o' Wales."

"That wouldn't make no difference with me," argued Bebb: "I ain't that kind of a public official. But it just happens these gen'lemen *are* kind o' highly connected, at that. You low down jack rabbits better watch out for yourselves you don't get in trouble, rampagin' round like outlaws or somethin'."

"So's Brad Upton highly connected—ha'f grizzly bear an' ha'f catamount," replied Red Jukes, to the loud delight of his comrades. "We done talked that all over, Hugo.

"Rance says 'tain't likely them fellers amount to much, seein' they sat there in the lock-up for a week without lettin' out a howl. Rance says if they'd had much money or any high-up relations, they'd 'a' had the governor o' the territory and a whole passel o' lawyers here afore now."

"I know what I'm talkin' about most gen'ally," said Bebb weakly. "All I want o' you galoots is to go away peaceably and let me do my duty as an officer of the law. The prisoners will be locked up in the county jail and brought to trial when the right time comes.

"I'm orderin' you fellers to go about your business like law-abiding citizens. If you don't, I'll have the law on the whole passel of you for committing *non compos mentis*."

The cowboys were tiring of the impromptu comedy, and a low mumbling from the more impatient ones grew to a chorus of growls and threats.

Suddenly a pistol cracked, and Bud yelled from the roof that some one had put a bullet through his hat.

"Give it back to 'em, Bud!" shouted Bebb. "You have the authority. They're in defiance of the law."

Bud refrained from shooting or showing his head again above the low mud parapet, and the angry murmurs quieted down suddenly to the low hum of a general conference.

All at once a half dozen of the boldest raiders came hurrying toward the door, carrying a heavy log.

"Go on!" urged an encouraging voice. "He won't shoot."

The marshal jabbed his revolver through

the slit in the adobe and fired a shot over the heads of the attackers.

"He's only jokin'," Red Jukes assured the men, and they came on resolutely.

"Stop 'em, Bud!" shouted the marshal to his deputy, thereby shifting the responsibility for the moment. The more reckless Bud let go and dropped one of the men who were carrying the battering ram.

That was the gage of battle, and the adobe bulwark behind which the deputy crouched was peppered with bullets. Some well-aimed shots came through the loopholes in the house wall, and the close-packed inmates ducked their heads and crouched out of the line of fire.

With the burst of fire, Hugo Bebb seemed to shake off his caution and fear. Belching fiery oaths, he stuck his six-shooter through the loophole by the door and emptied the cylinder as fast as he could pull the trigger.

"Load that!" he yelled to Norman Trent, hurling the empty gun and his cartridge belt to him, then made ready for more deliberate shooting with the other revolver.

"Better let us get into it, marshal," said Norman. "Four can do more than two. These Mexicans—"

"Get in, then!" roared Bebb, and in a string of Spanish oaths and threats he bade the two Mexicans deliver all their weapons to Norman and Ronald.

The result was a heap of nondescript hardware, dumped with frantic haste on the floor, for the Mexicans were terrified, but out of the collection the prisoners got three revolvers and two bowie-knives.

"We've a fighting chance, now," said Ronald Ingram-Browne, trying manfully to keep a stout heart.

Sweat was dripping from his chin, and he dashed it out of his eyes, for the heat and fumes from the close-packed animals in the hut were almost suffocating.

"You've got your adventure now, with a vengeance," Norman said to him, as they looked to the loading of the revolvers.

Ronald nodded and grinned a little sheepishly.

"I fancy the Black Hole of Calcutta was not much worse," he murmured.

Hugo Bebb turned from the embrasure where he had emptied another cylinder, and there was inspiration in his eyes.

"Raise your right hand and swear," he commanded the two prisoners. "Do you swear to faithfully perform your duties as deputy sheriffs o' this county, s' help you God?"

The astonished young men gasped out affirmative answers, with their hands raised.

"Then I pronounce you—hell, no, that ain't it!" muttered the excited marshal. "That's for weddin's!"

He abandoned the elaboration of the ceremony and raised his voice to a mighty shout.

"Hey, you, Red Jukes!"

"Do you give in?" cried the leader of the mob, and there was a sudden hush outside.

"Never!" replied the marshal fiercely. "But I just swore in these two fellers as dep'ty sheriffs. Do yer hear? Now, call off your coyotes, or I'll have the law on the lot o' you for firin' on officers o' the law. I'll send the whole RX ranch to the penitentiary!"

"Oh, hang that ol' bag of wind to a cottonwood!" groaned one of the cowboys, and a burst of applause indicated that the suggestion met with favor.

"Looks like there'll be four dep'ty sheriffs less in this county when we quit," Jukes called back to the marshal.

Evidently the marshal had expected his diplomacy to be more effective, for he showed violent disappointment, and quickly resumed his fire from the loophole with renewed fury.

The cowboys were not expecting it at the moment, and one of the bullets found a target. A wild howl of pain proclaimed that one of them was badly wounded, and the natural reaction on the part of the others brought a lively fusillade that spattered on the adobe walls.

A pony in the hut flung up its head just in time to get a bullet through the neck, and panic ensued.

With the animal squealing and thrashing about with its hoofs, the others were filled with frantic terror, and it seemed likely

that they would kick and trample the human occupants of the hut to death.

Bebb quickly shot the wounded horse through the head, ending its struggles, then he and the new deputies got hold of the reins of the others and strove to control and quiet them.

The noise made by horses and men, for the Mexicans were shrieking like fiends, must have carried some idea of the horror to the mob outside. There was a cessation of firing, but an instant later the battering ram thundered against the planks of the door and burst them in.

Ronald Ingram-Browne knew in that moment that the supreme horror of the historic Black Hole of Calcutta had been exaggerated.

With mad recklessness the cowboys stormed into the turmoil that raged in the hut. Bronchos' hoofs were not unfamiliar to them, and they proceeded grimly to begin their work by shooting the terrified beasts and eliminating them from the problem.

The fearless Bud Ridley, true to his silver star, dropped through the hole in the roof and landed in the midst of the scrimmage with both of his guns spitting fire.

Three cowboys fell cursing and groaning in the shambles before Bud went down in the reeking pile of equine and human flesh. Then the one little oil lamp that the Mexicans had burning on a shelf was knocked down and extinguished, and the fight raged in pitch darkness, every man for himself, and every man stark mad with the lust of murder.

Ronald Ingram-Browne, of London, died of sheer terror, but another entity took his place. It was as though the soul of Ronald left the body and soared to more peaceful realms, while a spirit of evil entered the abandoned frame to wreak vengeance upon human kind.

The newborn Ronald shrieked blighting curses and obscenities unknown to the gently bred Ronald of old, and wielded a bowie-knife like a butcher.

Whenever the knife met resistance, he carved and stabbed the unseen obstruction, regardless of the nature of its substance, in the savage ecstasy of annihilation.

Thus running amuck in the confines of a narrowly circumscribed hell, he was checked in full career by a strong arm flung powerfully about his neck from behind, strangling him and toppling him over backward. The knife was knocked from his hand, and he felt himself being dragged out of the bloody whirlpool.

A dash of cold air in his face made him gasp, and as in delirium he saw the moon and the stars whirling about him, a universe gone mad along with humanity.

"Come!" roared a voice that he knew, and in a flash of returning sanity he realized that Norman Trent was dragging him over the ground at a furious pace, and Norman Trent was swearing blasphemously like all the other demons.

Ronald was pushed violently and kicked, propelled toward and against the side of a horse that stood in the fading moonlight with the bridle reins dragging on the ground.

The horse shied skittishly, but Ronald flung out his arms to save himself from falling, caught a stirrup leather, leaped up, and miraculously landed astride a saddle.

The cow pony was a wicked one, and it bucked. Ronald had hunted to hounds in England, and ridden in steeplechases, but never had he sat on a mean mustang before.

At any other time he would have parted company with the beast at the first wild jump, but now he was glued to the leather. The pony aspired to the level of the stars, went up facing east, and came down facing west. It became by turns a camel and a kangaroo. It squealed like a rat, and grunted like a hog.

And with it all, as a part of the miracle that began in the black shambles, Ronald seemed never to think of falling. He was a part of the grotesque phenomenon and could not be severed from it.

Careening thus between heaven and earth, he became conscious that another centaur was waltzing with the spheres in their courses. And it was nothing strange in the way of nightmares that he saw the face of his friend Trent ornamenting the top piece of that other centaur.

All at once the waltzing ceased abruptly,

and the centaurs were running over the plain in a race that left the wind behind, as *Faust* and *Mephisto* ran their mad race to Purgatory.

Little by little, sanity returned to Ronald. He was riding a fast horse over a moonlit plain at breakneck speed, and Trent was riding with him. The reins were in his hands, though he never knew how they got there.

The horses drifted together, more by their gregarious instinct than by any effort on the part of their riders.

"Wh—where are we?" murmured Ronald Ingram-Browne of London.

"On earth, I think," answered Norman Trent harshly, "and no credit to you for it, you lunatic!"

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGING FORTUNES.

MORNING found the fugitives resting —and they needed rest—in a secluded nook among low knobs in the desert. Mesquite and greasewood grew about the place, and there was a spring of clear water. The thirsty mustangs had found the spring, and their riders were more than willing to call the desolate spot their camp.

The men reclined on the ground languidly and groaned whenever they tried to change position.

Norman's head was bound up with strips torn from his shirt, for a bullet had plowed a furrow along the left side of his scalp. A shallow knife wound in his thigh was dressed with a pad made from the same garment, and he had already told Ronald a dozen times that he suspected him of inflicting that wound.

Ronald had an inflamed wound in his side, and was certain that a bullet was embedded between the ribs. One of his eyes was closed and grotesquely discolored, and two crushed toes on his left foot gave him constant throbbing agony.

Both men were bruised, it seemed to them, on every square inch of their bodies. They burned with fever, and their heads threatened to burst like broken gourds.

"We can't stand this long," moaned Ronald. "If we don't find a doctor somewhere, we'll be dead before night."

"You're going to move on, then?" queried Norman ill-humoredly. "I'm not. I've never seen a better place than this. I don't know anything about to-nights or to-morrows, and I care less. The present does very well, if I don't forget to lie still."

"The water saved my life," sighed Ronald, "but I've got to have food. I feel as though I were starving."

"Food!" cried Norman with deep disgust. "You're a hog, a beast; only an animal would think of food at such a time! All I want is air—pure fresh air. It's all I shall ever want, I think."

"There's too much air here," complained the Englishman. "I'm having a chill now."

They continued to rest, and from time to time lapsed into semi-consciousness. There were moments of feverish slumber. Then one or the other would break the peaceful silence with deep, guttural snores, and there would be an awakening with bitter reproaches and recriminations.

Noon, with its heat, brought more pain and an intolerable sickness. But the instinct of self-preservation caused them to throw off the dangerous lethargy.

They stripped and bathed in the spring, and applied fresh, but very crude dressings to their wounds.

"I declare I can't begin to see our way out!" said Norman, slightly refreshed and a little more normal. "An artist would find it hard to paint more horrible pictures than we present. You look a little worse than anything I can remember in Gustave Doré's drawings for the *Inferno*, and I suppose I look just as bad."

"But we've got to chance it," replied Ronald. "If we could find one decent, humane man, and tell him our story before he began shooting at us, we might get help in time.

"I mean that, you know, Norman. This hole in my side is festering, and I think you're hurt worse than you think you are. These toes of mine ought to be cut off, I fancy, before gangrene sets in."

"Another minute in that hut, and we

shouldn't be here worrying about ourselves," remarked the other philosophically. "If what's left of that mob of devils is on our trail now, we may not have much more pain."

"*You* belong to the sweetness-and-light school of philosophy!" cried Ronald indignantly. "But what's the use of grousing about it? I don't think they're on our trail.

"We got out—thanks to you, old chap—by a blooming miracle. And if one other man escaped with a whole head, I'll believe in fairies from now on."

"I almost wish a rap on the head had knocked the memory of it all out of me," sighed Norman. "Do you happen to remember that there were some children there? And a woman?

"Those two Mexicans were nothing but poor dumb creatures, and they whimpered like puppies. What became of them all? And the pig? And those fluttering, squawking chickens?"

"Quit that!" snapped the other. "You're getting morbid. I never heard anything shriek like those dying horses. I don't think I'll ever want fresh meat again. A slaughter house! Oh-h—I say, I'm feeling frightfully ill!"

"Then shut up, you fool!" cried the American. "You're not half as sick as I am, or you wouldn't talk so much."

Toward night they grew more desperately ill, with consuming fever, chills, and intolerable pain. A genuine alarm seized them, and they were brought more fully to their senses by a realization that some aid must be found at once.

Though barely able to move or stand, they washed and dressed their wounds again, and staggered over to the waiting horses which were standing with their reins dragging, according to the training of a cow pony.

"Here goes," muttered Norman tragically, and supported himself by the high pommel of the saddle while he felt for the stirrup with his foot.

The mustang snorted, snapped his teeth viciously, and whirled about. Norman fell to the ground, groaning in anguish.

"It can't be done," he said, drawing himself painfully to a sitting posture. "A cowboy might know what to do, but I don't. I can't get into the saddle, and if I did, one buck-jump would kill me."

"I'd walk a thousand miles, just as I am," vowed Ronald, "before I'd try to mount one of those filthy beasts. I belong to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. And if I live, I'll write my resignation to the secretary in Germyn Street in London, and tell him he's a silly ass, like all the other members.

"If I had that devilish horse tied fast, I'd show 'im what cruelty to animals is!"

They rested again, and as darkness was closing in they started walking toward a low line of hills to the east, dragging one foot after another, and groaning at every step. The ridge seemed not far distant, and it was a tangible objective; otherwise they had no reason for turning in that direction. Certainly there were no houses or other signs of human life on the plain, and there might be trails in the low hills that would lead to a ranch or a small settlement.

"A rum go, if we find a place and they set the dogs on us," grumbled Ronald. "That would be luck, what?"

"If I can't talk, you tell the people that we crave only a quiet place to die in," sighed his companion.

The hills were, as might have been expected, twice the distance they had figured, and they lay down on the ground three times to rest before they gained them.

As the moon was peeping over the ridge, a horseman appeared suddenly to their view, riding down a narrow trail to the plain.

Norman started up excitedly and tried to shout, but his voice cracked in his dry throat and he made only a horrible croaking sound.

Ronald, in desperation, opened his mouth and howled. It was a wolfish howl, a fearful note in the stillness of the night, and it echoed weirdly among the hills.

The lone horseman reined his mount in sharply, paused uncertainly for a moment, then spurred the pony to a wild charge over the plain, fleeing for his life.

"Another brave American!" Ronald snarled savagely.

"Suppose you appeared in Piccadilly as you are, and howled like that?" muttered Norman. "They'd call out the Horse Guards to save London."

"Come on while we have the strength. That man came from somewhere. Perhaps we can get to the same—somewhere."

In the moonlight they struggled along the trail that the man had descended, climbing painfully toward the moon, as it seemed.

They topped one of the lesser ridges of the range, and almost swooned with joy when they saw a house with lights gleaming from the windows, and little wisps of thin smoke rising from the chimney.

It was a log house, a house that looked cheerfully human, a modest homestead of some Yankee settler, and a royal palace.

They were suddenly made well.

"For the love of Heaven, be careful!" Norman implored his friend. "Remember, not a shout, not a howl. We mustn't spoil it all. It's going to take discretion, tact, diplomacy. If you were ever an English gentleman, be one now!"

"We might approach in that deep shadow," said Ronald gravely, "and have speech with them before they see us. We might manage to prepare them gently for—for what they have to look upon."

"There are no dogs," observed Norman, "else they'd have spotted us before now."

Treading softly, as in some sacred place, they reconnoitered the cabin. Apparently it was a little farm. There was a small irrigated truck garden, with the ditches shining in the moonlight. A barn, twice the size of the house, loomed darkly against a wooded hillside, and beyond it there was a corral, with two horses standing quietly at the gate. An added touch of reassuring homeliness was furnished by a row of six beehives, painted white, and gleaming in the moonlight.

Ronald paused and sighed ecstatically.

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool, sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way."

"Quit that!" muttered Norman. "You'll get sick again in a minute. I'm beginning to think this is all delirium; it's going to fade from sight presently."

They crept on, scarcely daring to breathe, and came near the line of deep shadow before the house.

Then a door banged with a loud noise, startling them painfully. It was at the barn, and as they halted uncertainly, fearfully, a woman came around the corner of the house, carrying a water bucket and leading a half grown urchin by the hand.

She wore a capacious sunbonnet of gingham, and as she walked with her head slightly bowed, the men in the glare of moonlight were for a moment shut from her view.

All at once she raised her head, saw them, and halted with a little gasp of alarm.

"Madam!" called Norman hoarsely, "we are—"

An unearthly shriek drowned his voice. The woman gathered the small boy in her arms and called on the heavens for aid. She started for the house, staggering in her panic, and the two men hurried forward to intercept her, lest she shut the door in their faces and barricade it.

She saw the movement and turned back, glancing toward the barn, dodging this way and that, unable to pick out a place of refuge. Her voice grew stronger, and she sent shriek after shriek reverberating through the hills.

"Don't! Don't!" yelled Norman desperately, splitting his throat in the effort to be heard. "Help us—we're sick—wounded—help us!"

She was a leather-lunged rustic. Her shrieks became trumpet calls, shattering the veil of night and annihilating distance.

Ronald found his voice.

"Shut or or I'll wring your damned neck!" bellowed the English gentleman and Cambridge graduate.

His fierceness struck terror to her heart. With one last clarion call for aid, she shouldered her boy and ran with great strides down the mountain trail, whence the intruders had come.

"That was her husband we saw," said Norman. "You've fixed it now. He'll

come back and shoot us on sight. He's probably coming now."

"Not he!" said Ronald hopefully. "That man was riding. He's ten miles from here by now—going to some town to get a glass of grog with his cronies."

The woman was gone. She no longer gave voice to her terror. They looked at the silent house with its cheerful lights, took hope, and went in.

A log fire burned on the hearth, and a tea kettle was singing merrily on the small cook stove. In the sink the supper dishes were waiting to be washed.

Surveying the scene anxiously, they saw an oilcloth-covered table, littered with crumbs and fragments of the recent repast —not altogether a pleasant sight. But it was redeemed by an earthen tureen half full of a stew of meat and vegetables.

"We'll heat it on the stove," said Norman practically. "There's life and strength in it."

In the joy of relief so promising, they forgot their pain and sickness. While one warmed the stew in a frying pan, the other found the tea caddy and prepared a brew in a stone teapot.

Bread was sliced and toasted over the embers on the hearth. Half an apple pie was foraged from the pantry, and the good man's demijohn of applejack was brought from its hiding place.

Presently they sat down and feasted.

"We are sick men," Norman reminded his friend, speaking thickly with a mouth full of food. "This may kill us, you know. But there are worse deaths."

They did not gorge themselves, however. The stew warmed them and relieved their faintness, but their appetites failed them before they reached the pie. Their fever reasserted itself and the viands lost their savor.

The ecstasy of conquest over, they grew soberly practical. With hot water they bathed and made themselves less frightful to behold. They found and raided the family medicine chest, obtaining salves and liniments, lint, old linen, and a phial of carbolic acid.

Ronald objected at first to amateur surgical aid, but his friend overpowered him and probed for the bullet in his side with a steel knitting needle from the woman's sewing basket.

The bullet yielded to rough persuasion, while the patient swooned with pain, and Norman dressed the wound with diluted carbolic acid and fixed a pad of lint upon it. The crushed toes were similarly dressed and bound up, and Ronald returned to consciousness when a draft of applejack was poured between his lips.

The general raid extended to the attic and the clothes presses. Norman attired himself in a suit of Sunday broadcloth, brought out from the East, no doubt, while the Englishman donned a more practical dress of brown homespun. A good gray Stetson covered Norman's battered and furrowed head, and a black hat of the Southern planter's style did for the man in homespun.

The American glanced at the clock on the mantel.

"Time's up," he declared regretfully. "We've been here over an hour. There may be a regiment of cavalry on the way to exterminate us."

The other grew alarmed at the suggestion. In sudden haste they made up packets of food for a march over the mountains, took a teapot of tin, and a frying pan, and wrapped each packet in a good woolen blanket from the bedding chest.

The creaking of boards now filled them with alarm, and they listened constantly for the sound of hoofs or footsteps.

Norman filled a pocket with medicines and surgical material, and they stole quietly and furtively from the house, shutting the door after them, and slinking along in the shadows.

"We've reached the depths," whispered Ronald, in a flash of shame and remorse. "From murderers to sneak thieves, housebreakers, burglars!"

"But we've got another chance for life," said Norman cheerfully. "And these people shall be rewarded richly."

They found a trail that led away from the farm toward the east, mounting to the loftier ridges, and they agreed to follow it. Taking a farewell look at the house which had succored and nourished them, they

paused and listened for sounds of approaching enemies. But the night was still and peaceful.

CHAPTER VIII.

"FATE A FIDDLER."

NEITHER Norman Trent nor his friend was versed in the craft of the scout and pioneer. They had no compass, no map, and were utterly ignorant of the geography of the country in which they were lost.

They tired quickly after setting out from the farmhouse, and were obliged to seek a secluded spot on the wooded hillside and make a rude camp.

Wrapped in the warm blankets, they slept heavily until the rising sun wakened them, and found themselves ill, sore, and more fatigued than ever.

With a small fire of twigs, giving little smoke, they made tea and ate some bread and bacon, then forced themselves to take up the march.

"Southeast, as well as we can figure it," suggested Norman. "I should guess that we might come in time to the railroad. We're surely north of it. We've never crossed it."

"I'll leave it to you," said the other amiably. "I wouldn't hazard a guess on any point between Maine and California. Night before last we did some riding. The Cossacks of the Steppes don't know what rough riding is. I think those devilish animals ran fifty miles before they stopped. It's a happy thought, however, that we must be miles and miles from the town of Split Cañon."

"I have a vague idea," said Norman, "that we passed to the west of it on our ride. I think we're south of it, and we might hit the railroad somewhere nearer Santa Fe. That's where I want to get."

Guiding themselves by the sun as best they could, they marched south, bearing eastward. They crossed the range and descended into another valley of plains, and were in a veritable wilderness. At noon a camp was made in a gully, in the shade of rocks, for rest and refreshment, and after another march of no more than two hours, they collapsed from fatigue and illness, and went into camp for the night.

Next day they were in wooded hills again, and dared to hope that strength was returning and the fever abating.

They were descending a hill when Ronald cried out excitedly and pointed to the valley below.

"A road!" he exclaimed. "A real road, with wheel tracks in it!"

"And going south," remarked Norman hopefully.

Then he fell to regarding the strip of road thoughtfully, looking up and down, and glancing at the surrounding trees and rocks.

"It's good enough for me," said the Englishman; "much better than no road at all. Don't you like it?"

Norman continued to survey the road, a perplexed frown on his face.

"It's good road," he said at last, "and I've seen it before. I remember that rock up there with the patch of quartz in it; it's shaped like a shield. We went over this road in the buckboard. It's the road from Bitter Springs to Split Cañon."

Ronald paled and started back as though to flee over the hills.

"A little more, and we'd have marched right into Split Cañon," he said huskily.

"Even so, I have an idea that most of the men we knew there are dead. I don't think this road is dangerous for us, if we are alert and cautious, and it leads straight to the Santa Fe Railroad."

"The stage coach runs out to Bitter Springs every morning," Ronald recalled. "We never saw the stage driver, and we're pretty well disguised as scarecrows. It would be a jolly lot better than walking any more. Those toes are killing me."

"It might be done," Norman decided. "We ought to watch the approach of the stage and see if there are any passengers we know. If it looks safe, we'll get aboard, and discuss the fares with the driver on the way. I can get money readily at Santa Fe.

"We can tell him we are farmers, and we've tramped over the hills to take the coach to Bitter Springs. I'll think out a story about the money."

With growing enthusiasm and bright hopes they selected a place of concealment in a rocky nook, and rested there while they watched the road.

The creaking of wheels and soft thuds of the hoofs of trotting horses set their hearts to fluttering. They leaned forward eagerly, but warily, and peered through the tree branches.

The coach came in sight from around a curve in the road, and they saw two men sitting on the box, one of them holding the reins, the other resting a rifle across his knees.

Bending low and squinting, they tried to see the interior of the lumbering vehicle, and when it was almost upon them they discovered that the passengers' seats were vacant.

Rather too abruptly, reckless in their excitement, they fairly tumbled into the road, dragging their blanket-wrapped packs after them.

The rifle cracked from the top of the stage and a bullet whizzed over their heads.

The guard yelled at them to put up their hands, and the driver dragged on the reins till the horses came to a stop.

They stood wide-eyed and chap-fallen with their hands in the air.

"Now, what about it?" demanded the guard. "Either you're the craziest loons in ten States, or you don't know how to hold up a stage."

"We want to ride," said Norman humbly. "We thought the stage was going too fast for us to stop it, and we've hoofed it more than twenty miles to get a ride to Bitter Springs."

"Look-a-here," snapped the driver impatiently, but not unkindly. "You're greenhorns, sure enough; I can see that. And I don't believe bandits ever look like you. But I refused to take along a couple of passengers at Split Cañon, 'cause I didn't know 'em well enough.

"We've got the express box along, and orders to run right through without stopping. The guard, here, has his orders to shoot first and ask questions afterward. You got any guns?"

"I've got a six-shooter under my coat tails," said Norman meekly.

"I'll look 'em over, Gene," the driver said to the guard.

He tied up his reins and got down, and while the guard covered the two men with the rifle, he took Norman's revolver, searched him from head to foot, then went through Ronald's clothing just as thoroughly.

"I might get in trouble," he said thoughtfully, "but you look so dumb and tired I'm kind o' sorry for you. Pile in if you want to, and I'll give back your gun when we get to the Springs."

"They're sure a hard-lookin' pair," growled the guard. "One with a black eye, and the other with his head all mashed up."

"Too much red liquor," explained Norman sheepishly.

"O' course," agreed the guard. "Any one could see that. The temp'rance preachers ought to have your pictures in a magic lantern; they could get more pledges. Got any money left, or are you tryin' to sneak a ride?"

"I'll tell you all about that," said Norman. "I'll have plenty of money when I get home, and—"

"Aw, get in the stage!" said the driver impatiently. "You can tell us your tale o' woe on the way. I wouldn't have the heart to leave you two buzzards along the road; the coyotes would get yer."

Mumbling his thanks, Norman stowed his pack in the rear of the coach and got in, followed by his companion.

"Get goin', Rufe," said the guard. "We've lost a lot o' time."

The driver placed one foot on the hub of the wheel, then paused to strike a match and light a cigar.

The midday heat was beginning to penetrate the wooded valley. A locust droned in the thicket, and a yellow-breasted meadow lark flashed from one tree to another like a flying nugget of gold.

A voice rang out in the stillness:

"Stick 'em up!"

As though he had been there all the time, a tall, slender man, dressed in black from top to toe, a black mask covering his whole head, stood at the left of the coach with a long-barreled revolver in each hand.

The express guard, facing toward the right, whirled about with a sharp cry, swinging his rifle across his body.

There were three shots, in less than that number of seconds. One of them came from the rifle, but too late by a fraction of a second. The guard pitched forward, dropped his weapon, and tumbled with a crash upon the pole between the wheel horses.

The driver, with the cigar between his teeth, crumpled over the wheel, and rolled to the side of the road as the frightened horses started forward.

The bandit fired again, and one of the leaders pitched to its knees and fell under a tangle of harness, and the other terrified animals piled on top of it, kicking and fighting for liberty.

Three more shots, and all the horses lay still.

The road agent had not moved a step from his position at the roadside. He was as cool and unruffled as a gentleman out for a morning walk, and there was something distinguished in his bearing.

He turned his curtained face toward the two men in the rear seat, and seemed satisfied that their arms were held sufficiently high.

"Get down, slowly," he said in a soft, rather pleasant voice. "Keep your hands high. One false move and you're dead men. I never miss."

Norman and Ronald obeyed with alacrity, and with attention to every detail of the instructions. They were convinced that the man in black was indisputably master of the situation.

"Now, turn slowly, arms well up, and walk in single file down the road, keeping to the middle," ordered the bandit almost politely. "Don't turn your heads or try to look back, and don't start to run. I'm a dead shot at a hundred yards or better."

As he spoke, suavely and a little pompously, a shot burst from the right side of the road. The driver had turned over and fired through the spokes of the wheels.

The bandit, taken by surprise, leaped nimbly aside and darted behind a tree, as another futile shot came from the driver's revolver.

Norman Trent, as startled as the bandit, forgot the latter's strict orders, wavered uncertainly for an instant, then leaped for cover behind the rounded panels of the coach body.

Behind him, near his feet, lay the driver, turned on his back, his eyes open and ghastly, and the smoking revolver lying loosely in his relaxed hand.

Impulsively, recklessly, Norman stooped swiftly and caught up the weapon. With his head covered by the thick panel, he thrust the revolver through the open window and fired three times in the direction of the tree that shielded the robber.

A startled exclamation from Ronald drew his attention, and, turning, he saw half a dozen mounted men charging down the road from the direction of Split Cañon.

It was all too astonishing and bewildering to seem like reality. He felt dizzy and faint. He had raised his head and was standing with it in full view of the bandit behind the tree, but not a shot came from the evil genius who never missed his target.

Diverted even from the charging horsemen, he stepped to the rear of the coach and peered around the corner, the revolver ready in his hand. There was no longer a man behind the tree: the gentleman in black had departed as mysteriously as he came.

Ronald, now wildly excited and alarmed by the sight of the horsemen, darted suddenly to the dead driver and snatched Norman's revolver from his belt.

"It's the end," he shouted tragically. "We'll die fighting, old chap!"

Norman was stunned. He stood as in a trance.

The horses rushed almost upon him, then halted as their riders reined them to their haunches.

"Drop those guns! Put up your hands!" roared the leader of the posse. "I'm Sheriff Kemp, of this county. You're my prisoners."

Norman obeyed meekly, and Ronald did likewise, though he muttered incoherent objections and imprecations.

Members of the posse lifted the bodies of the driver and the express guard and reported that life was extinct in both.

"A dear job for you!" growled the sheriff savagely. "Murder and highway robbery!"

"We're not guilty!" cried Norman, finding his voice. "We were passengers. The stage was held up here by a tall, slim man in black, with a black mask. The guard fired his rifle at him, and missed, and the bandit killed the guard and the driver."

His voice quavered and grew shrill with excitement, but he went on.

"He—the man in black, made us get out of the coach and start down the road. Then—you see, the driver wasn't quite dead, and he fired his revolver at the bandit. The bandit got behind that tree over there, and I took the driver's gun and tried to shoot the man. Just then you came along, and—"

"That 'll do!" snarled the sheriff. "I never saw *you* before. What's your name?"

"Norman," answered the shaking prisoner.

"Got a handle to it?"

"Why — yes. Harry Norman. That's my name: Harry T. Norman."

"Yours?" the sheriff snapped at Ronald.

"Ronald Browne."

"They'll do till we get better ones," sneered the officer. "I was going to ask where you came from—where you'd been operating, but you're too green for that. Looks something like a first job, and a dirty one.

"What you been doing, punching cows? Up north—Colorado? Kansas? Got it in your heads to be road agents, hey?"

"I tell you," began Norman desperately, "we didn't—"

"Don't tell me anything more like that. Do I look like I'd swallow any schoolboy yarn like that, now? You've heard all about the Black Parson, of course. Black clothes, black mask, tall and slim. You think you can ballyrag me into believing he was here.

"But I'm too old a bird at this game, young feller. If the Parson had been here, it would 'a' been a cleaner job, and the express box wouldn't be up there on the roof of the coach."

"Say, sheriff, I know these bums," spoke up a member of the posse. "They been locked up in Split Cañon for some time. The big one shot Brad Upton. They was in the fight the other night, along with Hugo Bebb. Right now they think they're disguised, but I just got on to who they were."

Sheriff Kemp's stern eyes opened wide, and he swore magnificently in his astonishment.

"Well, now!" he growled. "Maybe you fellers aren't quite as green as I thought you were. Maybe I'll have to apologize. But I guess I can bear up under the disgrace, seeing as I've made quite a haul this morning.

"Murder wouldn't be a fair charge in your case; better say you're charged with *massacre!* 'Slaughterhouse Harry,' we'll have to call *you,* and your little friend is the 'Butcher Boy.' Ten men dead in that mill up in the adobe the other night, and Marshal Bebb lying at the point of death right now.

"Tie these murder experts up good and tight, boys," he added, summoning his deputies. "Billy the Kid was a greenhorn. We want at least six men to guard these babies night and day."

CHAPTER IX.

HIS LEGAL RIGHTS.

THE second reception of Norman Trent and Ronald Ingram-Browne in Split Cañon was more impressive, awe inspiring, and largely attended than the first. On both occasions there were elements of the picturesque, and there was a question as to which could be declared the more novel.

It was no common thing for two young men to ride into town in a gayly decorated buckboard as escort to a lady who had been a bride and widow all within an hour. But on this second visit they attracted attention and enthusiastic applause by coming on horseback in a novel manner.

One charger did for the pair of them, and they rode with their faces toward the horse's tail, their hands tied tightly behind their backs, and their ankles bound by ropes beneath the horse's belly.

Like wildfire spread the news of their desperate escapade, and sober persons stood awed and silent, staring at them as one might stare at Old Nick himself, bound and dragged through the market place.

They were killers, dead shots, men who escaped like sorcerers from slaughter pens in which ordinary fellows died by the dozen. They flew from dark deeds to darker ones, and flitted over vast stretches of country by night, like birds of evil, quitting the scene of one outrage to appear in another place and outdo themselves in the extravagance and villainy of their mischief.

Before they were loosed from the horse in front of the lockup, it was passed from mouth to mouth as authentic that they shot Hugo Bebb, who lay dying; that Bud Ridley fell before their guns, as did a dozen of the RX cowboys. Brad Upton still wavered between life and death, stricken by their deadly bullets, and in a short morning's work they had sent the stage driver and the express guard to "Kingdom Come."

Legends of the heroic and criminal Billy the Kid were revived along the street, but a little apologetically. He had killed but a score of men, and it was rumored that these demon twins must have accounted for double that number, if the whole truth were known.

Young girls giggled and screamed shrilly when the villains so much as turned their heads. Carlotta Gallegos, the Mexican beauty, appeared dramatically at a second-story window, gave the wretches a daring and ravishing smile, and threw them a red flower to which she had touched her lips.

A young deputy of the sheriff's posse passed the word that Sheriff Kemp had rechristened the outlaws: they were no longer Messrs. Norman and Browne, but Slaughterhouse Harry and the Butcher Boy.

The people mouthed the names, savoring them on the tongue like delectable morsels, the while they secretly rejoiced that Split Cañon had achieved distinction above that of many of its prouder neighbors.

Norman and Ronald were cast into the very room that they had left on the memorable day of the already classical battle in the adobe hut—destined to be celebrated in that county as "The Little Alamo."

They wore leg irons now, and handcuffs, and no privileges were granted them.

Two grimly solemn guards sat with them, each with a rifle across his knees, and in the lower room, formerly occupied by Marshal Bebb and Deputy Bud Ridley, quarters were established for the permanent guard—permanent while the doomed miscreants should be left in Split Cañon.

The prisoners missed the affable and obliging Bud, but they had little inclination for sociability now, and the guards were cold and taciturn.

They gathered, however, from what they heard around them, that Sheriff Ira Kemp, a famous champion of law and order, had come down from the county seat to "clean up" Split Cañon, immediately after the battle of the Little Alamo.

Already he was regulating the habits of Split Cañonians, publishing regulations for the dance halls and gambling palaces. And he had addressed the miners and the cattlemen in two public meetings and warned them to mend their manners and their morals.

The RX Ranch was in bad odor, yet its owner, Rance Buxton, was named acting town marshal, pending the demise or recovery of Hugo Bebb, and it was reported that he was cooperating vigorously with the sheriff in the renovating process and rehabilitation of the town.

The weary, disgusted, soul-sick captives had little opportunity for discussions or exchanges of confidence under the new regime. What they wished to say to each other in private had to be whispered in short sentences while the guards were engaged in affairs of their own.

Ronald was nearly given over to despair, and Norman restrained him with great difficulty from demanding peremptorily that the British government be informed of his predicament.

"*Your* friends ought to know," whispered Ronald, barely moving his lips.

"Not yet," breathed the other.

"Sometimes—lynching—no warning."

"Not with Sheriff Kemp," mumbled Norman confidently.

The first night passed with cruel discomfort for the shackled men. The food was coarse and poorly cooked, and they were still sick. Ronald begged permission to dress his maimed foot, but the guard declined to loosen the leg irons, and he could not get his boot off.

Next morning Sheriff Kemp and Acting Marshal Buxton came into the cell, accompanied by two strangers.

It seemed to Norman that he recognized one of the men, but he could not readily place him.

There was an irritating moment of suspense. The four visitors conversed in hoarse whispers, while they stared at the captives as at wild beasts in a cage.

Presently one of the strangers, the shorter of the two, said aloud:

"Sure it's them, sheriff; I'd know 'em anywhere. They're the two fellers that got off my train. I talked with 'em and told 'em not to do it. Little I thought what kind o' critters I was talkin' to."

A wave of remembrance and sickening dread flashed over Norman. The little man in citizen's clothes was the train conductor on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad. He had looked different in a brass-buttoned uniform.

"I can identify them ready enough, sheriff," spoke up the taller man, whom Norman had never seen before. "I only had a glimpse of 'em, but it *took*. I'll never forget what I saw.

"As I was telling you," he went on earnestly, "we passed the west-bound train on the siding, and we were getting up speed, when one of the passengers yelled out to me to look. He yelled so loud I was plumb scairt.

"I sure looked, and—what I saw! They were alongside the tracks, you might say. Close enough for us to see 'em all plain. Me and the passengers, we knew right off the man on the ground was dead—you could tell by the way he laid. This big feller here never looked at the train, as I could see, but he stood there kind o' unconcerned, holdin' a gun right in his hand.

"The red-headed girl was sittin' in the buckboard, an' some of the passengers talked it over afterward with me, that she didn't seem specially excited, like anything very terrible had happened. This other feller was there all right, but I can't say I took special notice of him. I was all took up with the dead man and this big feller holdin' the gun."

Sheriff Kemp scowled at the man.

"Why didn't you stop the train?"

"Just because it's against orders, sheriff; that's why! We've had trouble enough out here with train robbers, and Injuns goin' on the warpath all of a sudden. We ain't stoppin' trains any more."

The sheriff walked over to Norman Trent.

"Well, Slaughterhouse Harry, you killed Tim Sharpe, did you?"

"Yes, I did," answered Norman, in a steady voice, and Ronald gasped and turned white.

"Got off a train to do it, eh? What for?"

Norman hesitated an instant.

"I never saw the man before. He was threatening a woman's life. I interfered, and I shot him in self-defense."

"Oh, you did! You're one o' these noble, gallant man-killers, are you? Did the stage driver and the express guard happen to offend your red-headed lady friend?"

"I've nothing more to say," replied Norman. "I'm within my legal rights in declining to answer any more questions, sheriff."

"One o' these gin-mill lawyers, too!" sneered the sheriff. "You and your rights! A right good piece of hemp and a pine box is about all the rights coming to you, my boy.

"Say, Harry, how many men do you reckon you've killed, anyhow? Have you bothered to keep tally?"

"I'm not a murderer," said Norman tensely, and his face was as white now as Ronald's. "I never killed a man until I shot Sharpe in self-defense. I was a passenger on the train, coming west, and—"

"And you were a passenger on the stage yesterday, hey? The postmaster here says the stage left here without a single passenger. You can lie about as easy as you can shoot, I reckon. I suppose that's within your legal rights, too!"

"I sha'n't say any more," asserted Norman, bitterly angry with himself for allowing the sheriff to draw so much from him.

"Too bad you can't tell me why the red-headed girl lied about Sharpe's murder. Said her own husband did it, at that. She's a hot specimen! No wonder she's red-headed."

"I never met Mrs. Lane but twice," said Norman, unwillingly, but feeling that he was forced to speak once more. "From all that I've heard, I believe she's a good woman, of high principles. She owed nothing to her dissolute husband, and she shielded me out of pure gratitude, because I went to her rescue. Sharpe had fired at her, and threatened to kill her."

"Never met her but twice, but you're a fast young man when it comes to making love and killing, aren't you? Mrs. Lane's gratitude was what made her cook your food when you were locked up here before, I suppose.

"She and her blind father are supposed to be poor—having a hard time, but she managed to bring you chicken and all the delicacies of the season. Maybe she and her daddy are getting along a little better since you began to take an interest in her."

"I'm in irons," said Norman. "You are occupying a high public office, so you have the right to insult me and slander women as much as you please."

He darted a look at the officer that made the latter start back involuntarily.

"I'm right glad you *are* in irons, Harry!" chuckled the sheriff. "I acknowledge your ability as a killer, and I'd rather have you in irons than any other way, except with a hemp necktie on. Much obliged for the information you've furnished us this morning."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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HELLO, SPRINGTIME!

INTO yesterday the winter passes,
Daisies peer,
Mammy's fixing sulphur and molasses,
Spring is here!

Once again a young man's fancy tingles,
He's in love,
And his old man's busy nailing shingles
Up above.

Birds sing sweet on trees and garden patches,
Pussy roams.
Woe to those the agile feline catches
Building homes.

Soon, dead grandmas will be back in season
With baseball,
And Babe Ruth will be the greatest reason
For it all.

You can't act like the canine in the manger
Any more,
When you find that Springtime is the stranger
At the door.

Pat Costello.

It Never Got Into the Papers

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "Madame Storey in the Toils," "The Pot of Pansies," etc.

A NOVELETTE IN TWO PARTS—PART II

XI.

AFTER a while Henry Varick raised his head and said, with a kind of weary defiance: "Well, suppose I did see my father yesterday afternoon? What of it?"

"Nothing," replied Mme. Storey mildly. "I am only wondering why you tried to conceal the fact?"

"Well, I was tempted because it seemed easy to conceal it. I came through a secret entrance, and I met nobody. Nobody knew I was in the house except—my mother."

"And Miss Gilsey," put in Mme. Storey.

He stared at her again. "You are a terrible woman!" he murmured. "Yes, Miss Gilsey saw me come, because she is always with my mother. But she would not have betrayed me."

"Nor your mother's maids?"

"Nor my mother's maids either. I did not notice whether they saw me or not. As for my reason for concealing my visit, surely that must be clear to you. It appears that my father was taken ill a few minutes after I had left him. Anybody could foresee what a nasty story that would start. The scapegrace son, and all that. My whole past life raked up.

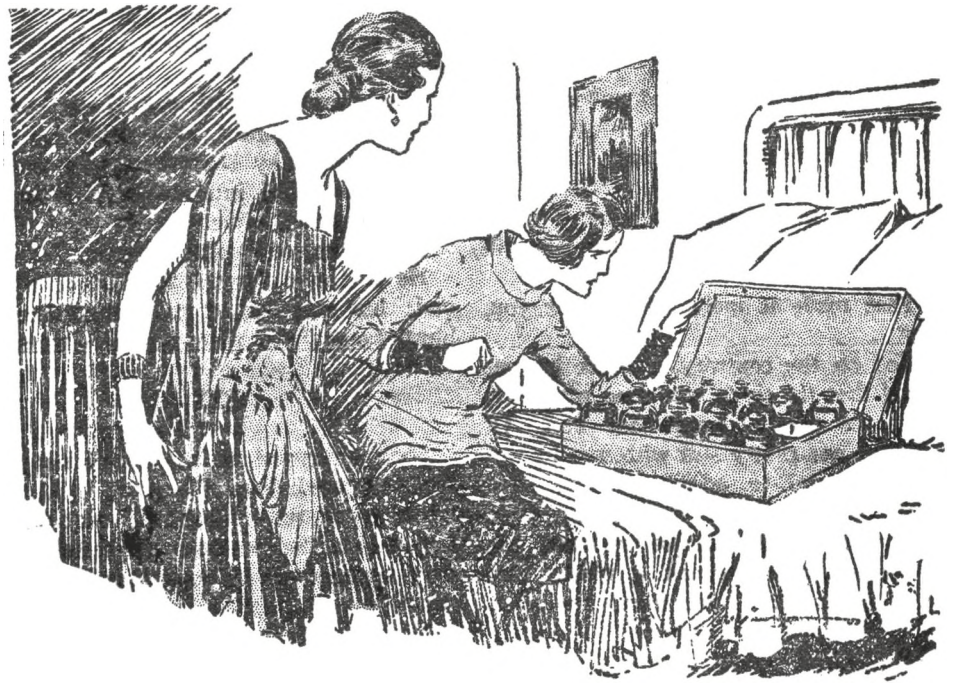
"My object was simply to keep a dirty mess out of the papers. I had no fear of the outcome. Why, no sensible person would believe that I had done it. A son does not poison his father! It is incredible! Am I a monster?"

Mme. Storey made no comment.

"And anyhow," he went on, "what a fool I would be to make an attempt on my father's life when he had just made a will cutting me off?"

"But you did not know that," she coldly pointed out. "You told me you had just

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 24



found it out. Yesterday all you knew was that your father *intended* to change his will. On former occasions it had not been accomplished so quickly."

The young man pressed his head between his hands.

"Oh, God, what a frightful position I am in!" he groaned.

"Why did you come back yesterday?" asked Mme. Storey.

"For the most natural reason in the world. I had cooled off. I was sorry for some of the things I had said. I hoped he might be sorry too."

"Were you prepared then to accept the princess?"

"Oh, no! There was no question about that," he answered quickly. "I just wanted to say I was sorry. I suppose it won't be believed, but I loved my father. Besides, why not confess it? I am only human. I was worried about the will. I care for money as little as any man, but the threat that had been held over me was that Theodore Varick, my father's nephew, was to get it all, in order to carry on the family traditions.

"The thought that that—excuse me—that *he* might be able to crow over me, that snooper, that worm—he's not a man, he's a water cooler! Why, for the last five years he's been sucking up to my dad, sympathizing with him for having such a graceless son! Gad! Once I had the pleasure of smashing his pasty face, and I hope to do it again! Anything to keep Theodore out! I came back prepared to eat humble pie, to agree to anything short of marrying myself to that foreign woman."

"You went direct to your mother's room?" prompted Mme. Storey.

"Yes."

"Did you send word to your father that you were in the house?"

"No, indeed. He would only have refused to see me. I went to his study. I went through all the rooms of the two suites so I wouldn't show myself outside."

"Was the princess still with him?"

"No, he was alone when we—"

"Who was with you?" interrupted Mme. Storey.

"Nobody," he answered. "A slip of the tongue. I was thinking of my mother. We had been discussing whether she ought to come with me, but she didn't."

"Now, come," said my employer with dry good humor, "isn't it a fact that Mrs. Varick was out of the house altogether at that hour?"

"Well, yes," he admitted sullenly. "If you know everything already, why ask me? She was out. Is that important?"

"No," said Mme. Storey. "Go on."

"Cristina must have just gone; I could smell her perfume, and my father was still fussed."

"That made it more difficult for you, then."

"No; on the contrary, I think he was relieved that the thing was done with. He treated me pretty decent—for him. Of course, he was pretty stiff with me; he was never the one to admit he had been wrong. But I think he showed it a little. At any rate, he didn't refuse my hand. He had his tea, and I drank a whisky and soda. Gabbitt must have found the glass. Was it he who gave me away?"

"No," Mme. Storey told him. "Every servant in the house knew you had been here, and all of them lied."

"Well, bless their hearts!" he said with a twisted smile. "I seem to get everybody in wrong."

"What did your father say to you?" she asked.

"He scolded me for having sneaked into the house secretly. Said it was very infra dig. He was afraid somebody might find me in his study. He sent me away, and told me if I would come back after things had cleared up—by that he meant after Cristina had left the country; she was not named between us—and would come in by the *front door,* he would be glad to see me."

"He did not refer to the new will he had made?"

"Not a word! He wouldn't, you see, if he was feeling more kindly toward me. He would just tear it up afterward. At any rate, I thought he had climbed down a good deal, and I went away happy. At Buffalo, in the middle of the night, the telegram was put on the train that brought me back. And now everything is ruined! My father is dead, and Theodore has his shoes, I suppose!"

His head went down between his hands again.

"Where were you going on the train?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Nowhere in particular. Just keeping out of the way until Cristina sailed."

"How unlucky that there was no witness to the final interview with your father," remarked Mme. Storey.

It had the sound of a question.

He hesitated for the fraction of a second; his eyes bolted painfully; then he blurted out: "No, there was no witness."

XII.

Soon afterward we left the dining room and sauntered down the great hall. Following upon the outburst of emotion that I have described, we had assumed the ordinary appearances of good form. It is instinctive.

Nothing of my employer's manner suggested that Henry Varick had rendered himself an object of suspicion by his disclosures. She talked of ordinary matters in an ordinary manner. He answered in kind, of course, but I could see from his uneasy glances that he did not know what to make of her.

He was wondering whether he had to deal with an agent of the police who was trying to entrap him, or with a woman of the world who took everything as it came. As a matter of fact, my employer was both.

"The library is at the other end," he said. "It's a pleasant room. Let's go in there."

It was a most inviting place, but "library" I judged to be a polite fiction; there were no books visible. Though the spring was well advanced, there was a wood fire burning on the hearth which gave off a most agreeable warmth.

We ranged ourselves before it in luxurious easy chairs, and talked like congenial acquaintances who had nothing in particular on their minds. This sort of rambling, casual conversation is one of Mme. Storey's most insidious lines of attack, and I could see that Henry Varick was growing more and more uneasy. He must have been under a terrible strain. The

only other light beside the fire was given by a shaded reading lamp in a corner.

I say we talked, but the truth is they talked, while I sat perfectly silent, watching that handsome face in the firelight, haggard with passionate emotion. It was most of all tragic when he smiled in a reckless boy fashion, trying to carry things off lightly.

While we sat there a footman came in with a note for Mme. Storey. This I judged must come from Inspector Rumsey via the underground channel they had provided.

She read it with a bland face, tore it into small pieces, and tossed them on the fire.

"From Inspector Rumsey," she said. "He says he can trace no sales of aconitine recently."

I guessed that there was more in it than this, and so, apparently, did Henry Varick. He watched the little pieces catch fire one by one with an expression of balked curiosity.

More conversation followed. Mme. Storey discussed her work on the case with apparent frankness.

Some time afterward, long enough anyhow for us not to connect what she said with the arrival of the note, she brought the talk around to the plan of the second floor.

"In order to be able to figure out what happened I must have that clear in my mind," she said. "I visited most of the rooms to-day, but I didn't like to go into your suite without having you along."

There was but one thing that he could reply to this. "Shall we go up now?"

"If you don't mind."

It was rather touching to find in that grand house a simple boy's room. I judged that it had been changed very little since Henry Varick was fifteen or sixteen years old.

The school pennants were still tacked on the walls, along with that type of picture that adolescent boys like, depicting flamboyant misses in sports clothes. There were fencing foils and masks hung up; a set of boxing gloves; a shotgun, a rifle, and various sporting trophies.

There was an armoire full of baseball bats, hockey sticks, tennis rackets and like impedimenta. Evidently young Henry had been no effete son of luxury.

This was the "study," which, like "library" downstairs, was a misnomer. Two shelves, and those not full, contained all the books. Many of them, I noticed, dealt with chemistry and drugs.

Mme. Storey pulled out a fat green volume entitled "Pharmacology and Therapeutics," and skimmed through it.

"Have you consulted this lately?" she asked.

"Not in years," he answered carelessly.

She then did something that I had seen her do before; a simple trick that has an uncanny effectiveness. Holding the book loosely between her two hands, she let it fall open of itself. She repeated this two or three times.

"Yet I should say that it *has* been consulted recently," she said quietly; "and more than once. See, it opens of itself on page 425."

We looked over her shoulder, he on one side, I on the other, and there we saw staring at us from the page a chapter heading:

XXI—ACONITINE

It gave me a horrid shock; Henry Varick too. He stepped back, his face working spasmodically.

"Well," he asked harshly, "does that prove anything?"

"No," said Mme. Storey, closing the book and putting it back.

"Anyhow," he went on in a loud, strained voice, "I am perfectly familiar with the action of aconite. I would not have to consult that book."

This was an answer that cut both ways.

The next object of interest in the room was a glass fronted curio cabinet that contained the schoolboy's collections. One saw the usual things neatly set out on the shelves; the minerals, the fossils, the arrowheads and pipe bowls. And on the lower shelves, butterflies, beetles, and birds' eggs.

It was more comprehensive than the usual youngsters' gatherings, because this boy had been well supplied with money. I could picture the handsome, intent stripling arranging his treasures.

"Where is your collection of drugs?" asked Mme. Storey quietly.

It came like a blow. He caught his breath and started to answer, but she checked him with a sudden, involuntary gesture.

"Ah, don't lie to me!" she said with real feeling. "It shames you and me both. I am to blame. I will deceive you no longer. The letter that I got from Inspector Rumsey said:

"'I have learned that Henry Varick, while he was engaged in the drug business, caused a collection to be made of samples of every drug. The samples were contained in a walnut case which was sent to his home. Presumably the drug aconitine was included among the rest, but I cannot verify this at the moment. See if you can trace the case.'"

"I wasn't going to lie to you," Henry Varick said in his rapid, strained voice. "I had such a collection, but I destroyed it two years ago. When the trust busted I was sick of the business. Besides, such a thing was too dangerous to have lying around."

It was only too clear that he was lying then. It made me feel sick at heart.

"How did you destroy it?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Burned it up in the furnace downstairs."

She said no more, but led the way into the bedroom adjoining, a bare and sparsely furnished chamber almost like a hospital room.

Amid the almost oppressive luxury of that house it was like a breath of fresh air. In one corner stood a narrow white bed.

Mme. Storey stood in the doorway looking around her without speaking. Out of the corner of my eye I could see that the face of the young man beside me was livid and sweating.

I suffered with him. Finally my employer said in a deadly quiet voice:

"Turn down the mattress, Bella."

A groan was forced from the young man that seemed to come from his very depths: "Oh, God! I'm lost!"

With trembling arms I obeyed my mistress. Between mattress and springs there was revealed a flat, square walnut box of the sort that artists use to carry their paints in. Evidently it had been hastily thrust there while a better hiding place was sought, or a chance to destroy it.

"Have you anything to say?" asked Mme. Storey.

He broke into a bitter fleering laughter.

"Say? What do you want me to say? You've got a case against me, haven't you? Better proceed with it. I guess I've reached the point where I'd better keep my mouth shut without advice of counsel."

This was merely the bravado of one who was half crazed.

Meanwhile I had laid the box on the bed, and let the mattress fall back into place. The box was locked.

"Have you the key?" asked Mme. Storey.

"What's the use?" he cried. "I admit the stuff was there, and it's gone now."

Nevertheless, he produced his keys.

"Have those keys ever been out of your possession?" she asked.

"No."

"Was there ever another key?"

"No."

"When did you put it under the mattress?" she asked.

"This afternoon. I intended to burn it to-night when the house was quiet."

"Where was it before that?"

"In the curio cabinet."

"Has anybody a key to that cabinet but yourself?"

"No."

By this time the box was open. It was lined with red velvet, and was divided into scores of little grooves holding glass phials full of drugs, stopped with wax.

Each phial had its label neatly pasted around it; and as a further precaution, there was a number under each groove, and an index pasted into the top of the box.

One groove was empty! Under it was the number 63, and as our eyes flew to the index above, we read opposite 63:

Aconitine.

XIII.

MME. STOREY sent for Jarboe, and Mr. Henry was locked in his bedroom. The

windows looked out upon a stone paved well or court about thirty feet below, and there was no way he could have escaped short of wings.

However, the house was full of the young man's friends, and my mistress telephoned to Inspector Rumsey for a guard to be sent. This man, Manby, was posted in the outer room of the suite.

Jarboe was heartbroken by this turn of affairs. We took nobody else into our confidence. When Mrs. Varick learned her son was a prisoner, we expected the devil to pay.

Mme. Storey and I slept in the house. Early next morning the body of Commodore Varick was privately removed to the family vault in Woodlawn cemetery, there to await further orders from the police.

There had been no official reading of the will, but everybody in the house now seemed to know what it contained. The commodore had created a great trust fund of which his wife was to be sole beneficiary during her lifetime. Upon her death the fortune was to be divided into three equal parts of which one was to go to the New York Hospital, one to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and one to Yale University.

Mr. Henry's worst fear was not realized inasmuch as Mr. Theodore Varick's name did not appear.

In describing the dramatic scenes that took place inside the house, I must not omit mention of the efficient but quite unspectacular shadowing work that was going on outside. There was a small army of operatives engaged on the case. To insure secrecy Inspector Rumsey had agreed that at any rate for the first twenty-four hours our men should be principally used on this work.

Every move of Dr. Slingluff's and Miss Priestley's was followed. On Miss Gilsey we could get no line because she lived in the house, and had never left it since the murder. The valet, Gabbitt, and indeed all the servants in the house were picked up whenever they went out. Frequent reports from these operatives reached Mme. Storey under cover to Mrs. Varick.

In addition to these outside men, our best operative, Crider, was installed as a footman inside the house. Crider's work, however, resulted in nothing.

He complained that from the very first, every servant in the place was aware of who he was, and became mum in his presence. This looked as if Jarboe had played us false, since none but he knew where Crider had come from.

By a clever piece of detective work, the police had established that the first anonymous letter—the one addressed to Inspector Rumsey—had been mailed in a pillar box on Lexington Avenue somewhere between Thirty-Sixth Street and Forty-Second Street shortly before eleven o'clock on Tuesday night; whereas the second letter—addressed to Mme. Storey—had been dropped in a chute at the branch post office in the Grand Central Station at three thirty on Wednesday afternoon. The peculiarly formed characters had aided in the tracing of these letters.

A report had been received from the chemists to whom Commodore Varick's medicines had been sent the day before. It was to the effect that they contained nothing but what was represented on the labels; the first a tincture of digitalis of the usual strength; the second capsules containing a simple compound of pepsin and bismuth.

Mme. Storey and I established ourselves in Commodore Varick's office. My mistress dictated to me some notes she had taken of an examination of one of the maids while I was busy elsewhere.

This maid, Nellie Hannaford by name, had removed the tea things from the commodore's suite. She said that Gabbitt had already been sent for to come to his master, but there were three doors between her and the commodore's bedroom, and she saw nothing, nor heard anything that led her to suppose the master had been taken ill. In fact she hadn't heard anything about his sickness until after he was dead.

She said she found on the study table two empty cups that had contained tea, and another cup in the service pantry full of tea that had been made and not drunk. Four of the tea balls had been used, indicating that four cups of tea had been made.

The cups belonged to a tea service that

was kept in the commodore's suite, and it was her duty to wash them in the pantry, and return them to the shelves. She denied having found a glass that had contained whisky and soda. In making this last statement we supposed she was lying.

"Who could the third cup of tea have been for?" I asked involuntarily.

"Think, Bella," said my employer with a smile. "Surely it was obvious when we questioned Henry Varick last night, that he did not go to his father's study alone. Mrs. Varick was out of the house, remember."

The picture of a lovely, blue-eyed face rose before my mind's eyes, a face stony with distress.

Estelle Gilsey! I thought in amazement. Another one! Good Heavens! This young man was entangled among women like a horseman in a thicket!

While we were still engaged in routine work Miss Priestley entered the room. The tall dark girl still had faintly the look of one suffering from shock.

Her curious parrotlike utterance carried out the idea. What she said had no relation to the remote, somber glance of her dark eyes. It was her room that we were working in, and Mme. Storey apologized politely.

"Oh," said Miss Priestley with a gesture, "I scarcely know what right *I* have here now that the commodore is gone. The bottom has fallen out of everything. It is just a blind instinct that brings me back to finish his work as far as I can. I will carry it into the study if I am in your way."

"No, indeed!" said Mme. Storey. "If anybody moves, it shan't be you. At present, we are only engaged at desk work."

Lighting a cigarette, my employer leaned back in her chair, and started chatting with the girl in offhand, friendly fashion. She told Miss Priestley many of the details of the case that had come to light overnight, but not the more important developments.

And then, characteristically, she graduated by insensible degrees from the act of giving information into that of seeking it.

"I expect that will be a very interesting book," she remarked with a nod toward the pile of typescript that the secretary had taken from a drawer.

"Oh, yes!" said Miss Priestley "the commodore was acquainted with all of the most eminent persons of his time."

"And of course his end will give the book a tragic interest now."

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed the girl with one of her curious wooden gestures. "It is too dreadful to reflect that what you say is true!"

"Is it nearly finished?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Yes. I shall be able to bring it up to the end of 1918. That will include all the most interesting parts of the commodore's life."

"How long have you been working on it?"

"Since last May. It is just a year since he engaged me to help him with it."

"A year!" repeated Mme. Storey. "Bless me! Isn't that a long time to take in writing a book? I understood that books were written overnight nowadays."

"Not this one," said the girl, patting the sheets. "The commodore took the greatest pains in polishing his style. Besides, you must remember that he was a man of many engagements. He could not spare very much time to it."

"Did he work on it when he was in Europe last winter?"

"No. He had no intention of doing so. The script was left here."

"What did you do during that time?"

"I stayed at home. The commodore was good enough to pay me my salary while he was away. I was so familiar with the work that he wished to be sure of getting me to go on with it when he returned."

"Was Mr. Henry interested in this work of his father's?"

"I can hardly say that he was interested in it. Mr. Henry is not very literary."

"But he knew that it existed?"

"Oh, yes. He was in and out of the house all last summer at Easthampton while we were working on it. A reconciliation took place between Mr. Henry and his father in June, and he stayed a month with us."

The conversation was rudely broken off at this point.

If my description of the plan of the house

was clear, it will be remembered that the room beyond the commodore's office was Mr. Henry's study. There was a door between, but it was not used.

I suppose it had been locked when the rooms were first divided into suites. From the next room we heard a suppressed shriek.

Mme. Storey and I both jumped to our feet, but Miss Priestley was before us. That strange girl, as if electrified by the sound, was out of the door like a flash and in through the next one, Mme. Storey and I making a bad second and third. In Mr. Henry's study the situation could be read at a glance.

Manby, the detective, stood barring the way to the bedroom door. Facing him stood Estelle Gilsey frozen with horror, one hand clapped over her mouth as if to still an uncontrollable need to shriek.

A black dress emphasized the fragility of her fair beauty. She turned to my mistress.

"He won't let me in!" she gasped. "He is a policeman! Henry is arrested!"

Before my mistress could answer her, Miss Priestley spoke. The dark girl held herself like a very Juno then, her handsome face icy with scorn.

Her self-control was in very odd contrast to her mad dash out of the room just now. Verily, a woman's infatuation leads her to cut strange capers.

I perceived in Julia Priestley still another victim. She said with a superb air of scorn:

"What are you doing here?"

The blond girl, beyond half a glance, paid no attention to her. She repeated her question to my mistress: "Is he arrested?"

"What are you doing in his room?" reiterated Miss Priestley. "In his bedroom? Have you no shame?"

Miss Gilsey turned on her then. It appeared that the blue eyes could flash sparks, too.

"What business is it of yours?" she demanded.

"You would not have dared while the commodore was alive!" cried the other girl. "His body has scarcely been carried out of the house. You are shameless!"

"Be quiet!" cried the blond girl, stamping her foot. "Everybody knows what's the matter with *you!*"

What a scene! It appeared that the delicate little thing could show her claws, too. We are indeed all alike under our skins.

My mistress was taking it all in with a sphinxlike regard. To add to the confusion Mr. Henry began to pound on the other side of the bedroom door.

"Let me out! Let me out!"

Mme. Storey nodded to the detective, who thereupon opened the door. Henry Varick seemed to catapult out of the inner room. He had eyes for none of us except Miss Gilsey. He seized her in his arms.

"Oh, my darling!" he murmured.

She, too, forgot the world. Her arms wreathed themselves around his neck.

"Henry! Henry!" she murmured.

I thought she was about to faint.

So it was revealed at last which one among the many girls young Henry favored. I was hardly surprised, for I had seen from the beginning that there was some sort of an understanding between them.

Julia Priestley surveyed this scene with cold and amused scorn, but the rising and falling of her breast betrayed the inner tempest. She uttered two words:

"Good comedy!"

That drew Henry's attention to her. When he perceived who it was, he dropped his girl as if she had been red hot.

He flushed and then paled, and a craven look came into his face that was very painful to see if you were fond of him. The tall girl seemed taller still, regarding him like an empress with flashing eyes.

He could not face the situation. He turned and fled back into his bedroom.

Estelle made as if to follow him.

"Henry!" she gasped.

But at that moment there was a knock on the outer door, and she stopped. Strange it was to see how we all drew masks over our faces.

There was one thing all were agreed upon in that house; to hush things up. Estelle allowed the detective to lock the bedroom door. Meanwhile Mme. Storey opened the other.

It was Jarboe, showing an anxious face.

Evidently he had heard something, but had succeeded in keeping the others off. Mme. Storey reassured him with a word, and he went away again.

But the interruption had put a permanent quietus on the scene. Both girls had had time to reflect on the danger of giving too much away. Each was now elaborately ignoring the other.

As soon as Jarboe was out of the way, the tall beauty marched out of the room with her head up, and, as you might say, all colors flying. When she disappeared, the little blonde's head went down, and she began to shake.

She struggled hard to get a grip on herself, but couldn't make it. Apparently she thought it was useless to ask to see Henry again. With her face working uncontrollably, she suddenly darted for the door.

Mme. Storey detained her for a moment.

"Keep the secret from Mrs. Varick as long as possible," she said. "Don't return to her until you can show a smooth face."

The girl nodded her head, and flew.

When we returned to the next room, the other one—extraordinary creature—was tapping away at her typewriter as if she had never left it.

XIV.

THE next thing that happened was the arrival of Inspector Rumsey at the Varick house. He came in a closed car by way of the courtyard. We three retired into the commodore's study to consult.

"I must yield up my responsibility in this case," began Mme. Storey at once.

"Hey!" exclaimed the inspector, very much startled. "What's the matter?"

"The situation here grows worse and worse," said my employer, "and I cannot any longer be responsible to the police. It ties my hands. It forces me to act in a manner counter to my best judgment."

"But you have full liberty of action," he protested.

"No, I have not. Sit down, and let me tell you the whole situation." Which she proceeded to do. I helped out by reading portions of the notes I had taken.

When she had come to an end the inspector shook his head heavily.

"Bad! Bad!" he said. "I quite understand your feelings. But my duty is clear, of course. I must arrest Henry Varick."

"That is what I expected you to say," replied Mme. Storey with a faint smile; "and that is why I must wash my hands of you. Because *I am not satisfied that Henry Varick poisoned his father.*"

My heart jumped for joy hearing her say this. I blamed myself for having doubted even a moment that she was on the right side.

"But," protested the inspector, "Commodore Varick died of a dose of aconite; his son was the last person to be with him before he was taken sick; by his own admission he had eaten and drunk with his father; and Henry Varick *had the aconite.* Why, it's a *prima facie* case!"

"Not quite," said my employer. "And anyhow I don't care if it is or not. I may say that there is even more damaging evidence against Henry Varick. I know it is there, though I have not yet brought it out. It wouldn't make any difference. All the evidence in the world would not satisfy me."

"You are illogical," complained the inspector.

Mme. Storey arose and tossed her hands up.

"Ah, there's the rub!" she cried. "There's an old point of division between you and me. You work by logic, my friend, and I by intuition. Oh, everybody is on your side—everybody except Bella here, who is just another silly woman and doesn't count—lawyers, judges, juries and the great public, all on your side, all they think of is evidence. It's absurd the importance they attach to evidence, which is the most unreliable thing in the world."

"You can't take intuition into a court of law," said the inspector.

"So much the worse for the court," she retorted. "That's why so many trials are solemn farces. And look at the work it makes for me! Three-quarters of my time, I suppose, is spent in digging up 'evidence' to prove what anybody can see is so at a glance!"

It was impossible to tell whether she was speaking quite seriously or not. This was an old subject of dispute between her and the inspector.

"Well," he said, "to return to Henry Varick; what makes you suspect he may not have done it?"

"The whole character of the man, and all the former acts of his life so far as they have come to light."

"I can't go with you there!" said the inspector. "My experience teaches me that murder crops out in the most unexpected places."

I saw a retort spring to my mistress's lips, but she withheld it, for fear, I suppose, of hurting our old friend's feelings.

"Granted," she said instead. "I base my opinion of Henry Varick's innocence on what I have observed of him during the past twenty-four hours. On what he said; on the way he looked when he said it; and on the tones of his voice.

"There are men, of course, who can simulate anything, but he is not one of them. He is just an ordinary, scatter-brained, impulsive young fellow, who has been a little spoiled by too much kindness—especially from our sex; and who has never taken serious thought of anything in his life."

"I have not had the advantage of seeing him," remarked the inspector stiffly. He thought that Mme. Storey had fallen a victim to the young man's charm like all the other women.

It did not escape her.

"It is true, what you are thinking of," she said with a laugh. "I am crazy about him. But, letting that go for the moment, consider his actions. A murder by poison, of course, is not committed in the heat of passion; it requires planning. If he planned this out, is it reasonable to suppose that he would go off to Buffalo, and leave that telltale cabinet of drugs here in the house?"

"They always forget something."

"Surely! But not *the* thing."

"Does your intuition suggest who *did* commit this murder?" he asked dryly.

"I may have my notions," she said evasively, "but I do not intend to speak of them until I have dug up the evidence."

"How long will that take you?"

"How can I tell?" she said, spreading out her hands. "I may never get it. Lots of things which are as plain as the nose before your face cannot be *proved.*"

"What is the additional evidence against Henry Varick that you spoke of?" he inquired. "I suppose I have the right to ask for that."

"Oh, assuredly!" she said, turning away with a gesture. "But it's so painful! So very painful! However, all must come out, of course." She turned back. "Will you promise me not to allow this last disclosure to reach Henry Varick's ears for a week?"

"But why?" he demanded.

"Simply because it would break his heart."

"Oh, very well," he said, a little nettled. He thought we had both lost our heads over the young man.

"Let us find out if Dr. Slingluff is in the house," suggested Mme. Storey. "He has been making frequent visits to Mrs. Varick."

My heart began to beat quickly as soon as this name was mentioned. From the first I had suspected that the secret was in the possession of the family doctor.

Gabbitt was dispatched to find him. Within five minutes the valet returned, having the handsome, dignified practitioner in tow.

Mme. Storey introduced the two men to each other. As soon as he learned that he was facing a police officer, Dr. Slingluff began to sweat.

He was such a nice looking man that it was painful to see. My employer wasted no time in beating around the bush. She said:

"Doctor, we had a painful interview yesterday, and a still more painful one is before us. It was perfectly evident to me yesterday—that you were—if you will excuse me, lying! It may have been from the highest motives, but it was nevertheless—lying!"

He puffed out his cheeks. "Madam!" he cried, "your sex protects you. No man would dare—"

"Why become angry?" she interrupted

with a smile. "If I am wrong you can afford to laugh at me."

He subsided.

"What the inspector and I want to know is," she went on, "why you signed that certificate as you did, when you knew that Commodore Varick had been poisoned."

"I did not know it!" he cried. "I have already told you—"

"Now, doctor," she said cajolingly, "with your skill, your vast experience, you cannot expect us to believe that."

"I don't care whether you believe it or not!" he cried. "It's true!"

"You're a naturally truthful man," went on Mme. Storey, "and lying, like everything else, to be successful, requires practice."

She pointed to a little diamond shaped mirror that was let into the top of the escritoire.

"Look at yourself in the glass, doctor. If you saw that face upon another would you not say that the man behind it was lying?"

He would not look, of course, but strode away, cursing under his breath.

"Consider a moment," she continued. "I am your friend because I believe that you are actuated by the highest motives. Won't you fare better with me than you would with a bawling lawyer in open court? You can't get away with this. If you persist in trying to do so, an inevitable public humiliation awaits you."

He dropped into a chair and flung up his hands. "Very well," he said, "I was lying! Oh, God! What a relief!" He wiped his face and forehead with his handkerchief.

"Why did you lie?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Because the commodore asked me to. He was my oldest friend."

"Asked you to!" interpolated the inspector in astonishment.

"The moment I clapped eyes on the commodore I saw that he had been poisoned," explained Dr. Slingluff. "I suspected aconite, owing to the intolerable pricking of the skin of which he complained. No other poison gives rise to that symptom. I sent Gabbitt on the run to my office for atropine, but I saw that it was too late for atropine or anything else. My real reason was to get the man out of the room, because I saw my friend had something of a private nature to say to me.

"He took one of my hands between his; he was perfectly conscious, but I had to stoop low to hear him. He said: 'Fred, I have been poisoned!' I nodded. Then, with an agonized look of entreaty in his eyes, he went on: 'Keep it a secret, Fred. It rests with you. Oh, God! Don't let me die with the fear of disgrace and horror on me!' And so I promised, and a look of relief came into his dying eyes. Could I have acted differently?"

"Certainly not," said Mme. Storey. "But was that all?"

"That was all."

"You're an enlightened man," she said; "you're the sort of man, I take it, who reserves the right to think and to act for himself on all occasions."

"I hope so," said Dr. Slingluff.

"Well, wouldn't it be consistent with your idea of what is right to give such a promise to a dying man to ease his death, and then break it afterward if the public interest demanded?"

He saw that he was in a trap, and refused to answer.

"You see," said Mme. Storey mildly, "you have not yet told me why you lied."

Silence from the doctor.

"Commodore Varick also was a man of the world," she went on, "he must have known that in asking such a thing of you, he was asking you to betray your professional reputation, your duty to the State. Didn't he appear to be aware of this?"

"No," replied Dr. Slingluff.

"Didn't he give any reason for making such a request?"

"No!"

"Didn't he," Mme. Storey asked very softly; "didn't he tell you who poisoned him?"

The same symptoms of extreme agitation appeared in the doctor's candid face, but he answered as before: "No!"

Mme. Storey sighed. "It may help to clarify the situation," she said, "if I tell you that Henry Varick has been under ar-

rest since last night. We have built up a strong case against him."

Dr. Slingluff started up out of his chair, and dropped back again in a heap. His eyes seemed to start out of his head with horror. Then he covered his face.

"Henry arrested!" he groaned. "Then everything is over!"

"You see there is no further occasion for lying," said my mistress gently.

"No!" he murmured wretchedly. "No! God help us!"

"What were Commodore Varick's last words to you before he died?" asked Mme. Storey.

"He said," came the husky reply; "he said—'Henry poisoned me.'"

I pass over my private feelings at that moment. The others shared them at least to some degree, I fancy. As Mme. Storey had said, the situation was too painful.

After the stricken doctor had left the room, Inspector Rumsey turned to my employer in a kind of amazement.

"And you knew it all the time?" he said. "You knew what was coming?"

"Yes, I knew it," she answered soberly, "in a way."

"How *could* you have known it?"

"By intuition. There was no other way of accounting for the doctor's agony of mind yesterday when I questioned him regarding the commodore's death."

"Can you still tell me that you are not satisfied as to this young man's guilt?" demanded the inspector.

"I am not satisfied," said Mme. Storey stoutly. "In this latest disclosure there is merely an emotional effect, there is no proof. You are crushed by the horror of that father's death, believing that his son had poisoned him. Suppose he was mistaken?"

"Impossible!"

"Suppose the commodore had taken several substances into his mouth about that time, how could he know which might have contained the poison?"

"By the remembered taste afterward."

"It may have been disguised."

"You are simply hoping against hope," said Inspector Rumsey. "My duty is clear. I must take Henry Varick down to headquarters."

Mme. Storey spread out her hands in surrender.

XV.

HOWEVER, Henry Varick was not taken away just then. Mme. Storey began: "Before we part company in this case, inspector—"

He interrupted her in great concern: "Part company?"

"Well, hereafter I suppose you will be for the prosecution and I for the defense. But let us try one last expedient together with a view to discovering the truth."

"What do you propose?" he asked.

"You are familiar with the criminal procedure in France and Italy," she answered; "how they bring accused and accusers face to face in the court room, and let them shout at each other, the idea being that the truth will somehow reveal itself in spite of lying. It's not a perfect method, but it has its points; if there must be shouting in court it seems more reasonable to let the principals do it than their hired lawyers, as we arrange it over here. I propose that we have Henry Varick and his accuser in here together."

"But his father was his accuser," objected the inspector, "and he is dead."

"He has another accuser," said Mme. Storey. "Telephone to Manby to fetch him in here, and I'll produce her."

He did so. Meanwhile Mme. Storey went to the door leading into the office. When she opened it one could hear the unperturbed tapping of the typewriter within.

She said: "Miss Priestley, will you be good enough to come in here for a moment."

The secretary entered with a look of polite surprise. Inspector Rumsey's eyes opened at sight of her, and that indefinable change took place in him that one always sees in a man upon the entrance of beauty.

My heart began to beat again, foreseeing another painful scene. I wished myself away from there.

A moment later Henry Varick was brought in. The detective was sent back to wait until he was called for again. Henry

knew by instinct, I suppose, that the stranger in the room was a police official, and a desperate look came into his eyes. When he saw Julia Priestley also, he changed color, and looked around him wildly like a trapped creature.

All this created a very unfavorable impression on the inspector. Guilty! his look said just as clearly as if he had enunciated the word. But good Heavens! The unfortunate young man was half mad with grief and terror. How could he have looked any differently?

If I had been in his place, I should have looked just the same. So far as I could see, Miss Priestley never looked at him.

"Sit down," said Mme. Storey to Miss Priestley. My employer had assumed a bland and smiling air that might have concealed anything.

Mr. Henry was not invited to take a chair, but he did so anyway, not having become accustomed as yet to being treated as an inferior. So there we were, the five of us.

We were grouped around a table at the end of the room farthest from the fireplace. It was the same table upon which tea had been served two days before—the commodore's last meal.

The inspector was seated directly at the table, and myself a little behind him. My mistress had told me not to produce a notebook, so I had nothing to do but sit with my hands in my lap and look on.

Mr. Henry had his back to the windows, and Miss Priestley was across the room. Mme. Storey was between them, but she did not remain in one position, frequently rising to pace back and forth.

She said to Miss Priestley with her blandest air: "I asked you in, knowing your great interest in this matter. Our labors are completed for the moment. It would not be proper for me to say that Mr. Henry Varick is guilty, but our case against him is complete. He is about to be arrested."

A hunted look came into the young man's face as he listened to this. It seemed like gratuitous cruelty on the part of my mistress, but it was all part of her plan.

"Inspector Rumsey and I want to thank you for the great assistance you have rendered us," she went on.

The girl started. "I don't understand you," she said.

"I am referring to the two letters you wrote," said Mme. Storey, "one to Inspector Rumsey and one to me. The first started this investigation, and the second directed it into the right channel."

This was a surprising piece of news to me, and, likewise, to the inspector. But both of us looked as if we had known it all along.

"I wrote no such letters," declared Miss Priestley with an air of great astonishment.

"Oh, I quite understand your reasons for wishing to keep in the background," said Mme. Storey with a friendly smile. "They do you credit. But unfortunately we need you for a witness."

The girl shook her head with a mystified air.

"What reason have you to suppose that I wrote the letters you speak of?" she asked.

Mme. Storey went to the escritoire, and unlocked the drawer that I had seen her lock the day before. From it she took the sheet of paper she had then put away. There was a slip clipped to it that she detached.

"This appears to be a sketch for a title page to Commodore Varick's book," she said. "As soon as I saw the lettering I recognized the same hand that had written the two anonymous notes. There is just as much character in block letters, of course, as in written ones. You have a taste for lettering, I see. The characters are formed with care."

Miss Priestley did not turn a hair. Glancing at the paper, she said with a smile: "I am sorry for the truth of your deductions, but that sketch was made by Commodore Varick, not by me."

"That can hardly be," returned my employer, still most polite, "because this slip was pinned to it. I read upon it: 'Here is a sketch I have made. I hope you like it.' And signed with your initials: J. P."

"Oh, then I have made a mistake," said the girl with the utmost coolness. "So many sketches were made at different

times; some by the commodore and some by me. However, I know nothing about any anonymous letters."

"Ah, you can't be allowed to keep modestly in the background," continued Mme. Storey, smiling. "In the net of espionage we have spread, you had to be included, of course, and we know all about your movements during the past thirty-six hours. You live in an apartment on Lexington Avenue at Thirty-Seventh Street. From a hall boy there we have learned that you went out about nine thirty on Tuesday night, returning in a moment or two with a newspaper. The incident was fixed in the boy's mind, because he wondered why you hadn't sent him for it.

"The late editions that night carried the first news of Commodore Varick's death. When you read that his death had been ascribed to natural causes, you feared that the ends of justice would be defeated, and you wrote the first letter. You came out with it a half hour or so later, and again the hall boy wondered why you didn't let him post it. But you had a very good reason, of course. It was addressed to Inspector Rumsey at police headquarters. Through the post office we have established that that letter was mailed on Lexington Avenue somewhere between Thirty-Sixth Street and Forty-Second, and was taken up in the eleven o'clock collection."

Miss Priestley listened to this with an enigmatic smile. It was all a mystery to Henry Varick, of course. He sat forward in his chair, listening with strained anxiety.

"The second letter we can bring even closer to you," Mme. Storey went on. "You will remember you and I were talking in the next room about half past two yesterday, when the name of the Princess Cristina was suddenly injected into the case, and I went tearing off to find her. Again you thought the real criminal was likely to escape, and you sat down and wrote the second note. You left this house at three ten, somewhat earlier than your custom. You were picked up by a detective and followed.

"You entered the branch post office in the Grand Central Station, and dropped a letter in a chute. My operative could not see the address; however the post office has reported to us that the second anonymous letter was received through a chute in that post office and canceled at three thirty."

"Well, I give in," said the girl with a calm gesture. "I didn't want to appear in this horrible case, but I see it is inevitable."

"Inspector Rumsey and I have only one question to ask you," said Mme. Storey. "How did you know that Commodore Varick had been poisoned."

"I didn't know it," she said quickly. "I only suspected it."

"Your first note stated it as a fact."

"I know. I thought an investigation ought to be made. I thought that would be the best way of bringing it about."

"Oh, quite. What made you suspect that he had been poisoned?"

Miss Priestley hesitated. She glanced fleetingly at Henry through her lashes.

"Ought he to be present when I am telling these things?" she asked.

Mme. Storey looked at the inspector in seeming concern. A glance of intelligence passed between them which the girl could not see.

"How about it, inspector?" my employer asked. "Is it proper for him to hear this?"

"Oh, yes," answered the inspector with a judicial air. "A man is always entitled to hear what he is charged with."

I doubted very much if this was the usual practice; however, the girl could have known no better. She resumed with the air of one conscientiously performing a disagreeable duty:

"Mr. Henry knew all about poisons. I knew that he had a collection of dangerous poisons. In the past I had heard him talk about poisoning people—"

"Oh, no!" cried Henry in a shocked voice.

The girl looked at Mme. Storey.

"I knew this was going to be painful," she murmured.

"Let me explain!" cried Henry desperately. "It is true that I have talked to her about poisons. I have described to her how men would die after having taken

different poisons: aconite, strychnine, arsenic and so on; but I never proposed to poison anybody!"

"It is not important," said Mme. Storey smoothly. "The fact that you had talked about poisons is not sufficient in itself to have aroused her suspicions." She turned to the girl. "How did you know that Mr. Henry had been in the house on Tuesday afternoon?"

"I saw him," was the calm reply. She went on: "In my anxiety to keep out of all this, I suppressed part of the truth yesterday. I did not, as I then told you, go downstairs as soon as I had admitted the princess to the commodore's study. I went into the office where I had some work to finish. A few minutes later I heard the rumble of a man's voice in this room. I was greatly astonished, because I had not heard the princess leave, and I knew that the commodore had no other appointment. In fact, I was alarmed. We all considered it a part of our duty to protect the commodore from intruders. I went to the door between the two rooms and opened it a crack. I saw Mr. Henry in here."

"Was he alone with his father?"

A pinched look came into the girl's face.

"No," she said stiffly, "Miss Gilsey was here, too—if that is her name."

"Ha!" cried the inspector.

"I told you that," said Mme. Storey.

"But you only surmised it. This is direct evidence."

My mistress smiled. To the girl she said: "Please describe what you saw in this room."

"Oh, as soon as I saw it was a family matter I closed the door," she said. "I had only the briefest glimpse."

"What did that glimpse show you?"

"As I opened the door I heard the commodore saying: 'Not a cent! Not a cent! Let the marriage be annulled and I'll settle!'"

Mr. Henry started up. "My father never said that!" he cried.

"Be silent!" commanded the inspector.

"What marriage did he refer to?" asked Mme. Storey.

"The marriage between Mr. Henry and Miss Gilsey."

The young man dropped his head between his hands. "I wanted to keep her out of this!" he groaned.

"Oh, they're married, are they?" said my mistress coolly.

The girl's nostrils became pinched again.

"Henry said they were. He said that on the day before. On Monday afternoon he saw his father alone, and they had a violent quarrel. They talked so loud I could hear a good deal in my room. Henry told his father then that he was married to Miss Gilsey. I don't know if it's true, or if he just said so to get out of the match with the princess. At any rate, the commodore was infuriated because he looked upon Miss Gilsey as an adventuress. He told his son not to expect a cent from him, and ordered him out of the house."

"That was on Monday," said Mme. Storey; "now returning to Tuesday, what did you see when you looked in this room?"

"They were grouped around the tea table—this table. As it happened it was just in line with the crack of the door. The commodore had that moment risen, and was walking away toward the window there. His back was therefore turned to me. Mr. Henry was standing between me and the table, and his back was toward me. Miss Gilsey was seated at the table with the tea tray before her, and I could see her face—"

The girl hesitated.

"Well?" prompted Mme. Storey.

Miss Priestley was breathing quickly.

"Nothing happened," she said with a jerky gesture. "Nothing that I could swear to on the witness stand. It was just a glimpse. I saw her give him an extraordinary look. His hands were hidden from me—but he bent over the table a little—it seemed to me that the movements of his arms were suspicious—that's all."

It was a horribly vivid picture that she called up. I think we all shuddered. Mr. Henry's face was hidden.

"And from that you thought—" Mme. Storey prompted further.

"Well, taken in connection with what had happened the day before," said Miss Priestley. "I knew that Mr. Henry feared the will was going to be changed. As a

matter of fact, it had already been changed, but he could not have known of that. I supposed that he had brought the girl along in a final effort to soften the commodore's heart, and when that failed he was rendered desperate."

"Quite!" said Mme. Storey.

XVI.

It seemed as if their little plan would come to nothing, owing to Henry Varick's having been utterly crushed by the girl's statement. He sat with his elbows on his knees, and his head pressed between his hands. In order to stir him up, the inspector demanded in a rasping voice:

"Have you nothing to say, sir?"

The young man started to his feet with a wild, despairing face.

"What she says is nearly true," he cried: "but just that little difference makes all the difference between life and death to me!"

"You may question her if you wish," said Mme. Storey.

He quieted down.

"I don't want to question her," he said, "but I want to tell her something."

He approached the girl, looking at her steadily. Something new had come into his face, something firm and fine; it was the look of a man brought to the last extremity of grief and danger, who is suddenly lifted out of himself.

"Julia, is it worth it?" he asked.

She was shrinking away from him with a look of repulsion.

"Do I have to submit to this?" she murmured, appealing to Mme. Storey.

"It is his right to break down your story if he can," replied my mistress.

The girl drew a long breath, and stiffened herself.

"He can't do that," she said confidently, "because I have said nothing but the simple truth. But let him try."

She sat down in the same chair that she had before occupied, and met Henry's glance with a cold smile.

This time his eyes did not quail from hers.

"Julia," he went on in a low, moved voice, "I'm sorry for the way I treated you. I am a coward where women are concerned. I can't bear to hurt them. Ever since I grew up it seems I have been running away from women. And that only made matters worse, of course. I wouldn't face things out. But now I must face things out. If only for once I could find the right words to express the truth! Julia, I treated you badly. Must I die for that?"

He paused, searching her face to see if his words had had any effect. How she was able to withstand the appeal I could not comprehend.

The only sign of emotion she gave was to rise suddenly, and press herself against the wall, as if to get as far as possible from him. Her face was like marble.

"You know that this story you have told will send me to the chair," he resumed. "It's so nearly true that you can tell it with an easy conscience. But is it worth it? In your heart you know that I am incapable of killing my father. *You know me!* Why, the whole trouble between us arose from the fact that I was too tender-hearted and easy-going, and you were ambitious. You scorned me, remember, because I hadn't the heart to whip a puppy that had nipped me at Easthampton."

I cannot hope to convey in print the moving quality of that grave, young voice, low and shaken in tone. I know the tears were rolling unchecked down my cheeks, and I could see that both the inspector and my mistress were affected.

But the girl listened with a twisted smile on her white face; the smile of one who would die sooner than give in.

"You are mistaken if you think I lied when I told you I loved you," he continued. "Your beauty laid a spell on me. I worshiped your beauty. You possessed me entirely. But I couldn't marry you. Our natures were too different. We would have driven each other mad. I should have told you this, or written it plainly, but I couldn't bring myself to write the words that would hurt you. I hoped you would just forget me when I went away.

"But we were happy while it lasted, weren't we? I was in Paradise. If you send me to my death you will forget your

anger against me, you will only remember the times that we were happy. How will you feel then? It is worth it, Julia? I cannot believe that anybody so beautiful can have a bad heart. Do you remember—"

He took a step closer to her, and murmured something none of us could hear.

"After that," he asked gravely, "after that can you bring yourself to swear my life away?"

She strained her face away from him.

"I'm sorry," she said in an unnatural twanging voice, "but the truth is the truth! I have nothing to change in what I said."

Henry Varick slowly raised his shoulders, and spread out his palms; then his whole body sagged.

"Well, that's that," he said in a flat voice. "I'm done for, I guess."

A painful recklessness appeared in his face.

"Come on, inspector!" he cried out. "Come on, old cock, let's go! I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way!"

He stopped short, and an awful goneness sounded in his voice. "Oh, God! I wish it was to the death chamber that you were taking me! That is over in a minute, but the weeks before that—"

The inspector seemed disposed to linger, to talk things over with Mme. Storey, and the young man cried out sharply: "Come on! Come on! I can't stand any more of this!"

At a glance from my mistress the inspector bestirred himself. As the two men reached the door the girl shrieked. The sound seemed to be torn from her breast.

"Stop! Stop! I cannot bear it! I lied!"

The two men turned back. When the girl's unnatural self-control broke everything went. Her convulsed face seemed scarcely human.

She cast herself down on the floor. It was dreadful to see so complete an abasement.

"I lied!" she moaned. "I lied from beginning to end. He didn't do it! It was I who poisoned Commodore Varick. Oh, what a wretch I am!"

She beat her forehead on the floor.

Henry Varick stared down at her like one transfixed with horror. "You killed my father!" he murmured from time to time. "You killed my father!"

I was dazed with the suddenness of it. My mistress motioned to me, and I automatically drew a sheet of paper toward me and with trembling hands started to take down what the girl said, scarce knowing what I wrote.

She partly raised herself, kneeling on the floor, her body swaying forward and back. The words came gabbling from her lips, as if some terror urged her to get it all out before she could think.

"I will tell all! It has been in my mind for a long time. But it was Henry that I meant to kill. Because he was false to me. First with that foreign woman, and afterward with the contemptible Gilsey girl. It was the poisons that put it into my head. Always they were in the next room tempting, tempting me.

"I found a key that would open the door, and I could go into Henry's study at any time without anybody knowing. He was never there. There was a book in there, too, that described all the different poisons and how they acted.

"I collected old keys. I bought them in junk shops and other places many, many keys, until I got one that would open the curio cabinet, and a little one that opened the box of drugs. I took out the bottle of aconite, and locked all up again, and threw away the keys. Then I bided my time, and studied how to give Henry the poison. But I could think of no way. I never saw him any more. I wrote asking him to come to see me, but he paid no attention to the letter."

"She did—she did!" murmured Henry like one in a trance.

"Then I heard Henry tell his father that he was married to that white-faced blonde, and I went mad—mad! I changed my plan. I couldn't get at Henry, but I had plenty of opportunities with his father. I wanted to strike at them, I didn't care how.

"I made up my mind to wait until the commodore had changed his will, and then kill him. That was to be my revenge on

the pair of them. Paupers! I didn't think until later of putting the crime off on Henry. That made it sweeter!

"I knew the commodore took a capsule after every meal. There was a white powder in it that looked just the same as the aconite. I got some empty capsules and filled them with the aconite. There was only enough to fill three. When Henry and the girl were with the commodore in his study, I sneaked around outside, through the foyer of the suite and into the bathroom. I took the capsules out of the box, put the poisoned ones in, and went back to my room. I watched and listened. I saw Henry and the girl go. The commodore was half reconciled to them, and it made me smile to think how I was going to dish them all!

"When the commodore left his study, I followed and listened at the crack of the door. I heard him go into the bathroom and come out again. Then I knew the thing was done. I knew that I would have just as much time as it would take for the capsule to melt in his stomach. Plenty of time to get away.

"He returned to his study, but he never saw me. I was back in the office then. I went around through the foyer into the bathroom. There were only two capsules in the box, so I knew there had been no slip up. I replaced them with two of the harmless capsules, and went downstairs."

So much for the facts of her story. I shall not speak of the unfortunate girl's ravings. It is too painful. Too great an effort of self-control is followed by the collapse of all resistance.

It left her exhausted and shaking, finally apathetic. Detective Manby was called in, and she was handed over to his care. Unable to speak above a whisper then, she begged for permission to rest for ten minutes in the office. This was granted.

The other four of us were left looking at each other, scarcely able to comprehend what had happened. I for one was conscious of an immense weariness. I felt as if I should drop in my tracks.

But it was a delicious kind of weariness, the feeling that comes after a shattering storm when you find quiet in your ears once more. Blessed, blessed quiet and peace.

At first you can hardly believe it. But I looked at Henry Varick, and there he was safe, and my heart was content.

He, I think, was the first to speak.

"Are you through with me now?" he asked wonderingly. "Am I free?"

"Free as air," said Mme. Storey, laying a hand on his shoulder. "Go to your wife and tell her. And to your mother. You appear to have lost your fortune, but you have them!"

Gladness shone out in his face like the sun breaking through. He had already forgotten the poor hysterical wretch in the next room. Well, such is youth!

"What do I care for the money," he cried, "if I am free?" He ran out of the room.

"Well, I expect your mother won't let you starve," remarked Mme. Storey dryly. "And wills have been broken before this."

"And so you were right after all," said Inspector Rumsey generously.

"As it happens," said my mistress, smiling.

Our excitements were not yet over, for presently Detective Manby burst into the room with a dismayed face.

"She has given me the slip!" he cried.

To make a long story short, at a moment when Manby was not looking directly at her, the prisoner had slipped from the office into Henry's study adjoining. Manby was not even aware that she had unlocked the door.

She slammed it in his face, and got out into the main hall. By the time he got through the two doors, she was nowhere to be seen.

None of the servants had seen her. To us, of course, it was apparent that she had gone down the inclosed stair, of which Manby knew nothing, and out through the secret passage. The inspector was in a rage, but Mme. Storey took it with more than usual calmness.

"It is all for the best," she said enigmatically.

"For the best?" he exclaimed indignantly.

"I take it, she has gone home," said my mistress gravely. "But wherever she has gone she will soon be found, my friend. The resolve to kill herself was in her eye."

"Justice will be defeated!" cried the inspector.

"Man's justice," murmured Mme. Storey with an imperceptible shrug.

"We must follow her!" cried the inspector.

"No! Let us not be seen there," said my mistress, laying a hand on his arm. "Send Manby."

And so it was done.

In my notebook I find the following clipping:

> At eleven fifteen yesterday morning the body of Miss Julia Priestley, twenty-six, was found dead at No. —— Lexington Avenue with a bullet through the heart. A new thirty-eight automatic was clutched in her hand, and her clothing revealed powder burns. From the position of the body it was apparent that she had stood in front of a mirror to aim the gun. She was found in the bedroom of a small three-room apartment that she occupied alone at the above address.
>
> The body was discovered by Detective Sergeant James Manby. Sergeant Manby had been sent to Miss Priestley's apartment as the result of a mysterious message received by Inspector Rumsey at headquarters, a few minutes earlier. Inspector Rumsey was advised by a woman's voice over the telephone, that he had better send a detective to the address given. When he asked for particulars, his informant hung up. It is supposed that this was Miss Priestley herself. When Sergeant Manby reached the apartment he found the door ajar, as if for his convenience. The woman's body was still warm.
>
> For the past year Miss Priestley was employed by the late Commodore Varick as an amanuensis in the preparation of a book that he was writing. It is supposed that the death of her employer, which came with such shocking suddenness on Tuesday evening, and the consequent loss of her employment, temporarily deranged the young woman's mind. Her nearest relative is a brother living in Cleveland, Ohio, who is on his way to New York to take charge of the body.

And that is all that ever got into the papers.

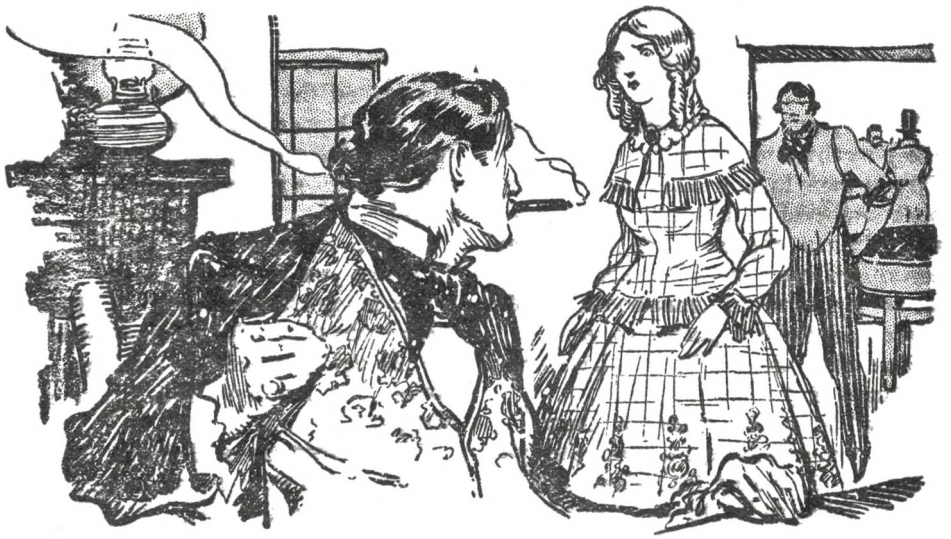
THE END

TO AN OLD CANTEEN

YOU'RE just a bit of metal
A mite the worse for wear,
And nothing that a stranger
Would ever wish to share.
But you were bright as sunshine,
And I was young and spruce,
Those days we went prospecting
Aboard my old cayuse.
So every scar that sears you
To this old heart endears you!

From dusk till dawn and after
I've kept high carnival,
And drunk to health and fortune
With many a merry pal.
But you and I, old comrade,
We have a closer tie
Which never shall be sundered,
No never, till I die!
For in the desert weather
We have been *dry* together!

Edward W. Barnard.



Gold

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "The Cañon of Light," "Night Hawk's Gold," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II

THE whaling ship Cape Cod, commanded by Captain Adam Bartlett, takes on a gambler named Jim Dorsey as a member of the crew. Soon after the crew mutinies under the lead of Mr. Swope, the first mate, who persuades them to sail to San Francisco, and jump ship to dig gold, which has just been discovered that year, 1849. When the mutineers leave the ship in San Francisco Bay, Dorsey offers to stay behind to release Captain Bartlett, his daughter Priscilla, and old Joshua, a harpooner who remained neutral during the mutiny.

CHAPTER XIII (*Continued*).

OVER THE SIDE.

DORSEY went below immediately to the steerage. Old Joshua was still sitting there, in his oil-soaked dungarees, his big white-maned head bowed, his chin on his chest, and his giant hands—the hands that made exquisite little images of whalebone—clasped together by manacles. Dorsey removed the gag from the old harpooner's mouth.

"Well, my man, it's all over," Dorsey said breezily.

"What's over?"

"The mutiny."

"They killed him? Is that it? And they're goin' to hang me. What they goin' to hang old Joshua for? What have I done? I been sittin' here, my mind runnin' like a squirrel in a cage. Hang me for what?"

"Do you know where the skipper keeps his keys?"

The dazed old man seemed to awake. "Keys to what?"

"Everything on this ship—the forecastle—those manacles."

"In his cabin forward there. In a chest. What do you want the keys to these manacles for? Swope's got some. Ask him. Gone—aye? To the diggin's. Then—"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 17

His florid wrinkled face lit up with a frenzy. "You mean they've shoved off in the boats—and without hangin' old Joshua? You mean I'm—"

"You're free," Dorsey said, "if you get the key to those manacles."

Like a man in a trance, the aged harpooner lumbered to his feet. Dorsey followed him to the skipper's cabin, and watched him kneel down and shuffle in the chest among some old hymn books, an old-fashioned astrolabe, a pocket compass.

"Here they are." His two hands held up a ring of keys.

Dorsey cast off his manacles, then:

"You row me ashore, my man, then you can come back and let the skipper and his girl out. They're in the forecastle locked up."

"But I'll be caught—"

His wrinkled face was clouded with doubt, complete bafflement.

"No one else is on board the old boat, my man. Come on."

The old man's face seemed to clear. He looked down at his free hands, then up again at his liberator. "Whoever you are, sir, I'm thankin' you. I'm thankin' you kindly—no matter who you are."

A moment later, the two having gone above to the starboard boat, they lowered away, and each taking an oar, shoved off.

They said no more to each other as they made for the low marshy ground in front of the lighted town. The old man was still confused. What had happened after all that gun-fighting? What had happened to the mutiny? Why was he not hanged, as Swope had ordained?

What was to happen to him now? And who was this gaunt handsome devil, left from that mutinous gang? Had he freed old Joshua merely to have a hand help him ashore? Not likely!

There was only one wharf at San Francisco in those days—the one at the foot of Broadway with a stranded ship or two used as a lodging house, another as a prison ship, another as a warehouse. A bit east where a fleet of fishing boats and small craft was moored the two men beached their boat.

"What am I to do now?" old Joshua asked.

"Go back to your ship. As for me, I'm going ashore to make my fortune." The music of the tent cantinas drifted down and invited the renegade to come quickly.

"The skipper will follow you ashore and have you hanged," Joshua said. "I advise you, son, to get a horse and make for the inland."

"That reminds me," Dorsey replied, "I'd like you to take a message from me to the funny old gentleman. Tell him that there is no God. He thinks, perhaps, that the Almighty saved his precious carcass during that mutiny. But it was not the Almighty. It was I.

"Shot down three of them. Put a ball in each man's shoulder so he couldn't fire. A bit of a cad, aren't I? Quite. But couldn't be helped, you know. The girl fed me. That's all. Good-by. And glad to have met you."

Before Joshua had time to stammer out his questions, Dorsey had leaped ashore and was gone.

The old harpooner watched his slim form darting like a shadow toward the bonanza town. In another moment he was a part of that world of glaring lights, of gaming houses, of music, of riproaring hours.

Joshua leaned his great weight against the prow, shoving the boat out again into the black water. He was gripped with a feverish desire now to go back and tell the angel of the Cape Cod that the devil himself had saved her.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISCILLA.

PRISCILLA had prevailed upon her wounded father, urging him to lie down in one of the forecastle bunks.

Beyond the noise of the davits, and the creaking of the blocks as the boats were lowered, neither of the two prisoners knew what had happened. But it was a safe surmise that Swope had made off with his henchmen.

Just who were left, the skipper did not know. Perhaps enough to man the ship and put out to sea again—that was his prayer. There was no telling how long

that gam of whales would be hanging around the coast. There was yet time, but not much.

After what seemed an eternity of silence, there came a knock at the forecastle door, and a cracked, excited voice:

"It's me, skipper! Me, old Joshua. They was goin' to hang me, but by God's infinite mercy I am spared!"

The key clinked in the hole, unlocking the door from the outside. Priscilla drew the bolt from within.

The white-maned old harpooner towered at the opened door.

"Help me out of this bunk!" Bartlett cried. "Help me up to deck and get me a crew. I'll get those whales first. Then I'll chase down that gang of forecastle rats to the end of the earth.

"You'll see what happens to seamen who raise their hands against the master of a ship and against God Almighty. Once I get my hooks on 'em, I'll flog every man jack with the end of a mainmast line!"

"There ain't no one left for to be flogged!" Joshua said. "The crew's deserted, cleanin' our hold, stealin' our boats. Every sea-cook's son of them is gone. You and me—and the girl—that's all that's on this old bark."

The skipper stared out of blood-drained eyes. The curse of Job was upon him. Wounded and helpless, deserted by his men, shorn of his boats and provisions—and two hundred barrels of blubber out there beyond the Gate!

"How is it with you, skipper?" Joshua asked anxiously, as the stricken old man lay in his bunk. "You look kind of squeamish."

"Get out the medicine chest," Priscilla ordered. "He's been hit. We've got to nurse him. Father—forget your whales. God has spared us."

The skipper seemed to come to himself abruptly. He picked up the pistol with which, as he thought, he had routed his crew. He dragged himself to his feet and to the porthole. He thrust the pistol out into the open.

In the clear cool night the heavens were declaring the glory of God, and the city of tents was declaring the glory of hell.

A flash of light, a loud report went out and lost itself in that immensity of moonlit space.

"The skyrockets!" the frenzied old man cried. "The megaphone. Hail them—any ship—all of them. Give 'em all the skyrockets. Signal our distress! Save us. Save my boats, my grub, my gear!"

He lurched over to the other porthole, where he thought he could make out three blurred specks way off to the northward where Swope and the mutineers with sails set were standing off for Angel Island, heeling to a good beam wind.

Fairly howling in his rage, the wounded man staggered out of the forecastle door, dragged himself up the companionway, lurched over to the rail.

He had no megaphone with which to hail the nearest square-rigger, but he did not need one. Cupping his hands, he started shouting in a wild fury for help.

Old Joshua, who seemed to have been infected by his master's frenzy, got out the skyrockets, and a whir and whiz of lights started shooting skyward.

Priscilla, as distracted as the two old men, had followed her father above. But she saw clearly enough that to plead with him to go back to his bunk was useless. She stood beside him, half-clinging, half-supporting him, while a boat from an English merchantman, the closest on board, put off for the Cape Cod.

Another put off from a French square-rigger, another from a Spanish. From the single wharf of San Francisco at the foot of Broadway two boats stood out into the bay.

The skipper staggered aft, howling at the oncoming boats, falling against the rail and clinging there as if on his last legs in a hurricane.

The old whaler seemed to have shrunk. It was as if these successive blows had pounded him to the deck. He looked across the rail with glazed gray eyes at the three blurred spots of white which were the sails of Swope's boats. And he gazed at the rowboats making toward him from all quarters—gazed at them as if he did not see them.

The white-maned giant Joshua saw the master, and leaving his box of fireworks,

he went to him putting a long powerful arm—the arm that had cast many a harpoon in the last fifty years—about the slumped shoulders. Bartlett had passed a line from the hale and hearty New Bedford blubber hunter into the region of old men.

Joshua was not much at sentimental encouragement. Besides it was not exactly a time for encouragement. He started to stammer out something, but realized that anything he could say would sound like a landsman's nonsense. Providentially something happened to forestall his miserable failure.

"Ahoy, there, Cape Cod!" a voice came up from below the landward rail. "What's wrong?"

The two old men and the girl looked down at the first boat to reach them. The skipper of a Yankee merchantman was shouting through cupped hands.

Bartlett called back in a shaking voice:

"Mutiny—that's what's wrong."

"Where's the skipper?"

"I'm the skipper."

"Then what can we do for you?"

"I want men. I want boats. My crew has deserted, taking my boats, and all the gear they could stow away."

"Is the fight over?"

"Not yet. All I need is boats to put out after them, and so help me I'll kick their guts through their heads. I'll have every whelp back in chains—and I'll hang 'em."

"You're telling us an old story, skipper," the visiting master called up. It was astonishing how calmly he took the news. "My own crew deserted, and I can't get a hand for love or money to help me get my cargo ashore.

"The Lucy Waddel swinging at anchor over there is in the same plight. And so is the bark yonder, the San Luis and the Lady Jane, and the Sippican, the Mattaiposett. There are four hundred ships in San Francisco Bay whose crews have deserted.

"If you're sending up skyrockets because your men have gone to the diggin's you'll have all San Francisco laughing before morning. Anything else you want? No? Very well. Good luck, sir. Shove off."

It was perhaps providential that old Skipper Bartlett had already reached the limit of his physical endurance. The climax to his sorrows was dulled by a comfortable surrender. He sank to the deck forgetting that he had lost everything; forgetting that there was nowhere to turn now for help; forgetting even that God had forgotten him.

The white-haired harpooner picked him up in his massive arms as if picking up a child, and carried him below decks.

In the captain's cabin there was the medicine chest, some rum, a decanter of water—the only water on board.

Having brought his master to, and washed his wound, and tucked him in bed, old Joshua turned about to see Priscilla sitting with her face buried in her hands, her slender shoulders convulsed in sobs.

She was a pitiful spectacle, for all her father's woes seemed to be trebled as they were heaped upon her own heart.

The brawny old harpooner had found himself tongue-tied when he tried to comfort his master. But it was not so now. He knew something about the girl's misery. Her father had failed in this last whale hunt of his declining years. He lay in his bunk on a ship that was as incapable of sailing as if she had been wrecked.

"There's one thing that 'll help you, my little child," the harpooner said humbly. "That stowaway; I mean that high-born gentleman."

"Don't speak of him," she sobbed. "He deserted us first of all; he started it all! He is a fiend—as my father said."

"Yes, he may have deserted ye, my child; but not till he saved your old father from them cutthroat mutineers! You hear that? Look up at me—and tell me you're understandin'!"

She looked up. Her eyes widened.

"Three of 'em was shot down—weren't they?" Joshua said eagerly. "Wounded; all in the right shoulder, so's they couldn't fire another shot. Who do you think brought 'em down?"

The skipper turned in his bunk. He, too, was listening, his bloodless eyes scowling at the shaggy maned figure.

"The Lord of Hosts brought them down," he said huskily uncertainly.

"No, sir—not the Lord, but the devil. It was the devil himself. The stowaway—that highborn gentleman."

The skipper shook his head, and sank back again to the pillow. It was nonsense. God had come to his rescue. The stowaway shooting down his fellow mutineers? What a lunacy!

But the girl—what a radiant light burned in her eyes! Although she said nothing, she burst into a song She went about nursing her father, mixing him a hot toddy, fixing him some supper, crooning a lullaby to him.

The song she sang was so soft, the voice so happy, that the woebegone old mariner dozed off into a sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

A DARING PROJECT.

A MAN cannot serve two masters, nor can his body be under the domination of more than one passion at one time. When Skipper Bartlett realized that his crew was gone, his uppermost fear—the fear for his daughter's safety—had vanished. It left him torn between a desire to kill a gam of whales and the desire to kill a crew of sailors.

The first desire won out. Whales were more important than a gang of forecastle rats. The deserters could not be used as a crew anyway—even if they were captured. And what Bartlett wanted now was help to man the windlass and the braces.

Outwardly he seemed to calm down under his daughter's gentle ministrations; but inwardly the same old fire that had burned in his soul for half a century was flaming. He must get that blubber; the crew could go hang; in fact, he would see that they hanged, but he must get the whales first.

He called Joshua to him. "You go ashore. You find a chandler's. Exchange our ile for gear. Get a crew. Offer them anything—any percentage they want, so long as it don't interfere with my percentage.

"Get two new boats. Don't wait to eat. What's eatin', when there's whales spoutin' within a few hours' sail? Bear a hand now, Joshua! Not a moment to lose. Provisions and a crew, and we'll sail by mornin' by the grace of God!"

The faithful old harpooner left, fired with his master's zeal. Provisions and a crew were all they needed. If the mutiny had taken place on the high seas, the situation might have been more serious. But here they were within a few cable lengths of a city!

What could be more providential? He took the remaining boat, and shoved off, convinced that his master's troubles would soon be over.

Meanwhile the old skipper fretted himself into a fever of impatience. There was no time to lose. Swope and his men could be tracked down ultimately, but the whale is a creature like time and tide, that waits for no man.

The bedridden old skipper recurrently sought for solace in his Bible, recurrently prayed while his daughter nursed him through two long, hectic hours. Priscilla knew well enough that her father could not sail that night. He could not have sailed even if Joshua had accomplished the miracle of gathering a crew from that gold-mad town.

Two hours later the harpooner came back.

"We're stuck here, skipper," he said dolefully—"stuck as fast as if we was in dry dock. Couldn't see the authorities; they are all in the gaming halls, makin' fortunes, same as every one else.

"They took me to Gearns the Alcalde, but he said we couldn't find our mutineers once they got up to the tule swamps above Suisun Bay. Like huntin' a needle in a haystack.

"And they ain't no one to do the huntin', and no boats to hunt in. Every boat is bein' used to take prospectors to the golden placers—and every man is on his way."

The skipper lifted his shaking fists.

"Who in the name of Beelzebub told you I wanted to chase the deserters? It's a crew I want, and provisions, and fluke spades, and harpin' irons, and—" He choked in his rage.

"How can I get provisions without money?" old Joshua asked piteously.

"The ile—"

"I can get a little for the ile, but it's bowhead ile, and not much good. Besides they all use tallow candles."

"The bone—"

"Sure, the bone's good. But they ain't no market for corsets in this country. Blankets and boots is what every man wants—not corsets. And food—you send me for provisions, master?"

The shaggy white head shook dismally. Priscilla, holding her father's hand, listened to the wild tale of a town that was wallowing in gold. Nothing to eat anywhere, nothing to wear, nothing to sleep in—but gold dust pouring in by every miner from Hangtown, and Hungry Camp, and Humbug Cañon, and Poker Flat.

"Apples and onions a dollar apiece, skipper, do you mind that? Eggs are the same, and sold 'without guarantee.' Roast grizzly a dollar a slice. There ain't nothin' nowhere but what's a dollar.

"And talk about gamblin'—holy Jehosophat! There's miners come down there and bet their weight in gold—gold at fifty dollars for three ounces! You think you can provision this ship in this town?

"Let the whales spout. The Almighty has protected 'em from my harpoon, skipper; that much I've found out to-night."

Priscilla looked at her wretched father. He was the picture of Job forsaken of his God. The girl turned to the landward porthole.

The strange, barbaric sight of those lighted tents had assumed a new fascination. The amphitheater of pale yellow flecks of light had turned from a wild gambling town on an unknown shore into a fairy city. The gaming houses, which were the confines of hell, had become paradise. Bags of gold, frontiersmen gambling in the hundreds of thousands, gold dust scattered on the sawdust of cantinas, music thrumming, men singing, Dorsey showing them how to play at cards!

The spirit of the town was the devil himself in whom she had fallen in love. A city of gamblers! All gamblers must be good. Any man who would gamble would come to the aid of a woman in distress.

She yearned mightily to set foot upon that forbidden shore; for intuitively she knew she could succeed where old Joshua had failed. She would find a means to help her ruined father.

It would not be hard to say just what it was that called to her. The man she loved was in that city. But Priscilla herself did not know that this was the mysterious impulse that made her yearn for land; in her mind an entirely different motive was brewing.

In the first place, she believed that that city would come to her aid. It was incredible that in so rich a town so small a commodity as the provisioning of a ship could not be had.

In her childlike innocence she believed that it could be had for the asking. Joshua had failed; but he was a grizzled old mariner. What if a woman should go ashore and tell that city that she wanted provisions for her father's ship?

Later, when Joshua had left, and once again Priscilla had sung her father to sleep, she tiptoed out of the stateroom. Joshua was sitting outside like a faithful dog on watch.

"My father is asleep," she said. "He will sleep, I pray God, until morning. Until then watch over him and see that no harm comes to him."

"I'll set here, Miss Priscilla. You go and get some sleep yourself."

"Not I. I have work to do. When my father's strong again, we must have hands to set sail."

"Where you goin', Miss Priscilla?" Joshua asked in sudden alarm.

"I'm going ashore."

"You're going crazy," he grunted. "Look here, little child, what you think you'll do when you get on shore there? It's the wildest town in the world—gamblin', gun fightin', brawlin'. It's hell itself at nighttime, that town."

"I'm going ashore," she repeated. "I've been in brawls and gun fights before, but no one ever harms me. And in that town no one will harm me. The stowaway is there. He will protect me, as he protected me before."

"But, child, you don't mean—"

"If my father wakes, tell him that I

am in a sound sleep. If he does not awake, you need not lie. It is best not to lie unless necessary. It is sinful to lie. But in this case—"

"But how you goin' ashore, alone? You are out of your wits, little child!"

"I have sculled bigger craft than our whaleboats when my hair was in pigtails."

He reached out for her, with an ill-considered resolution to keep her on board by main force, but she fled like a slim wraith to the topside.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT STEVE LUKON'S.

IN those Gold Rush days there was a cantina on the corner of Clay and Kearny, with a tent roof and a bar about the length of an ordinary city block. In 1848 it was called the Gold Rocker House, but later assumed the name of its famous owner, Steve Lukon.

You may read of Steve Lukon's exploits in Sam Brandon's paper, and of the hanging of his henchman, A. J. Monniger, in Sacramento. The Sacramento *Bee*, published then by McClatchy, has whitewashed Lukon and Monniger, and there are many old Forty-Niners who say the gaming house proprietor was a good, a heroic, a philanthropic man. It is not the duty of the present writer to delve into this moot question.

Lukon may have been the head of a gang of claim jumpers, shoulder strikers, and bad men; he may have fleeced many a prospector coming down to San Francisco to bet his bag of dust on the wheel; he may have protected and fed and clothed the renegades who terrorized Dead Man's Bar, Angel's Camp, Brandy, and other famous mining towns of the Gold Rush days.

And, as others avow, he may have helped many a down-and-out gambler or paid the passage of sick prospectors back to their home shores on the Atlantic coast. I am not prepared to pigeonhole him as either a good man or a bad.

I will present him just as he came into the chronicle of the Cape Cod mutiny—the owner of the Gold Rocker House, and the man to whom Priscilla Bartlett, because of a strange twist of circumstances, went for help.

He was a big man, with massive shoulders and a bull neck. Muddy brown eyes suggested Indian blood. The fact that he was always smooth-shaven marked him apart from most of San Francisco's frontier citizenry. He had large hands with diamonds and red fuzz on them; and he wore a rawhide vest, jackboots, broad trousers, and frock coat.

On the night when Priscilla Bartlett went ashore for help Steve Lukon was in his private office, superintending the work of his barkeeps and croupiers and cantina girls.

The business of entertaining the cosmopolitan clientele of the frontier town was extensive and peculiar. There was no caste system. In the huge hall outside his office—which was the size of a one-ring circus—there were several hundred guests, representing, it would seem at first sight, several hundred different nationalities of the globe.

Sydney Ducks from Australia were at cards with caballeros from Mexico; Kanakas played at the wheel with sable-coated Russians; Digger and Dogrib came to the bar—if they had the pinch of gold dust necessary for a drink, or the forty dollars to buy a bottle of South American rum.

Bearded frontiersmen who had just arrived in their covered wagon trains played with their greatest enemy, the Indian. All castes, all religions were welcome. The sign above the entrance specified:

COME ONE, COME ALL.
DEAD OPEN AND SHUT GAMES.
A GIRL FOR EVERY MAN.

"They's a young lady wants to see you, Steve," the bouncer said, sticking his close-cropped head around the office door.

"How do you mean, young 'lady'?" the proprietor asked, turning from his desk incredulously.

"A girl with the face of a kid, and gold ringlets. A beauty; I just heard all about her—and let me tell you.

"You know that fight they was stagin'

down at the foot of Broadway near the pier? I mean between a bear and a bull it was chained to? Well, when they slit the bull's nose and the bear went after him, and the bloodiest scene in town was about to be e-nacted, why the crowd left, melted away? You know why? This gal came walkin' down the pier."

"You're daft."

"Asked for to see the mayor. I reckon she thought she was in civilization. And the police. And the harbor commissioner. Don't laugh. They followed her up the street where some one was takin' her to the Grand Hotel for to see Reverend Hunt.

"Well, the post office line waitin' for tomorrow mornin's mail broke all to pieces. So help me God! A line stretchin' acrost Sacramento Street into the tents and chaparral!"

"Broke up the post office line?" No, that was carrying the yarn too far. A girl might be more intriguing to the miners returning from the camps, than for instance the sight of a grizzly clawing a mad bull to pieces; but the post office line where men made a living by standing for hours and then selling out their place to those who were crazy to get back to the diggings —that was a different matter.

"Who is she, and what all does she want?" the skeptical proprietor asked.

"Comes ashore from a old whalin' bark, sayin' she wants men to ship before the mast. Whales are offshore beyond the gale. Seems like it's the old story: the crew hopped into the boats and rowed on up to the Sacramento without waitin' for to be discharged."

"What did the Rev. Mr. Hunt say to her?"

"He wasn't home. So she asked where the gamin' houses was at, sayin' that she reckoned the best men to help a lady in distress was gamblers."

This must have piqued Steve Lukon's vanity—which history says was abnormal —for he immediately said:

"Show the young lady in."

Presently a girl with a seraphic face and a plain linsey dress stood before him. About her neck she wore a handkerchief, the two ends of which crossed her childish bosom and pinned down on opposite sides. Steve Lukon noted the frayed bonnet with its old ribbons faded by salt air, and the sea-stained woolen stockings, and a pair of tiny slippers slushy with whale oil.

The gaming house proprietor rolled his cigar between his lips and squinted up at her out of a half-closed muddy eye.

"What's the trouble, little lady?"

"I want help for my father's ship."

"What kind of help?"

"Please, sir, I want a month's provisions for a crew of twenty-five."

Steve Lukon whistled. "I've grub-staked a busted mucker now and then so's he could get back to the hills, but when you mention twenty-five men, sailors at that—" He shook his chunky head. "It's all I can do to feed these hungry cantina girls of mine. Sending twenty-five sailors to the gold washes is not in my line."

"Sir, it is not to the gold washes—"

"Then where are you going?"

"Please, sir, we're going a whaling."

Lukon stuck his thumbs in his leather vest, and his beefy shoulders rippled in a chuckle. His barkeep followed suit, sticking tremendous thumbs into his suspenders. Priscilla had never seen such big thumbs. Indeed that was why he was a San Francisco barkeep—in order that his pinches of gold dust would amount to something.

"How is it you came to me for to finance a whalin' expedition?" the proprietor laughed.

The girl blushed. She had believed that all gamblers were chivalrous men. Gambling in her mind—despite the teaching of her forefathers—must be a very honorable profession. But evidently she had made a mistake. This brute seemed of a different mold than the stowaway of the Cape Cod.

Finally she managed to stammer: "I saw a sign outside, sir, saying you wanted a cantina girl. I thought perhaps I could work. My father is in his bunk—and he won't be able to get up for a week or two. I want to work—at anything. I want to earn something so I can buy provisions for my poor father."

Lukon did not laugh this time. He cast a covert glance at his barkeep, who was standing behind the girl. The barkeep stood with mouth open, retaining the smoke of his pipe with his held breath.

"What makes you think you can ack like a cantina girl?" Lukon asked in a changed voice.

"Perhaps I can't. But I wanted to ask what they have to do."

"Well, they have to dance with the guests—"

"With those men out there?" the girl gasped. "I can't do that, sir. I can't dance anyway. I've wanted to learn, but I have always heard it is sinful. Yet I would gladly learn if—"

"We can let you out of the dancin' if you qualify in somethin' else. F'rinstance, some of my girls are just entertainers. Sing songs—"

"I can do that, sir," she said eagerly.

The barkeep's eyes met those of his master again, and he nodded. If she could sing, no matter how simply, she would be a riot. Those muckers coming down from Slap Jack Bar and Rag Town and Red Dog, roaring with their wealth, would go crazy.

"You'd have to dress kind of different," the proprietor said, eying her woolen stockings and oil-stained shoes.

"How do you mean, sir?"

"How do I mean? I mean with silk stockings—that's what."

"My father—"

"He won't know."

"You promise me that?"

"I'll bill you as a girl from a whale ship. Lots of 'em in port. I'll make a mystery out of you." He turned to his barkeep. "Call in Arizony, and tell him to bring his fiddle. Likewise call Big Nell."

A one-eyed man with a tobacco-stained beard and a fiddle came into the room, blinking apprehensively. Behind him was a large steaming woman in a spangled dress, with a necklace of gold nuggets under her double chin.

I wish to mention Priscilla's reaction when she saw this "Big Nell." It was the first woman she had seen since putting out from New Bedford many moons ago. Since then she had lived in close quarters with the forecastle rats of the Cape Cod.

She had seen a few Eskimo on the coast of Alaska. She had seen a few Japanese sailors up there off Kamchatka. She had seen from afar the strange heterogeneous company on board the Lady Weymouth; and down on the coast of Chile, when they stopped for water, she had seen a vaquero or two.

But although there were women in these particular localities, destiny had so shaped events that this gentle New England child had not once met a single one of her own sex during all that time.

The sight of Big Nell was like the sight of green palms to a shipwrecked sailor. Two small pearly tears filled the blue eyes of Priscilla Bartlett, a heavenly smile came to her lips. She thrust out her slender hands, and the bediamonded paws of Big Nell took them, and for some reason or other gave them a squeeze.

It was not the squeeze which was Nell's ordinary stock in trade when making up to a bearded miner who had struck gold. It was sisterly, or perhaps I should say motherly. For Big Nell at a glance sensed the fact that this girl was a bit of flotsam drifting on stormy seas.

She felt the child clinging to her hands. She felt her come into her arms. She saw her lift up her face. And without the slightest surprise—for it all seemed so natural—she felt the soft lips against her cheek.

"Can you paint this lady up, Nell?" the proprietor asked. "She's goin' to entertain the gang out there."

"Paint her?" Nell repeated. "She don't need it."

"Fix her up so's she'll be a riot," Lukon ordered.

"Is there any sense in paintin' a angel, Steve. Never heard tell of paintin' a angel."

"Shut up, and do as I tell you. But wait—" He turned to the blinking old fiddler. "I want to see if she can really sing. Tune up, Arizony. Now, then, little lady, what are you going to give us?"

"Let her sing Jim Crow—that's what they're all crazy about."

"I don't know Jim Crow, please," Priscilla said.

"Then how about Railroad Bill?"

"Leave her choose, you old seedwart," the proprietor snapped.

"Somethin' weepy," Big Nell advised. "I can sing 'Blest Be the Tie That Binds.'"

"That's more like it," the proprietor said, for Steve Lukon had a good sense of showmanship.

"Never heard of it," the one-eyed fiddler grumbled.

She sang it anyway, and the fiddler picked up the tune quickly enough. She sang as she would sing on the after deck of the Cape Cod—always totally unconscious of the tattooed crew—and now unconscious of this new type of ruffian audience.

It was Big Nell's turn to have tears in her eyes. She wept easily. It was part of her stock in trade. She could turn on her tears like a water faucet. Generally it did not signify anything particularly tragic. It did not in this case either. She was merely transported into the nearest that Big Nell would ever come to heaven.

"That's enough," the proprietor said gruffly. "I don't want 'em to hear out there till the time comes. When can you go on, and how much do you want?"

"Whatever you say, sir," the girl answered wisely.

"How about four octagonals, and startin' in to-night?"

"It's all right, sir," she said eagerly, although she had no idea what an octagonal was. She would have sung for four dollars. To sing a few songs for two hundred dollars was beyond her imagination. She had something of her father's innate faith that the only way to obtain real wealth was to hunt whales.

"'Tain't much," Steve Lukon said, "but the muckers—particularly such as is drunk—will throw you more. You can maybe outfit your whalin' expedition after a few nights singin' out there in that dive."

He turned to Big Nell. "Go on, Nell; fix her up. I'm leavin' her in your care. No man is to talk to her. You get that? She's to be treated like she was our own baby."

"I was thinkin' that long before you said it, Steve."

The barkeep, the proprietor, and the fiddler had a drink.

"Frisco's goin' wilder to-night than she does on a new gold strike," Steve Lukon said. "Here's where my house gets more famous than Nevada Jack's."

CHAPTER XVII.

GOLDEN GLORY.

PORTSMOUTH SQUARE was blazing with lights that night, but it was not boisterous. In those days all of the east side of the Plaza, most of the north side, and a part of the south were given over to gaming houses.

Some like the famous Parker House were substantial frame buildings renting for ten thousand a month. Others were old adobe houses, of the Yerba Buena days. Still others were merely tents.

The Gold Rocker House was a barn of unpainted redwood with a canvas roof. On the night of which I speak it was crowded and yet quiet. In fact, the part which was given over to the dead open and shut games was gripped in a rather ominous silence.

Men were betting huge sums. They were drinking, but they were not noisy. They spoke in hushed voices. You could hear the clink of chips, the whir of cards, the tinkle of glasses.

When men lost their fortunes they got up silently and slipped out. No one knew what had happened to them. In some cases no one ever heard of them again.

A gentle-eyed gambler with a drooping black mustache, and his companion, a gentle-voiced man with a black beard and hair that came to his shoulders, were at cards with a big Kentuckian.

The Kentuckian wore a black shirt, homespun suit, and dogskin boots. He had panned a hundred thousand dollars of dust in Seven-up Ravine. The gentle-eyed man and the bearded man with the soft voice were proceeding to take it away from him.

They had not started in on the big haul as yet—for the simple reason that they wanted to bait him. They were letting

him win small sums. The psychological moment to trim him had not yet come.

Beyond a partition of redwood, the big dance hall was crowded and noisier. The sign outside which stipulated that there was a "girl for every man," could not be taken at its face value.

There were no girls at all. There were, perhaps, five women painted up as girls, and adorned with spangled knee-length dresses and red stockings. But there were more than five men who wanted to dance. There were nearer five hundred.

One of these ladies had corraled a young miner who had just come down from Churntown. The young miner was buying rum and sugar for the lady's glass. The sugar had to be weighed on the scales till it balanced its weight against gold dust.

The young miner was telling a tale of a wife and two children left at Kansas City, whence his wagon train had set out.

But the plot of his story was weakening. The saga of paternal love and devotion, of childlike faith in a father's heroism, of a Bible kept when he had discarded furniture, books, clothes, grain, and even the covered wagon itself, of thirst in the Great American Desert, of starvation in the snows of the Sierras—these elements of his narrative began to disintegrate.

The face of his wife grew dim, the tears of his children were forgotten. It was a night to celebrate the finding of a fortune. On the morrow he was going back and buy his family a mansion and horses and carriages. For the moment, however, he would pretend he had no wife and children.

At the next table that victim of the gold rush days—a fellow called Kiesburg—was describing how he had served on the relief of the famous Donner Party. You heard about the Donners from all lips in those days. The Donner girls were at that time up in Sonoma.

Their father and mother and many others had died in the Sierras, the survivors, clinging to life only by eating strips of beef hide boiled to glue, or the leather of boots, or the wax from sewing baskets or a bit of harness—and finally, so the word went about in San Francisco—they turned to cannibalism.

Many were the tales of horror, of loot, of murder told about those good people, and here was a blackguard who posed as a hero, because he went into the Sierras with the heroes from Sutter's Fort. But no one believed him.

But they did believe the blood-curdling tales of Indian fights which were being recounted at the next table by a certain man of fair complexion, with slender bones and muscles like wire, who was called Kit Carson. This fellow was a hero in the eyes of all the habitués of the Gold Rocker House. To-night he held court.

And at the booth beyond—the booth nearest to the little stage of unpainted redwood planks—there was a swarthy man, with Spanish sombrero tilted to the back of his head, his big feet spread out before him with silver spurs half-buried in the sawdust and tobacco cuds. He was eying a youth on the dance floor, a youth who held his coonskin cap in one hand, and a glass with the other.

Three other youths were drinking the health of his absent señorita who was to be his wife. The man in the booth, slouched on the bench, was loading his revolver.

Into this scene of our most glorious frontier epic, into the midst of this tempest of avarice and lust and hatred and drunkenness there came a sad, sweet song:

"Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts—"

Kit Carson noted that his listeners were distracted. He looked up toward the row of whisky bottles and candles shaded by tin cans which served as spotlights on the stage.

The man who had looted the dying Donner victims looked up.

"The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above—"

The young man in the booth with the lady of the red stockings stopped talking of his Churntown fortune. He had been happier when recounting the pranks of his tots back there in Kansas City.

The lady of the red stockings had enacted a very sympathetic rôle. Her eyes—he could have sworn—were filled with tears. But when he spoke of Churntown and his

fortune, they burned with such a light that they dried out.

Now they were brimming again. Quite a sentimental lady in her way. Both listened in rapt ecstasy. It was a great world—what with its fortunes and its South American rum and its memories of distant homes beyond the prairies.

From the gaming room there came certain of the players. The sight of an oval-faced, seraphic girl singing a hymn, with old Arizony playing his fiddle, was something to leave poker for.

There were, of course, a few women in San Francisco. In the year before the gold rush there had been exactly one hundred and thirty-eight. But there were no women like this. There was no woman like this in the whole world. That's what the gamblers and the gold-hunters swore.

The Kentuckian who had been fed small sums as bait, threw down his hand. "It's my last hand, gentlemen. I won't lose my fortune. Not me!"

"Quitting because you're winnin'?" the gentle-eyed man asked in a servile voice.

"No, he ain't," the gentle-voiced man said. "No Southern gent would do that. And he's a Southern gent."

"Sure," the prospective victim said. "I'm a Southern gent, as you say, and I'm thinkin' of mah ole Kentucky home."

The voice from the sea was spinning its witchcraft:

"We share your mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear."

The man in the Mexican sombrero forgot the important duty of loading his horse pistol for the purpose of killing a rival. And for the moment he forgot the señorita he had lost to another man. This señorita was more beautiful than any in Spain.

The song ended, and the girl in the rustic dress and the sunbonnet made a curtsy to that barbaric congregation. There was a hush. Those Forty-Niners were boisterous about little things, but when some one made a big haul at cards, or lost a claim on the table, their emotions were dammed up within the powerful hirsute chests.

Then suddenly a voice from the crowded door called out: "Let her sing another!"

"Not another!" some one else cried. "But the same. Over and over again."

An argonaut who had come out as a deacon and got the gold fever, called out: "Over and over again, wonderful words of love! Let her praise Him again with her voice!"

The cries began to spread, the whole company lifted up their call. At the bar the drinkers started yipping and howling. The room was a trumpet in which a concerted blast of joyful frenzied voices sang.

They heard the wild cheer from the cantinas next door, from the old City Hotel, across the street, from the tents on Telegraph Hill. What was it? A lynching? Or was it the reception of some new pioneer who had found a strike up in the Hills and was treating the house? No, it was too wild a cheer for that.

San Francisco of the Gold Rush crowded to the doors of Steve Lukon's place to learn of this bonanza news. Gold was forgotten. Gold was nothing compared to this vision of a strange pallid-faced girl with sea-colored eyes, singing old songs at midnight at Steve Lukon's.

She sang again. She sang "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" to the rhythm of Arizony's violin and a Mexican's guitar. She sang Foster's songs which were all the rage at the time:

"Oh, Susanna, Open Thy Lattice, Love," and "Old Uncle Ned."

A woolly-headed negro played the banjo as she sang "Zip Coon." And when she was through with this last song, the young Kentuckian, with two tears trickling down his leathery face, tossed her a little rawhide bag of gold dust.

The gang of bearded men thumped across the floor in their jack boots. They jammed up about the stage and threw buzzard quills of gold dust at her feet. Big Nell tore a nugget from her necklace.

The man with the Spanish sombrero tossed her his ring. A gambler who had won big pots that night, threw her a handful of octagonals.

A peculiar fellow that gambler. He would fleece an old mucker out of six

months' of work in the hell of the mining camps—and then burn money to impress a woman.

Nevada Jack, the most famed of all Frisco gamblers, he who had a Chinese wife, had forsaken his dive and come to worship at this shrine. He threw down a rawhide bag which many fleeced gamblers had sweetened that night.

Steve Lukon, the rival proprietor, was not to be outdone. He got up on the stage behind the candles. The hot light threw his features in sharp relief.

"Gents, I'm invitin' the whole house to drink her health. No, the drinks ain't on the house exactly. You're to pay for same—but every grain of dust you pour into the barkeep's hat—why, the little lady gets it—for another song, which will be 'Home Sweet Home' and her last."

San Francisco drank. The city of the Argonauts bought bottles of rum with slugs of gold. The wild fire of raw liquor burned in the veins of five hundred pioneers. The sex-starved miners from Hangtown and Poker Flat and Hell's Delight saw a young girl with a halo of light about her head.

They heard the voice of a girl singing to them, crooning to them as their mothers crooned their childhood lullabys. They saw their homes on the Wabash; they visioned the schoolhouse on a bleak New England hill; they were in church back there on a sea cliff in Maine; they heard the negroes singing in the cotton fields; they came from the sickness and starvation and snows of the Sierras into Paradise.

At two o'clock that morning the starboard boat of the Cape Cod came up alongside.

Sculled along with a muffled oar, she approached as noiselessly as if laying on a whale.

One man on board, however, had detected her approach. This was old Joshua, straining his eyes for a sign of the girl's return.

"Joshua!" she called softly, seeing his tall, gaunt form looming over the rail against the low moon.

"Priscilla! Where in God's name have you been?"

"My father—"

"He's all right—been snorin' the deadlights off o' hell's front door!"

"Then come down and hoist this carpetbag. It's too heavy for me to lift."

The old harpooner ran down the Jacob's ladder and was beside her. "Miss Priscilla, in the name of the Almighty—"

"Everything is settled, Joshua. In a few days we go a-whaling. Until then I have a theatrical engagement."

"A what!"

"I am an opera star. I sing of Home Sweet Home to miners, and they give me their gold."

"Miss Priscilla! Are you daft! Are you moonstruck! Or are you makin' sport of poor old Joshua! What in the name of ten thousand devils is in this bag?"

"My salary."

"Then you are making fun of old Joshua—faithful old Joshua who is the only man of your father's crew to stay aboard. Shame on you, Miss Priscilla—by Heaven, it is heavy enough for three men—"

"It took three men to bring it to the water front," the girl said. "Three men with guns, who were my escort."

Joshua climbed the ladder, tugging and grunting and groaning. "What in the name of Beelzebub is in this bag!" He dropped it on the deck. The girl opened it.

Joshua peered in, and his bleary old eyes widened and shone.

A light seemed to emanate from the bag. A moonbeam slanting across the massive stooping shoulder found the pile of nuggets and kindled a faint yellow glow.

"Nuggets, so help me God!" he exclaimed. "The Gold of Ophir! A fortune, Miss Priscilla, for our poor wounded master."

"A part of it." the girl said, "for tomorrow I'm going for more."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEWS FROM THE CITY.

A WEEK later a company of sick scarecrows came out of hiding from the tule swamps of Suisun Bay.

They were laboriously rowing three whaleboats through the narrow channels be-

tween the mud lumps, and because of the height of the tule grass, you could not see a sign of them even if you had been in a channel ten yards away.

In the foremost boat a slim man with buck teeth stood at the bow, a foot on the whale-line tub. He was peering across the tops of the grass toward what is now called Grizzly Island. The way he stood there, with narrow shoulders crouching forward, suggested the attitude of a cat peering across the ground for field mice.

The week had gone hard on Swope's gang. Chips, the carpenter, who was the unluckiest of the three wounded men, was suffering from an infection. The lack of shade and of fresh water had increased his misery. He was delirious at the end of six days, and on the seventh, Swope and the rest of the gang counseled together to leave the raving nuisance on one of the lumps.

On the seventh day the crew could be held in check no longer. Swope's plan had been to remain under cover in case Bartlett got up a pursuit. It would have been foolhardy to stand out in the open waterway where a continual line of craft from San Francisco was transporting the Argonauts to the golden placers.

At the end of the week Swope sent one of the gang ashore to search out a farm and find water. The water of the tule swamps was brackish and unfit to drink.

At certain tides some of his men—including the fever-maddened carpenter, were foolish enough to drink, for at ebb, with the waters of the Sacramento flowing into the bay, it tasted fairly fresh. What salt there was in it, however, increased their thirst and their misery.

At the end of the seventh day Swope announced that he was going to steal back toward the open river under cover of dark. He had espied a group of shacks through his glass, which were evidently at a point where an inland road came down to the river's edge. The place is now called Dutton's Landing.

His purpose was threefold, to get water, to get information about the gold fields, and to find out some way of reaching them without rowing up the Sacramento.

For his trip to the landing place Swope chose three men from his own boat: the cooperer, Tom Brass, the negro cook, and the doughboy. The two former, being the biggest men of his gang, were a sort of bodyguard for the mate.

The doughboy, a youth of seventeen with a cherub's face and the soul of a murderer, was Swope's favorite on board ship. He could be used as a cat's-paw in the most dangerous emergency.

For example, he could be sent to the shacks to find out the lay of the land, without arousing any suspicion. He would look like a lost farmer's boy—not like a mutineer.

His very raggedness, his big bovine eyes and woman's mouth and downy cheeks would arouse sympathy before suspicion.

This doughboy, whom they called Hiram, was, in fact, a very peculiar character. He reveled in piracy and murder, even when his eyes gazed at you with the innocence of a baby angel.

When serving the skipper coffee on the Cape Cod, he had a loving and adoring look, which, however, reminded Swope of a woman poisoning her lover. If he had had a jeweled gown on his lanky frame instead of that grease-spotted pea-jacket, he would have been the very picture of Catherine de Medici serving poison to a prince.

The negro had originally been placed in Swope's boat for a very good reason: he was the master of the provisions. Thus it was that as Swope and his three favorite mutineers rowed out of one of the sloughs toward a hummock known as Solomon's Island, he took with him the three worst blackguards and all the food.

And this was important. For, it may as well be set down right here, this quartet of double-dealing cutthroats never went back to their shipmates.

The latter, with the three wounded members of the gang, were left in the mosquito-infested tule swamps to shift for themselves without food or water, or any knowledge whatsoever of the country in which they had dreamed of picking up fortunes.

Swope, steering with his twenty-foot oar, ran the boat into a slough two miles from the landing, and covered her with the tule

grass. The four men then went ashore, heading inland and tacking back toward Dutton's Landing.

Three shacks of hide, canvas, and redwood sent out the warm, yellow light of tallow candles and a merry babbling of voices. On the edge of the black water two small craft were moored.

The doughboy was sent in first to find out the lay of the land. He came out later, sickened with his gluttonous attack upon their fresh water.

His report was favorable. There was only an old Mexican barkeep, serving homemade cuevo to a motley assortment of travelers. No one had noticed him. They were all as ragged and hungry looking, the boy reported, as he himself.

Swope, the negro, and Tom Brass, the cooperer, followed him back.

It was a bare room, with two barrels and unpainted redwood boards serving as a bar, and an assortment of boxes of bottles in a corner. Spittoons on the sawdust-covered floor, tin cups on the bar, a pair of scales to weigh gold dust, strips of jerked beef hanging on the wall to be sold by the yard completed the furnishing.

One of the boats was on the down trip heading for San Francisco. The only ones on board were the skipper, a deck hand, and one passenger.

This passenger was of momentous interest to Swope and his henchmen, for the simple reason that he was the first gold hunter they had seen.

He was a shrunken, yellow-faced man, clothed in a tattered black shirt, patched trousers, and torn jackboots, through which his toes protruded. Swope had been sailing with some pretty sorry looking bits of flotsam—but nothing that approached this.

"How's the diggin's?" some one in the room asked of the returning prospector.

"Look at me!" the derelict barked out. "You look at me and then ask how's the diggin's." Having thus silenced the room, he turned to the Mex. "Give me a drink—you."

"You got se pay dirt?" the Mexican asked doubtfully.

"Do I look it?"

"He ain't got nothin' except the clothes on his back," the skipper of the lugger who had brought him down river said. "Paid his way to Frisco with a pickax and borer. He's through with pay dirt."

"I got to have a drink."

"No pay dirt, no cuevo, señor," the barkeep said humbly.

"Look here, mister, have a drink on us," Swope said.

The man did not ask Swope who he was. For no man asked a stranger such a question in that country. He accepted eagerly fervently, turning all of a sudden from an arrogant tramp who had a grudge against all of mankind, into a humble wheedling thing, rubbing scrawny yellow claws together.

"We're headin' up to the diggin's, mister," Swope said. "Maybe you can tell us something."

The negro, the doughboy, and Tom Brass gathered about. Brass looked over the shoulder of the boy. He did not want to thrust himself forward. Being thoroughly frightened at finding himself among these landsmen, he did not open his mouth once during that scene.

"You ask me to tell you somethin' about the diggin's," the derelict said in surprise.

"Sure. We're strangers here. Came down from the north in a wagon. We're huntin' our fortunes."

The miner laughed a dry, brittle, scornful laugh.

"Fortunes, aye? That's what everybody's dreamin' about. And some are gettin' it. But nine out of ten ain't. Unless they sell eggs and raw liquor like this Mex. That's the way to get rich—feed the muckers. Don't do any muckin' yourself.

"One man gets a strike and pans out a hundred thousand dollars of gold—I mean after workin' till his back's broke. Another goes to a quarter million, and some shoulder strikers come and jump the claim and send him out at the point of a gun.

"The next man gets cholera. They's plenty of that up at the camps where I been rottin' away for the last year. Cholera, starvation, freezin', fightin'—that's what we're all doin' except the wise ones who sell eggs and liquor or know how to deal a cold deck.

"There's my story, gents. Take it or leave it. But for me, I'm headin' for the Horn and home."

That was all the information Swope could get about where to find a fortune in the mines. Cholera, starvation, breaking your back digging—it was not exactly the roseate picture painted by the stowaway of the Cape Cod.

But it was, after all, only one man's version. They had another version a few minutes later. The only trouble was this: it was not the authentic record of a man who had actually been to the fields. It was from the lips of a man who was on his way. And that, Swope reflected, made it far less valuable as a bit of advice.

The other craft moored to the river's edge was on the up trip. A party of prospectors were setting out on the terrible, the glorious adventure. Of the five Argonauts two were from Virginia, one from Sweden, another from Lower California, the fifth from Japan.

It was one of the Virginians who, inviting every one at the bar to join him in a drink, gave Swope and his gang the other side of the picture.

"Stayed in Frisco four days," the stranger said. "Good Laws, what a town! Won two thousand at Red Dog. Got a good outfit.

"They're pannin' with Indian baskets, clay cups, old hats, but I got everything: rocker and compass, pan and gold borer and pickax. Enough left to buy a couple burros up in Sacramento.

"But I sure did hate to leave that town there. Yes, suh! You ask why? I'll tell you. Fell in love. No, I ain't speakin' about pussonel matters. It's about the whole town.

"The whole of Frisco is in love! A beautiful girl. No'therner—but that don't matter. She could have been a Chinee—like Nevada Jack's wife—and we'd of loved her just the same. And her voice—"

"Where about's is your claim?" Swope interrupted. He was in a hurry to get out of the place. He did not want to be listening to a tipsy young Virginian talking about a girl singing songs.

"Wait till I tell you, suh. Wait'n I'll tell you ever'thing. Gray eyes. I sat in a booth right up smack against the stage. Gray eyes—a lady who'd sailed, they said, from up no'th somewhere—Alaska.

"Imagine that. A beautiful child with gray eyes comin' down from Alaska—maybe with Eskimo blood in her veins and singin' hymns in a gaming house to drunk miners!

"I tell you, suh, it was somethin' I'll never forget. Bein' a Virginian and a gentleman, I respond, suh, to the charms of a woman—no matter who she is. But when she's got gray eyes and an angel's face—"

"How long a journey is it, mister, to your diggin's?" Swope interrupted again. The negro was shuffling his great feet impatiently. The doughboy was focusing his cowlike eyes on the rum bottle, and not listening; Tom Brass was getting more apprehensive every moment about the wisdom of chatting with a stranger—particularly about matters that had no bearing whatever on their plans.

"Now wait, suh. I want to tell you about this girl. I'm on fire, suh. Can't get her out of my mind. As I say, the whole town went mad. Why, damme, suh, they poured their gold dust into her very lap. Just because she sang hymns.

"And when she sang some of those good old Southern melodies, why, gen'lemen, my heartstrings were town asunder! Who she was, no one knew. But I heard confidentially from one of the cantina girls—a friend of mine, suh—that she was from a whaling ship. From heaven, I'd say—"

"What I'm interested to know, mister," Swope began—but he checked himself as he caught Tom Brass's eye. Brass looked ten times more scared than ever. Or perhaps the look on his face, the wrinkled brows, the little popping eyes, was not so much a look of consternation as of utter astonishment. "What were you saying, mister—about a whaling ship?"

"Don't know if it's true. The word of a cantina girl—but I never contradict a woman. One thing I do know, that little child was raking a good little contribution from the city of San Francisco.

"Man, let me tell you! It was as much as a miner could get in a year of hard pan-

ning. A gold hoard every night, that's what they say. Simply unbelievable, on my word as a Virginian gentleman!"

Swope and Brass exchanged glances. The big negro and the gawky boy entered the mute communion.

"What did this lady look like?" Swope asked in a changed voice.

"What did she sing?" the doughboy put in.

"Where-all did she take the gold you're designatin'?" the negro asked.

Tom Brass said nothing. He was vitally interested, but he foresaw trouble. They must not breathe a word, or bat an eye, else some one would suspect that they knew this girl, and her ship, and her history.

"Let me answer you-all's questions one by one: First, she looked like an angel. Golden hair in ringlets, a bonnet, a quaint little frock. One of these artists that hang around the Frisco saloons cutting silhouettes made copies of her profile and sold 'em fo' an ounce apiece.

"Then he made twenty more and raised his price. You'll see her picture in ever' bar in Frisco before the month's out, or my name as a Virginia gentleman is soup."

"Every night she takes her hoard and—disappears?" Swope asked.

"To her ship most likely. But no one knows which ship of the five hundred out there in the bay is hers. A Yankee ship most likely, because her accent is a No'therner's. Can't fool me—even when she sings negro spirituals.

"And her hymns and whalemen chanties sound a powerful lot like way down East, I'll tell you-all. But can't tell which Yankee ship.

"Steve Lukon simply wouldn't give up the secret. Made a mystery out of it—bein' a showman. And it don't matter what ship, so far as Frisco is concerned. Why, man, she can buy any ship in the bay what with the fortune she's haulin' in ever' night!"

"Whalemen's chanties, hymns, a Yankee accent, golden ringlets, gray eyes!" Swope and Brass, the doughboy and the sea-cook were staring at each other as if they were looking upon ghosts. The negro licked his lips.

A fortune—a city, the city of the Gold Rush, mad over a prima donna! It was unbelievable, and yet, if they had only known it, it was an oft-repeated story of the bonanza days: an actress set up as a goddess on a pedestal of gold like the famed Señorita Abalos, Laura Keene, and Matilda Heron, and Mrs. Kirby.

"All aboard!" the skipper of the tidewater lugger called out from the shore.

The Virginian and his fellow passengers tossed off their drinks and hurried aboard. The four mutineers were left with the Mexican barkeep and the man whom the gold fields had broken.

Swope cast one last look at the latter. He was a sorry contrast to the group of hilarious young prospectors bound for the diggin's.

Tom Brass looked at the derelict out of red apprehensive little eyes. Slushy, the sea-cook, looked at him. The pimply faced doughboy looked at him. He typified the probable future that was in store for these whalemen, if they attempted a landsman's occupation.

They wanted gold—a fortune—but they did not want to swing a pick. Besides they were handicapped by the dread possibility of being rounded up by a posse of Vigilantes and brought to trial for mutiny.

It was a crisis of Swope's carefully laid schemes. His men and he himself had come to a turning point. Which company should they join? The small chosen company of miners who found gold—or the greater company who fed them and robbed them? Which was the safest? Which promised the greater and the quicker reward?

Swope beckoned to them with a gesture to follow him.

They were out in the tule swamps—four lurking shadows—their heads bent close together in earnest and excited conversation.

"You men know well enough what I'm goin' to tell you," Swope said. "There's four of us. We've got a boat and all the grub. We don't have to go ashore and pay a dollar for a tin cup of watery soup. We'll stay in the offing, as you might say.

"No man will know where we are or where we come from, or where we're goin'.

But you three and me will know: We're after the easiest money and the most of it."

"The rest of the crew—" the negro said, "if we divvy up with them—"

"Divvy up? Not us. There's us four. Who else? That's all. The rest of the crew can rot out there in them swamps. Or else they can risk their hides by standin' up the river in them whaleboats which will be spotted right off the bat as the boats from the Cape Cod. We stay under cover. No diggin' for us. We're goin' back to Frisco—"

"Goin' to Frisco?" Tom Brass cried in alarm. "They'll hang all four of us for the fool lubbers we are."

"Not ashore," Swope said. "Drat you for an ass, Tom. Not ashore—but to the Cape Cod."

"You mean to give ourselves up to the skipper?" Brass exclaimed in terror.

"Sure—give ourselves up to him with a harping iron through his skull. That's how we'll give ourselves up. The skipper can't fight any more. He was hit durin' the gun-shootin' at sea.

"He's most likely lyin' up waitin' for old Joshua to gather a posse and come and chase us. And waitin' for that little mopsey of his to skin San Francisco out of a fortune."

"Let her skin 'em. Let her sing!" the negro said gleefully. "The more she skins 'em the more for us."

"Slushy's got the right slant," Swope said. "How about you, Brass?"

"The skipper's a powerful fighter. He'll murder all four of us—"

"I'll murder him first." It was the high, cracked voice of the cherubic doughboy speaking. "Bashed me about the decks for this whole cruise, did he? Thought I was smilin' and forgivin' him, did he? I'll show the Bible-thumpin' sea-cook! I'll come aboard him. That's all as I ask, Mr. Mate, to join your party."

"That's talkin', boy. You're with us. You get a fourth. But you, Brass—"

"A fourth of what?" the lanky cooperer asked. He was torn between the emotions of avarice and fear.

"A fourth of this gold the girl's filching from drunk miners."

"I'm with you—that is, if Bartlett's wound keeps him lyin' up."

"I ain't so sure but we should of left you in the swamps, Brass," the mate said.

"I'm with you," Brass announced. He knew well enough that it was healthier to be with Swope than against him. "But we've got to bump off that skipper before he starts any more of his sharpshootin'."

"All right, men," Swope said briskly. "Let's get aboard. Wind's hauled over to eastward. We can make the trip under sail, and by morning be alongside the old bulk."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

A Hat in the Radio Ring

By GARRET SMITH

"THE radio's playin' hell with politics!"

With this sententious remark, a long speech for Boss Quaid, the big fellow, who had just taken the end seat at the speakers' table, glared at the microphone opposite the toastmaster's seat halfway down the long alley of snowy linen. His pale little eyes betrayed secret anxiety through their slits of fat.

"How so?" asked the lean, dapper gentleman at Quaid's right.

"Why, it's this way, Mr. Forsythe," broke in the rat-faced little man at the boss's left. "Take this dinner to-night, for instance. In the old days when we pulled a keynote dinner like this, that was to set the pace for the campaign, we could pretty much keep it bottled up. We had the newspaper boys fixed, and if anybody made the wrong turn, or started puttin' tacks on the pike, maybe we could keep it out of the papers.

"Anyhow, we could get it toned down, or if worse came to worse, have a statement of our own printed along with it. Now everybody has a radio and gets the gas right hot from the cylinder. He should worry about what the papers say next morning."

"Barney's right. They don't even go to meetings any more," mourned the boss.

"Unless they're hand-picked, like this one," Barney chuckled.

"Barney's right," the boss echoed the chuckle.

Barney Fogarty, the big fellow's secretary, was as loquacious by nature and profession as his chief was silent. But his speech was the thought of Quaid, O. K.'d by the big fellow's guttural "Barney's right."

"I take it I better be careful what I say to-night," the elegant Forsythe murmured with mock anxiety, as if his utterances were to be his own spontaneous outbursts.

"If you want the boss to get you nominated for Governor, you had," Barney laughed. "As long as you're cagy about the State power proposition, it doesn't matter a whoop what else you say. It's some dark horse popping up here to-night that we're afraid of. Every yahoo in the State will know it as soon as we do."

"Barney's right," Boss Quaid sighed again. "People hear too damn much these days."

Boss Quaid's domain had for twenty years been practically a one-party State, dominated by the machine which Quaid till lately held tight in his fat hand. But lately he had felt his power slipping a little with this ominous growth of modern publicity. Walls had developed too many ears.

Now on the eve of the county conventions he was not quite sure he would get enough hand-picked delegates to dominate the coming State convention which would nominate a Governor this year. The question of State control of water power on which the boss saw fit to hedge was threatening internal disruption.

To-morrow was county convention day. He was hoping that Forsythe's speech at this dinner to-night would swing sentiment in enough doubtful counties to give him a majority of pledged delegates when the State convention opened.

But he was uncomfortably conscious of that great unseen radio audience in a hundred thousand homes already settled before their "speakers," listening eagerly to the preliminary gossip of the announcer as the faithful gathered around the tables.

He knew that a wrong note struck at this dinner might start a thunderstorm up-State over which he would have no control.

Forsythe was worrying, too, under his suave exterior.

"Suppose somebody did break loose to-night," he remarked, leaning insinuatingly toward the boss's secretary. "Couldn't an accident happen to the radio temporarily?"

"Oh, nothing raw like that!" Barney deprecated with outpushed palm." They'd smell something rotten to the end of the State. No, I got a better way."

He glanced at a smaller table adjoining the low platform on which the speakers' table stood. It was surrounded by a group of dashing and determined-appearing young men. At the end of this table, facing them, sat a dark youth, even more rat-visaged than the red-headed Barney. He winked knowingly at the latter.

"Who's that young gunman?" Forsythe asked a little distastefully.

"That's Jim Neenan," Barney told him. "He's a vaudeville actor and a friend of the organization. Jim and his little pals will kind of unofficially supervise what goes over the radio. Watch 'em if anything breaks."

And something did break. It held off so long that less acute observers of political nature than Boss Quaid were beginning to breathe freely.

The harmless preliminary speakers had received polite applause. Boss Quaid, after a glowing tribute from the toastmaster, had risen, bobbed his head, grunted, and sat down to the tune of a thunderous ovation and orchestral strains of "He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

Then Forsythe, the favored son and real speaker of the evening, had risen and said nothing dangerous, in burning, glittering language and at considerable length.

But while his favorite was talking, the roving little eyes of the boss had settled on the keen, quizzical face of a big, shaggy man at the other end of the table. The man's high, thoughtful brow corrugated as the would-be candidate went on with his mellifluous platitudes. The pleasant blue eyes, bent intently on the speaker, turned to gray steel.

Quaid nudged Barney.

"Watch out for Hammond," he whispered.

When Forsythe sat down, Hammond sat bolt upright in his chair and stared hard at the toastmaster.

It was not on the cards to have any more speeches. Forsythe's address had been planned as the climax of the evening. A half dozen lay figures and uncertain quantities remained at the speaker's table who would be called on as a matter of form. All were supposed to know better than to do more than rise and bow.

While the prolonged applause for For-

sythe was still ringing, the newspaper men gathered up their notes and departed, leaving the Associated Press man to let them know if anything unexpected broke loose at the last minute, not amply covered by the radio.

Then, in its perfunctory course, the name of Martin W. Hammond of Gainsport was called.

The big man arose promptly. But instead of sitting down with a bow and a word of greeting, as the man before him had done, he marched straight down the table to the speakers' position in front of the microphone.

"Gentlemen, I beg a moment's indulgence," he began in deep, mellow tones that filled the suddenly silent hall and rang in the ears of the greater radio audience in a hundred thousand homes. "I did not come prepared to make a speech, but I cannot let this occasion pass without saying certain things that the Honorable Mr. Forsythe left unsaid."

Boss Quaid grunted and kicked Barney's shins. Barney turned and winked at Jim Neenan at the little table.

Neenan and his gang jumped to their feet with a yell of "Hurrah for Forsythe! Hurrah for the next Governor! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

They chanted it in chorus, crowding to the edge of the platform, and leaning almost over the speakers' table, with their faces only a few feet from the ringing microphone. They kept it up, their cheers alternated with catcalls.

The tumult spread through the big hall like a contagion. The whole place was in an uproar. For a minute or two Hammond stood facing the clamor, a sardonic smile on his face. Then as the noise continued he leaned over the microphone and tried to go on with his speech in an effort to reach his radio audience at least.

But the young cheer leaders bent closer to the instrument and redoubled their efforts. The ether waves bore only an inarticulate roar.

Twice when the confusion subsided a little he tried it again, only to be thwarted by a renewal of the racket.

Here and there through the throng there were cries of protest from the fairer-minded. There were growing indications that the meeting might break up in a riot.

The toastmaster stood helpless, his eyes fixed on the boss, who regarded him with an indulgent grin.

At length Hammond gave it up altogether. With a bow and a smile, he turned and walked out of the hall.

At this gesture a partial hush fell on the crowd. There were cries of "Shame!" "Call him back!" "Give him a chance!"

Several fist fights were threatened among some of the more explosive of the faithful. The toastmaster began gesturing for silence.

Then Jim Neenan leaped to the center of the speakers' table and gave an elaborate caricature of the presiding officer's gestures. As soon as he could make himself heard, he shouted:

"Gentlemen, inasmuch as Mr. Hammond had to catch a train and could not make a long speech, I've been asked to go on with it."

Thereupon the vaudeville artist launched into a parody of a political speech that in a few minutes had restored the crowd to hilarious good humor. At length the orchestra struck up "Home, Sweet Home," and the crowd filed out, most of them convinced that the whole episode had been a bit of horseplay staged to give a light touch to a successful occasion.

II.

Boss Quaid was chuckling contentedly as he entered his limousine with Forsythe, Barney Fogarty, and Jim Neenan. He had expressed his satisfaction and his gratitude to the manipulators by giving the dignitaries the slip, with the exception of Forsythe, and inviting the trio to supper at his favorite roadhouse where neither henchmen nor reporters would search him out.

"Now we're all set," Barney assured Forsythe as they rolled away. "There were three or four possible bad eggs there tonight, Hammond among 'em. Hammond was the only one that hatched, and we squashed him before he got out of the shell, laughed him to death."

"Barney's right," Quaid agreed.

But for once Barney was wrong. How amazingly, mysteriously wrong, he learned two and a half hours later, when the party stopped at an all-night news-stand on the way home and bought copies of the *Press* and the *Sentinel*, the capital city's two morning papers.

MARTIN W. HAMMOND THROWS HAT IN RING

This was the flaring headline that smote his eyes from one front page, at the top of the dinner story.

HAMMOND FLOUTS FORSYTHE, DECLARES HIMSELF CANDIDATE

This blazed at him from the other newspaper.

"What!" the boss exploded. "The damned traitor! Sent 'em a statement! Hell's bells!"

"Statement nothing!" Barney ejaculated. "These papers are full of prunes, both of 'em! Why, they say he made this speech as the dinner feature of the occasion, the *Sentinel* calls it."

For several minutes, under the glare of the dome light in Quaid's limousine, the four men read, pop-eyed with amazement, the silence broken only by occasional crackling profanity. There was no doubt but that both papers had seemingly gone mad.

According to their accounts, Hammond had actually completed a ringing speech of some twenty minutes' duration at the dinner, and at its conclusion had received tumultuous applause. He had scathingly picked Forsythe's empty mouthings to pieces, keenly analyzed the State power proposition, declaring it must be put in the hands of experts to determine the right policy as between State and local control. He was personally engaged in such a study now, he declared, and the State could have his services as Governor to direct such a study and carry out its results.

There was added a brief account of Hammond's career as a successful engineer who had served the State for one term as engineer ten years before.

Quaid finished reading and dashed the paper to the floor in a purple rage.

"*Sentinel* office, George," he ordered the chauffeur.

The *Sentinel* was controlled by Quaid. Boon, its managing editor, and handy man to the boss, was just about to go home when the enraged and mystified quartet stormed in.

"What the hell?" Quaid demanded, slapping the paper down on the desk and pointing one pudgy finger at the offensive and mystic headline. "Are you fellows crazy or drunk?"

"That's what I wonder!" Boon returned with unwonted spirit. "We've been hunting you boys for two hours, almost lost the trains on the first two editions, waiting for you to give orders on the handling of this yarn. Why didn't you tell us you were going to flop to Hammond? All we could do was to print the news."

"News, hell!" Quaid snorted. "Damned lies! Hammond never made a speech. Tried to; got hooted out."

Boon leaned close and got a good sample of the breath the quartet had acquired at the roadhouse, drawing erroneous but not unnatural conclusions as to their sobriety.

"Say that again slow," he requested. "I don't get you."

Barney said it for him, making from two to four words grow where one grew before.

"Now I say you ought to get out an extra denying this rot," Barney wound up, looking about for confirmation.

"Barney's right," declared the boss.

"Now, listen," Boon exclaimed. "I was glued to that radio horn from the time your dinner opened until the orchestra stopped playing 'Home, Sweet Home.' Don't try to tell me I don't know what I heard. Half the rest of the office heard it too. About twenty other people who listened in on the radio in Gobel's drug store drilled in here to get the inside dope. The men over in the *Press* heard it too. They had me on the wire, asking for a statement from you."

"Now we all heard Hammond called on at the end of the evening. We heard him get a whale of a demonstration and some kidding. Then we heard his speech to the finish and the cheering he got afterward. We got his speech right from the radio by

shorthand. They heard it all over the State too. We've had wires from papers from one end of the State to the other asking for dope.

" Now, in the face of that, do you want to make an ass of the whole party by a statement that your keynote dinner was so wet that you were all too drunk to hear the key speech?"

" Did your reporter hear that speech?" Quaid demanded in bewilderment.

" No. The boys all left when Forsythe got through. The A. P. man stayed, but he must have been drunk and gone to sleep. We couldn't get anything out of him."

" Listen, boss," Barney broke in. " Somebody double crossed us, unless the spooks have been at work. I bet Hammond played in with the broadcasting station some way and got 'em to let him break in. The whole mischief's been done for to-night. We better lie low till we find out how it was done."

" Barney's right," Quaid decided, and stalked out.

Barney was right when he said the mischief had been done. But the following day only increased the mystery of how.

First thing in the morning, the fatal morning of the county conventions, Quaid began getting wires from leaders all over the State, asking instructions, and confirming the fact that every radio user outside of the dinner hall had heard the speech.

Also he had innumerable phone calls from people who had been at the dinner, asking what it was all about and confirming the fact that no one at the dinner had heard Hammond's speech.

Following Barney's hint, the staff at the radio broadcasting station were given the third degree. They swore that Hammond's speech had come over the regular wire along with the rest of the dinner program.

Their announcer on duty at the hall that night could shed no further light, as he had gone home after the Forsythe speech, arranging with the toastmaster to give the radio " good night."

Hammond himself, who had a reputation for truth telling, issued a statement to the afternoon papers exonerating the broadcasting staff.

" I was invited to speak at the dinner, and I did," he told the reporters. " That's all. I'll swear to you I made the whole speech right there. I'm sorry if the gentlemen at the dinner couldn't hear it, but I have the statement of my radio audience about a thousand to one against theirs."

That's all they got out of him, and the twinkle in his eye indicated that he was enjoying himself immensely.

But the speech was on record. That was the important and practical fact.

Events pressed too fast to waste further time over a puzzle as to how it got there. Early reports from the counties decided Quaid to hold off his own statement for another day till he could count noses of instructed delegates.

It was a worried group who met with him in his office the day after the county conventions. Forsythe, under his air of debonair indifference, was decidedly anxious for fear his sponsor might decide to drop him for the new entrant.

" Give 'em the dope, Barney," the boss ordered.

" Well, we figure just about forty per cent of the delegates pledged or sure for Forsythe, and just about the same number for Hammond. That leaves about twenty per cent waiting to be shown."

" And that kind hates a dude," Quaid remarked, looking hard at Forsythe.

" Meaning that's what I am?" he asked.

" No! No!" Barney assured him. " He means that's what they might figure if you go to talk to 'em personally. They're shy of city men. You're a polished gentleman. Hammond's sort of rough and ready. Other things equal, they'd be for him if they got a look at you both. And it's a cinch Hammond 'll go around and talk to 'em. I expect Mr. Quaid would like to keep you both out of sight of those birds. For once he'd like a straight radio campaign."

" Barney's right!" rumbled the boss.

" Perhaps I'd better begin wearing soft shirts and a slouch hat," Forsythe suggested wryly.

" Be yourself," grunted the boss. " I'm for you."

Forsythe departed, content with this assurance of the boss's support, but not alto-

gether optimistic as to the final outcome. Barney Fogarty retired thoughtfully to his own private office and went into the silences.

After a little of this, some cryptic phoning resulted in a luncheon appointment in a discreet back room of one of the city's quietest speakeasies.

Late that afternoon Jim Neenan, the handy impersonator and general utility man, presented himself on private business at the offices of Thomas Forsythe, who rather distastefully granted the caller's request for a confidential conference.

"Look here," Neenan opened, "I hear you and the boss are honin' for a pre-convention campaign that 'll limit you an' Hammond to radio speeches, figgerin' it would give you a better break."

"That seems to be Mr. Quaid's idea," Forsythe admitted dryly.

"I suppose you know Hammond has a different idea?"

"I have heard as much."

"How much would it be worth to you to have it arranged so that Hammond would be glad of a chance to make it a radio campaign?"

"It might be worth quite a little, but I fail to see what is the practical use of discussing it."

"Just this. For a price I might be able to bring it about."

Forsythe laughed.

"Judging from such of your methods as I have seen I feel safe in saying I'd pay as high as a thousand dollars if my opponent is persuaded to such a course and you can convince me that you were instrumental in bringing it about."

"Is that a promise?" Neenan demanded.

"It is," Forsythe agreed again with another cynical laugh. "And if your machinations result in my nomination I'll make it another thousand. And that's a promise. Now I'll bid you good day, as I have another appointment."

Neenan departed, a crafty smile on his narrow features.

III.

THAT same evening Warren Hammond arose from a hurried dinner and gave his pretty young wife an affectionate good-night kiss.

"Don't wait up for me, ladybird," he warned her. "I've got to speak at two meetings, and I may be out till all hours."

"I wish I could go with you to your first meeting. I'll be thinking of you. I'm so proud of my big boy."

"Even if he does traffic with the powers of darkness and employ black magic to make himself invisible," he laughed.

"I think you're mean, Warren, not to tell me the truth about that mysterious radio speech. I think everybody there must have been drunk as one of the papers hinted, and you don't want to let me know it."

Hammond laughed boyishly.

"Why, it was so simple I'm ashamed to tell it. When I do tell you, you'll be ashamed to think you didn't guess it."

"But do you think it's nice to fib to everybody about it?"

"Nary a fib," he denied. "I've told nothing but the truth, so help me. Now stop worrying and go to bed early."

He kissed her again and was off.

But Warren Hammond did not get to his first meeting. In fact, he got no more than a scant hundred yards down the narrow country road that led from his suburban home into the capital city.

He was just shifting his gears into first when he felt the front end of the car swaying violently back and forth. He threw out the clutch and jammed on the brakes, but it was too late.

The front of the car lurched over to one side, dropped to the ground, and plowed down into the ditch at the roadside. He was thrown forward felt a stinging blow on the head, and then went unconscious.

A few minutes later a passing car saw the wreck and stopped. Hammond came to in the ditch beside his car to find a neighbor applying first aid.

Besides the blow on the head, which had left an ugly welt across his scalp, both legs were broken. Fortunately the glass in his car was nonbreakable, and he had suffered no disfiguring cuts.

The cause of the accident proved to be a loose front wheel, which had come off,

completely tipping the car half over. It had all occurred so suddenly that he had no clear notion of just what had happened to him, but he assumed that his head had hit one of the top braces, and that his legs had been broken when he was thrown over the door.

Never at any time did he suspect that his accident had been inspired and carefully planned.

But a few days later Jim Neenan, with a smile more deeply insinuating than ever, again called at the offices of Thomas Forsythe. He carried with him a copy of an afternoon paper just off the press.

"Perhaps you've noticed that I've made good on that radio campaign stuff," he announced, pointing to a story on the front page.

Forsythe took the paper and read an announcement by Hammond's political manager. The latter would be confined to his room and bed until long after the State convention, his doctor had predicted, but would doubtless be restored to complete health by election time.

In the meantime the physician saw no reason why the patient should not carry on such mental labor as the pre-convention campaign required, as soon as he had completely recovered from the first shock of the accident. It had therefore been arranged that he should deliver a limited number of speeches by radio, from a telephone in his room connecting with the broadcasting station.

He would also have a final statement to deliver at the convention in the same manner, assuming the privilege of a regularly elected delegate and a leading candidate for head of the ticket.

"How's that?" Neenan gloated. "Barney tells me you are going to swing back with a big show of doing the sporting thing by agreeing to the same program yourself. So we've got our wish, and little Jimmie's come for his pay."

"How's that?"

"Wasn't I to get one grand if I arranged it so that Hammond would consent to a radio campaign?"

Forsythe was frankly puzzled for a moment, then saw a light.

"Look here, you young thug, do you mean you deliberately wrecked Hammond's car? Suppose you'd killed him! Good Lord, did you think I meant anything like that? We talked about persuading."

Neenan grinned.

"We're practical politicians, ain't we? There's different kinds of persuadin'. Mind, I'm not confessin' anything, but I leave it to your judgment if that looks just like an accident. There wasn't a chance in the world of his being killed, with a guy hidden in the back of the car to stop him if he got to goin' too fast with his wheel loosened up.

"Wasn't it funny he wasn't marred up, nothing wrong but a little tap on the head and a couple of broken legs that laid him up proper without any permanent hurt? He never guessed that he got that biff on the bean from a blackjack from behind him, and that his legs was broken nice and quiet by hand afterwards."

"You cold-blooded devil!" Forsythe began, but checked himself on second thought. After all he couldn't afford to antagonize this crafty little man.

"Look here," he went on. "I haven't got a thousand on hand just now, and I didn't mean just that, but here's a hundred cash on account, and I'll make good on the two thousand all right if you can show you've put over my nomination without any more physical brutality and no danger of a comeback."

There was a little argument over it, but in the end Neenan left with his hundred and a promise that he'd earn the big money yet.

IV.

So the novel pre-convention radio campaign opened and developed presently a pitch of excitement seldom exceeded by a closely contested Presidential election. Twice a week alternately the courtesy of the capital city's broadcasting station was extended to one of the contestants, Hammond reading his speech from his bed in his little farmhouse in the suburbs, Forsythe delivering his from the hotel suite which he had taken as headquarters till after the State convention.

Harking back to the famous "Front Porch" campaigns of certain Presidential candidates, this campaign of Hammond's was facetiously dubbed a "Bedside Campaign." Forsythe made much of it in his glittering speeches which continued to evade anything but generalities regarding the State water power issue.

On the whole the two contestants continued to run neck and neck. They continued to hold their original blocks of instructed or definitely committed delegates, each falling some ten per cent short of the required majority.

And the little block of uncommitted delegates from the rural districts who held the balance of power, despite repeated rumors of a break after each radio speech, remained uncommitted and stuck together.

There had been no personal mud slinging on either hand. They admired the finished oratory of Forsythe. But equally they admired Hammond's clear, cold analysis of the power situation.

They were suspending judgment until the final summing up of recommendations he promised to make when they assembled for the convention.

So the time of the State convention arrived, and, as Boss Quaid had feared, the fight was carried to its floor with the chance of victory ready to fall either way according to the words a sick man might utter into his telephone in the privacy of his bedroom.

For when the convention opened, Warren Hammond was really ill, broken down by the strain of the campaign on top of the shock of his injuries. With great effort he had finished dictating his final radio statement which he hoped to read over the wire to the convention. Now there were grave doubts whether he would be able to read it himself.

The morning of the convention dawned at last. Into the city's convention hall the delegates poured.

Quaid snorted at the spectacle.

"Don't look much like the old-time batch of handmade ones," the big fellow mourned to Barney as they watched from the gallery.

"Nope," his satellite admitted. "Especially with the skirts in on the game. But the women ain't nuthin' to this Hammond. He's a woman and a devil and one of the Lord Almighty's mysterious ways wrapped up in one bundle. He's been one trick ahead of us at every jump. That accident of his was either plain dumb good luck or fixed by himself intentional. The poor invalid stuff's got the women going. The boys that are feeling him out say even those in the neutral crowd are leanin' his way. I'm afraid he's got us licked, chief."

"You've said it, Barney—afraid I'm about through."

An out-of-town man under the edge of the gallery hailed a local acquaintance. "Hello, Dick! Is this the place where you held the ghost dinner?"

Barney and his chief grinned at each other ruefully.

"They'll always believe we fellows were blind and dumb that night," Barney replied.

"And I'll always believe those radio people double crossed us somehow," Quaid added.

And the big fellow clung to that belief to his dying day.

A good sized knot of delegates came in, making the roof ring with cheers for Forsythe. Another knot across the hall tried to drown them out with counter cheers for Hammond.

"Hello, you bedroomers!" shouted a Forsythe man above the din.

"Go on, you ghost walkers," a man from the other ranks retorted.

And in Hammond's sick room out in the little suburban farmhouse, the invalid was listening to the tumult in the convention hall as it came to him over his radio. A vigilant wife and nurse kept him constantly under their eye, shutting off the blaring instrument whenever he showed signs of getting nervous.

"Remember, Warren, if you overstrain your nerves, the doctor won't let you read your speech," Mrs. Hammond warned him at intervals.

"I've got to read that speech if it kills me," he told her. "If I don't know what's going on beforehand I won't be able to put the right spirit in it."

And he managed to grin at her cheerily, although it was an evident effort.

In Forsythe's headquarters at the hotel near the convention hall, the other candidate was nervously rehearsing his speech in the intervals when he was listening in on the radio. Little Jim Neenan was in constant attendance upon him these days, acting as general handy man.

The crafty one had taken a room of his own down the corridor from Forsythe's suite where he could be on hand night and day to make himself useful. He was charging nothing for these services, but he hadn't forgotten the main chance.

" Remember you're going to owe me a fat two grand in the course of the next day or two," he reminded his self-selected chief at frequent intervals.

But Forsythe vouchsafed him nothing more by way of reply than a sarcastic lifting of the eyebrows. At times Neenan studied him reflectively, and worry lines appeared in the narrow brow. Then there was a flash of dangerous light in the cold, close-set eyes.

The convention moved through two days of tense suspense and excitement. During the routine business of organizing, whenever there was opportunity for a test vote, the original line-up continued firm.

This was discernible on the second day also, in the cheering and speeches accompanying the putting of Forsythe and Hammond in nomination for Governor. The neutrals were still standing in a firm bloc, waiting for Hammond's statement.

Then, on the morning of the third day came the long awaited opportunity. The session opened with a motion that the convention proceed to ballot for Governor.

Before it was seconded, a Hammond adherent, as previously arranged with the presiding officer, arose, and after a brief eulogy of the sick man announced that he had just been informed by telephone that Mr. Hammond's doctor had given permission to the patient to read his address to the convention over the radio that morning. He therefore moved that the convention extend this courtesy to Mr. Hammond as one of the nominees.

The motion was carried unanimously, and the time for the address set at ten thirty, one-half hour away. Then, in accordance also with agreement, the same privilege was sought and obtained for Forsythe, and his time set at twelve o'clock.

During the few minutes that remained before Hammond's voice was due to be heard over the wire, there was an atmosphere of electric suspense in no wise mitigated by the blaring of the band which filled in the interval. In the sick man's bedroom miles away, the doctor had just examined the patient and ordered every one else out of the room but himself and the nurse in order that the invalid speaker might be as little disturbed as possible.

Pale and trembling he sat propped up in the bed, his manuscript on a tray before him, and the telephone transmitter on an extension bracket at his lips. Downstairs his family and immediate friends were in front of the radio which would hurl back to them the speech he was about to send out.

In a voice deep and resonant in spite of his weakness he began his brief statement. The listeners below and the great crowds in the convention hall down in the city sat breathless.

After outlining his purposes toward the party in case he were selected, he summarized his finding in the water power problem in words eloquent for their simple clearness. Finally came the closing section in which he was to give his long awaited policy.

His councilors listening downstairs, who had worked with him over the manuscript, knew his suggestion for a long term nonpartisan commission by heart.

But as he began this section they heard words strangely unfamiliar. They stared at each other in amazement. Down in the convention hall it was as though the assemblage had been struck by a bolt of lightning.

They heard Hammond, the supposed scientific progressive, deliberately proposing as his conclusions that the State keep its hands off the water power forever, and leave it in the grasp of the present private corporations. As his words ceased, it was evident that in a few brief sentences, Ham-

mond had torn down all the esteem that he had built up, and with it his hopes of the nomination.

There was a moment of silence in the great hall, and then pandemonium broke loose. Boss Quaid and Barney Fogarty pounded each other on the backs and shouted with glee. Hammond had gone further than Quaid in his most arrogant moments had ever dared go.

"The guy's gone crazy!" Barney roared.

"Barney, you're right," roared the big fellow.

In the Hammond farmhouse the doctor came out of the speaker's room to face a horrified group.

"Doctor—has it been too much for him? Is he delirious?" Mrs. Hammond gasped.

"Oh, no; he's all right. Seems to be a great relief to him to get it off his mind," the doctor reassured her.

"But, doctor, you heard what he said at the last!" Hammond's partner insisted. "Altogether different from what he'd planned."

"Oh, I didn't notice what he said," the doctor told him calmly. "I was busy counting his heart beats."

V.

A FEW minutes later, down in the city, little Jim Neenan drove hurriedly up to the hotel where Forsythe had headquarters, leaped from his car and made his way up to the Forsythe suite with all speed.

Forsythe was closeted in his private office, going over for the last time, the address that he was to deliver over the radio in a few minutes, but Jim burst in on him unannounced.

"Now do you owe me the two grand?" he demanded triumphantly.

"I do not! What for? Get out of here. Can't you see I'm busy!" Forsythe snapped at him.

"What for?" Neenan snarled. "Why, for putting Hammond out of the running! Didn't you know I did it?"

Forsythe stared at him in contempt.

"You did it!" he sneered. "That's a delightful bluff, but I'm too busy to be amused. I don't owe you two thousand dollars, and never will. Now get out, I tell you."

"But listen, I can prove—"

Neenan got no further. Forsythe stood over him menacingly.

"Another word from you and I'll ring for a cop and have you arrested for conspiracy. Remember I know who broke Hammond's legs."

Neenan stared back at him for a moment with eyes turned to steel gimlets, white hot at the points. Then without a word he left the room and the suite and hurried down the corridor to his own apartment.

A few minutes later the eloquent voice of Forsythe was being poured into the convention hall. He was surpassing himself in his flights of oratory.

He wound up, deprecating his opponent's position on the water power question, and pledging himself to continue a safe and sane policy of watchful waiting until the time was ripe for the State to act.

Forsythe laid down his manuscript and turned to receive the plaudits of the group around him.

"Stop! Just a moment, Mr. Forsythe!" came an unfamiliar voice of thunder from the amplifier of the convention hall, and from the radio horn in the Forsythe suite. "You have something to confess, Mr. Forsythe. Do it now, before I'm compelled not only to confess it for you, but to make a further statement that will make you a fugitive from justice."

The booming voice ceased, and for a moment there was absolute silence.

Then another voice came from the radio. Forsythe started, and turned deadly pale. He had not spoken a word, but the voice that he was hearing was seemingly his own.

"I am afraid I will have to confess," the voice was saying. "My opponent, Mr. Hammond, has been the victim of a conspiracy. The closing words of his speech which led you to condemn him just now were not his own, but the artful interpolation of an impostor clever at disguising his voice. If you will go to the woodland near the home of Mr. Hammond, just outside the city, through which the telephone line passes that brought his

speech this morning from his bedroom to the broadcasting station, you will find still dangling from one of the poles a wire which the impostor had cut into the telephone line. It was a simple thing for him to attach a telephone to the end of that wire and listen in while Mr. Hammond read his speech. When my opponent reached his long-waited-for conclusion regarding State water power, the impostor cut him out of the line, and cleverly imitating Mr. Hammond's voice, he delivered the false statement which you heard with so much consternation. What Mr. Hammond actually read, and you can prove it by getting his manuscript, was in substance as follows:"

The simulated voice of Forsythe then gave a close approximation of what Hammond had intended them to hear.

" That is all I have to say," concluded the pseudo Forsythe.

The real Forsythe, still deathly pale, whirled away from the radio.

" That damned little rat of a Neenan! He double crossed me because I wouldn't bribe him! He played the same trick on me that he did on Hammond. Down to his room quick!"

The group rushed pell-mell down the hall and burst into the room which Neenan had occupied. But Mr. Neenan had gone, taking with him the sweet flavor of his revenge.

Over the window sill dangled a wire attached to a telephone instrument. It ran out along the ledge and connected with the special wire that had been installed in Forsythe's suite.

The crafty Neenan had lately feared that his service to Forsythe would be repudiated, and had prepared the instrument of his revenge beforehand.

And in the convention hall at this moment the uproar had subsided to the point where one of Forsythe's former adherents could make himself heard.

" Mr. Chairman," he said, " I move that we dispense with the roll call and instruct the secretary of the convention to cast one ballot for Mr. Warren Hammond as our candidate for Governor."

It was seconded and carried without a dissenting voice.

A few minutes later a local man came across Boss Quaid as he was slipping quietly out of a side entrance of the convention hall.

" Not leaving us, are you, chief?" the other asked.

' Yep," he sighed. " Barney's been intimating lately that I'm a has-been. Barney's right."

VI.

A WEEK after Warren Hammond had taken the oath of office as Governor of the State, he dropped a line to one Joseph Morris, a radio announcer employed by the local broadcasting station, suggesting to Mr. Morris that it might be to his advantage to call and see him.

" Mr. Morris," the new Governor began when the young man appeared, " I feel that I owe you an apology and a reward as well, in case anything in the line of jobs that I have to dispose of would appeal to you. I've looked you up, and the only thing I find against you is that on a certain evening when you were acting as announcer at our party's keynote pre-convention dinner, you took a chance and went home early, thereby making me Governor of the State."

He paused and chuckled at Morris's utter bewilderment.

" Well, it's the answer to the ghost story that's been puzzling a lot of people since last spring—how I was able to get a speech of mine from that dinner when I apparently wasn't there. It's so darn simple!

" When I left the table licked that night and went out the side door, I almost ran into your little sound-proof announcer's booth with its handy little microphone all ready for use, and its handy little switch to cut off the microphone out on the table so that I was able to stay right there and substitute my speech for Mr. Jim Neenan's horseplay, switching back to catch his applause and give it to my radio audience as my own. At that I guess I owe Jim something, too. But if there is anything I can do for you, let me know."

THE END

The Coast of Blue

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Desperate Chances," "The Pancake Princess," etc.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FLORAL PIRATES.

LATE in the afternoon Sir Charles decided that it was safe to come back and he arrived on the Lucretia shortly before five o'clock to find the passengers assembled in the salon absorbing tea and cakes.

The duchess had been informed half an hour before that at six thirty the yacht would be ready to sail. As the entire day had passed without attention from the police it seemed probable that the departure might take place without interference. Therefore, she had decided to permit Sir Charles to live another day.

After all, she considered, he might grow more curious regarding her excessive anxiety to depart for England and if he learned all the facts might fail to behave like a gentleman.

"I say, and how are you, one and all?" he demanded with a heartiness which masked uneasiness. "I hope you didn't take it too hard, Harriet, that we had to put back. After all, we had to have petrol and a few things to eat, you know.

"Deuced sorry you didn't give me warning before we started last night of our destination, this might have been avoided."

"It's quite all right, Charles," she said coldly. "Where have you been hiding all day?"

"I wasn't hiding at all, dear lady. I lunched at the Negresco and said au revoir to a few friends. What makes you think I was hiding?"

"Because you fled at such an early hour. I hope you didn't happen to mention we were accompanying you."

"Oh, dear, no! I knew you were keeping it dark as it were."

"Any news in the town?" asked Artemis casually.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 3

"Rather!" exclaimed the baronet, who joyously gulped his cup of tea, for he had expected a wigging and got off light. "Town is all worked up over poor Philip's death. Pity you hadn't married him, Artemis."

"What do you mean?" demanded the duchess, glaring at him. "He didn't have a penny."

Sir Charles chuckled. "Only about twenty-five thousand pounds to leave his widow if he had one. Goes to a cousin in Australia. I say, Harriet, shall we sail to Australia?"

"Your levity isn't decent," proclaimed the duchess. "Besides, you are out of your mind."

"Not I. It seems that the whole Flailfern family was blotted out yesterday morning, and Philip was killed in the afternoon. The poor chap had the title and didn't know it."

"Well, upon my word. It's incredible," she gasped.

Artemis sipped her tea indifferently.

"It's your fault, mother," she said. "He certainly wanted to marry me."

The duchess picked up a magazine and fanned herself.

"What an opportunity," she exclaimed. "What an amazing affair indeed."

"I am afraid these gentlemen will think we are extremely mercenary," Artemis said with a sly glance at Butsy. "Instead of expressing sorrow at his death we are discussing his fortune."

"Peer of the realm murdered in Nice," commented Sir Charles. "That makes it twice as necessary these French find the murderer. There will be questions asked in Parliament about it."

"Suppose we sail at once?" suggested the duchess nervously.

"Be easy," he soothed, unaware he had increased her anxiety by his careless remark. "We'll be toddling presently."

However, it was after six when the yacht dropped her moorings and moved slowly out of the basin, and the sun was setting very prettily. The passengers paid little attention to the sunset; they were watching the harbor behind them lest a police boat, even now, start in pursuit.

Presently they were out on the bay, passing a number of small craft returning from the naval battle of flowers at Villefranche. Their occupants shouted and waved to them and in several cases were near enough to throw flowers aboard.

Dusk was on the water, turning the blue to a greenish black, while in the east the stars were fighting to shine against the dying brightness of the sky in the west. A hail floated across the water from a large and gorgeously festooned launch, the last of the procession of Villefranche battlers.

Captain Groggins answered the hail, slowing up, to discover what was wanted.

"Out of petrol," came the reply. "Can you give us enough to get into port?"

"By all means," commanded Sir Charles.

The launch was drifting, therefore, the skipper moved the yacht slowly until the smaller vessel was close alongside, when a sailor tossed a rope which was deftly captured by one of those on the launch who drew the boat to the accommodation ladder.

Butsy, who leaned beside Artemis upon the rail, saw that there were several gayly costumed women on board and six or seven men arrayed as gondoliers. One of these ran up the ladder, followed by several others and, to the astonishment and indignation of Captain Groggins, the first to step on deck drew a revolver and thrust the muzzle of it against his well-rounded stomach.

"Elevate your hands on high," he commanded in French. "Ladies, gentlemen—all of you, with great rapidity."

All the other masqueraders carried weapons which they flourished and the hands of the skipper, the owner and the passengers went immediately skyward.

"*Tout va bien*," cried the head pirate. "*Partez*."

Immediately the gasless engine of the launch began to chug and, operated entirely by ladies, it moved away from the yacht and vanished in the gathering gloom.

"But—but—but—this is an outrage!" stammered Sir Charles.

"A lot of bally pirates," howled Captain Groggins.

Artemis didn't say anything, but she

grasped the left arm of Butsy in both her hands, whereupon he passed his right arm protectively about her. On board the Lucretia everybody was as if turned to stone, save one.

Mr. Dobey Dill slipped unnoticed into the cabin, rushed to his stateroom and stood in the center of it with the package in his hands while his eyes, like those of a hunted rat, roved in vain for a hiding place.

Suddenly he tore the paper wrapping from the package, darted into the gallery, ran downstairs into the salon and laid upon a table with several other volumes a copy of La Fontaine. After this act of desperation he lifted a cushion from a chair and placed beneath it his trusty automatic.

As the Lucretia was a motor yacht she carried a small crew, the skipper, mate, and eight men, including three stewards. The captain had a revolver, but it was in his cabin. No one else had arms of any sort.

"The police," cried the duchess in a voice which failed like a foghorn when there isn't enough steam.

"On the contrary, madame," said the head pirate with a low bow.

"What do you want?" demanded the skipper. "This is an act of piracy, I suppose you jolly well know."

"You will all descend to the salon and remain there," the leader of the visitors commanded. "The captain and myself will ascend the bridge and continue the voyage if you do not mind."

"The British navy will take this matter in hand," exclaimed Sir Charles weakly.

Artemis suddenly stepped forward and confronted the pirate.

"Will you kindly inform us the purpose of this insane action?" she demanded.

The pirate bowed. He was a very courteous pirate who admired a pretty woman.

"Have no fear," he assured her. "You ladies will not be harmed, nor shall anybody on board who behaves themselves. We desire to take passage with you to Barcelona?"

"But we are not going to Barcelona," shouted the captain.

"A thousand pardons, monsieur. but you are," replied the Frenchman.

"What shall I do, sir?" asked the distressed skipper of his owner.

"Throw these scoundrels overboard," bleated Sir Charles.

The contrast of the truculence of his remark and his cowering attitude in front of a gleaming pistol caused Pete Hargreaves to chuckle.

"Barcelona? That is in Spain," cried the duchess. "It is not in France. By all means let us go to Barcelona, Sir Charles."

"If you say so, dear duchess," he granted with much relief.

"Do you promise to go ashore at Barcelona, not to rob us and to refrain from injuring the vessel?" demanded Artemis.

"We promise to go ashore to Barcelona, dear mademoiselle," replied the pirate. "Everything else depends upon these gentlemen. For now, please to go below.

"François, Gaspard, stand at the entrance and see that none emerges. I shall be down presently."

"Come on, Sir Charles," cried Artemis. "We might as well obey since we have got to do it anyway."

Butsy hastened to escort her while Pete followed with the duchess. Sir Charles discreetly brought up the rear.

"I'm so relieved it's not the police that I don't seem to mind that it's only pirates," the girl whispered to Butsy.

"The duchess's jewels," he breathed. "They'll take them all."

She laughed.

"The day after the robbery she sent everything home by express. Mine went along at the same time."

They descended into the cabin and seated themselves in their favorite chairs while the panting of the engines told them they were again under way. The two guards remained at the head of the staircase and made no effort to control the actions of those below.

In a few moments Beryl Murther and Dobey Dill were drawn out of their staterooms and sent down to join their betters. The pair sought a far corner and sat side by side, Beryl athrill at the situation, Dobey deadly pale, for he knew why the vessel had been boarded by pirates. They had come after him.

In fifteen minutes the man who headed the boarding party descended. He was costumed as a gondolier and wore a black mask across the upper part of his face. At a season when honest people wear masks thieves attract no especial attention.

His black eyes gleamed through the mask when they settled upon Dobey Dill.

"Come here, monsieur," he commanded in French.

Dobey did not budge.

"You are being paged, Dill," said Hargreaves sharply.

"He does not, perhaps, understand French. I shall speak English," said the thief. "Where is the package?" he continued, addressing the little crook.

"What package?" demanded Dobey. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"The package you took from me and confided to this gentleman and his friend," said Larue, for, of course, he was the pirate.

Dobey shook his head, deeply puzzled, and looked appealingly at Hargreaves.

"I don't know what this guy is driving at," he complained. "What's it all about, boss?"

"That is what I would like to know?" demanded the duchess.

"I am after stolen property, madame," said the Frenchman. "If these Americans return what does not belong to them, I agree to take nothing from any of the rest of you and leave you unharmed at Barcelona."

"D'yer mean to say these fellows brought stolen goods on my ship?" demanded Sir Charles.

Larue bowed.

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"Well," cried the baronet, "if you are officers of the law I must say you took a pretty way to show it. Why didn't you say what you wanted instead of sticking guns in our faces and acting like a lot of blooming pirates?"

"There were reasons, monsieur."

Sir Charles regarded Hargreaves with an insolent glare.

"I don't know who you are, sir," he said. "I invited you to accompany us at the request of her grace, who appears to have been deceived. Kindly deliver to this officer the stolen property he requires. Then please to accompany them ashore."

Pete returned his glare.

"I know nothing about stolen goods," he said, "but if I had such things in my possession I should not return them to these bandits. If this man is an officer why does he wish to land at Barcelona?"

"Oh, ah, yes. Why do you wish to go to Barcelona?" demanded the Englishman.

"For my own reasons, monsieur," replied Larue, haughtily. "Now, gentlemen, will you turn over the packet before I am compelled to take extreme measures?"

"I ain't got nothing. You can search me," Dobey offered.

"I propose to do so and also the rest of you, ladies included,"

"What's that?" boomed the duchess. "You lay a dirty finger on me, young man, and you'll wish you had never been born."

Larue grinned impudently.

"On second thought it will not be necessary to search you, as you are the last person to whom these American thieves would intrust what I seek."

Buttman suddenly thrust himself forward.

"If you refer to us as thieves again, or attempt to search these ladies," he shouted, "I'll give you a chance to show whether you dare commit murder on the high seas."

"Don't be a fool, Butsy," said Pete, attempting to draw him back. "These fellows have the upper hand."

"Be still, Butsy. Nobody believes the man," said Artemis sharply.

"And the reason why I won't have to search you, Mme. la Duchesse," said the Frenchman maliciously, "is that the stolen goods are the property of madame—at least, your pendant is among them."

"What?" bellowed the duchess. "You —these—you think my pendant is on board this ship?"

"I'm sure of it, madame," he declared.

"Explain yourself, man."

Larue grinned.

"Why not?" he asked. "Madame, I admit I am a thief. It happens that the jewels stolen at the Veglione were taken by these two Americans to their rooms at the Hotel Ruhl."

He pointed at Butsy and Pete, whose faces admitted the truth of his statement. Even Artemis drew back in consternation.

"By chance I broke into their chamber, found the jewels and removed them. Next morning this American picked my pocket and brought the jewels back to his employers, who placed them in the safe-deposit vault at the Ruhl.

"When all three of them came aboard this yacht it was obvious that the jewels came with them. That is why we have come aboard."

"Just a minute," said Hargreaves. "Do I understand you propose to turn them over to the authorities?"

"Ah, no, monsieur. I am not on good terms with the authorities."

"So you were the thieves of the Veglione," roared the duchess.

"Don't be absurd, mother," snapped Artemis. "The thief wore a costume exactly like mine and these men were always in plain view."

"Nevertheless," said Butsy quietly, "it is true that the gems were in our possession in the Hotel Ruhl.

"They were planted in my overcoat pocket for some reason which I can't explain. We could not return them at three in the morning, and decided to wait until eight or nine. But while we slept our room was entered and the jewels stolen."

Larue nodded.

"As I said."

"But that's the last we ever saw of them," declared Hargreaves.

"On the contrary your pickpocket returned them to you," denied Larue.

"He certainly—say, Dill, what was in that package you had me put in the deposit box?"

Dobey snarled:

"It wasn't nothing. Just my money."

"It seems to me that we are entertaining two sets of thieves," said Sir Charles. "I call this the most abominable situation in which I was ever placed in my life."

"Write to the *Times* about it," suggested Artemis. "If you think Mr. Buttman ever stole anything in his life you don't know even as little as I ever gave you credit for."

Her tone was biting, and she bathed Butsy in a gaze which was positively motherly.

"You heard them say they had the jewels," said the duchess.

"I told you these things, Mme. la Duchesse," said Larue, "that you would understand the character of these Americans and waste no sorrow if we are compelled to proceed to extreme measures with them."

"I suggest you hang them and the British navy will afterward hang you," said the benevolent Sir Charles.

"Dill, are the jewels on board?" demanded Hargreaves. "If they are, turn them over to this fellow. Later the police will recover them and punish him."

"I ain't seen no jewels," snarled Dobey. "This bird is plain bughouse."

"If you ladies will retire to your staterooms, we shall proceed to search these men," said Larue. "Should we fail to find what we seek, we shall search the ship. That failing, we shall be compelled to search you, much as I regret the necessity."

"Come, Artemis," said the duchess. "As for you men," she glared at Butsy and Hargreaves, "I have no sympathy for you. You are no better than this pirate."

Hargreaves bowed. Butsy caught the encouraging smile thrown at him over her shoulder by Lady Artemis and did not feel the sting of the duchess's tongue.

As soon as the stateroom doors closed Sir Charles attempted to depart also, but Larue barred his path.

"We propose to search everybody, monsieur," he said silkily. "I regret we cannot exempt you."

"This is intolerable."

"We shall be very gentle."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BUTSY TAKE A CHANCE.

LARUE put a penny whistle to his lips and blew a short blast, which brought two more buccaneers tumbling into the cabin within a couple of minutes. Two others guarded the head of the stairs, from which a perfect view of the stateroom gallery could be obtained. Sir Charles, Butsy,

Pete, and Dobey Dill watched the arrangements with varying degrees of uneasiness.

"You first, monsieur," commanded the thief, pointing a finger at Dobey. "Strip and hand me your garments as you remove them."

To this Dobey was not an objector, for he was aware he had nothing upon his person that the thieves desired. In a few minutes he stood in his underwear while Larue laid his belongings upon the table.

"Don your clothing and take a seat in the far corner," commanded the autocrat. "Now you two gentlemen," indicating the other Americans.

Naturally a search of Hargreaves and Buttman revealed nothing. Then it was the turn of Sir Charles, who trembled with wrath, injured dignity, but had sense enough to do as he was told. When the three were again dressed they were sent to the corner to sit alongside of Dobey.

Butsy, finding no room on the divan where the little man, Pete, and Sir Charles had been placed, took a chair close by. As he dropped upon the cushion he felt something hard at the back and thrilled to think that Dobey might have secreted the jewels there.

Watching his chance, he slipped his hand behind his back and under the cushion to touch the handle of the automatic which Dill had thoughtfully concealed there. When Larue turned away for a moment he retrieved it and concealed it in his right-hand coat pocket.

"I really did not expect to find what I sought upon your persons," said Larue, "but it was a very necessary precaution. Now remain where you are. The first man who moves will find himself tied up.

"There remains the matter of the ladies."

"I forbid you to lay a hand upon the ladies," cried Sir Charles.

"I regret the necessity, sir," replied the Frenchman with a bow. "Rest assured it will be done with all delicacy. Gustave, guard these men and don't hesitate to shoot any who interferes.

Gustave took up a position opposite the prisoners and displayed a revolver significantly. It was a twenty-two caliber affair, almost a toy, yet at such short range it might be very effective.

Larue now mounted to the gallery and knocked upon the door of the duchess.

"Mme. la Duchesse," he called. "It is necessary for you to come out. You will wear an evening dress, no cloak, and I shall make this as easy for you as possible. The same instructions apply to you, mademoiselle."

"Crafty," murmured Pete. "No woman can conceal anything beneath a modern evening gown."

"If he touches Artemis I'll murder him," hissed Butsy, who was almost ready to attack the pirates single-handed, particularly since he possessed a serviceable weapon.

"Watch your step," whispered Pete. "Leave it to the duchess to take care of that fellow."

The duchess, however, was cowed. In five minutes she came forth in a very low cut, tight-fitting evening gown, and a glance at her satisfied the chief pirate that she concealed nothing.

"Kindly join the gentlemen below," he commanded.

"No," she roared. "I don't stir a step without my daughter."

"As you wish. Is the young lady ready?"

Lady Artemis opened her door and dazzled Butsy by her loveliness. It was the first time he had seen her in modern evening dress, and even Pete, who, though he had recovered from his attack of Artemis fever, gasped with astonishment and delight.

She wore an exquisite gown of yellow satin, which displayed gorgeous creamy shoulders and an absolutely perfect neck. The gown was so short that the most exquisite legs in the world were not in the least concealed. Obeying instructions, she had put on a closely fitting garment and she passed inspection without delay.

"Now, ladies, if you will descend we shall search the staterooms," said Larue.

For half an hour the sextet sat in silence while the chief and one of his men entered stateroom after stateroom and turned them upside down.

"If the nasty beasts soil my clothing I'll

never speak to you again, Sir Charles," rumbled the duchess.

"But what can I do about it, Harriet?" protested the poor baronet.

"What kind of men are you all to submit to such an outrage?" she demanded. "If I were a man I'd soon clear them out."

"You forget they are armed, your grace," said Pete.

"Don't you dare address me," she retorted, turning a glare upon him which squelched him. "To think that you stole my pendant."

Artemis laughed shortly.

"Don't let's quarrel, mother. You know better."

"At least they had it and were stupid enough to let it be stolen from them."

"I'm sure it was not their fault," said the delightful defender, who was rewarded by the obvious gratitude of Butsy.

As vessels are built nowadays there are singularly few hiding places, and staterooms are so bare that concealment is practically impossible. A search of the occupied and vacant rooms soon satisfied Larue that the packet of gems was elsewhere and he finally descended again to the salon.

"It will save time and discomfort if you will inform me where you have hidden the jewels," he declared. "I warn you that failure to find them will cause me to try unpleasant methods.

"I know they are on board, I have a couple of days at my disposal and, while I do not wish to take human life, I shall not hesitate to kill to get what I want."

"You may search the ship. Neither the ladies nor myself know anything about the jewels," declared Sir Charles. "I am not interested in your treatment of these interlopers," he scowled at the trio of Americans.

"If you know where the things are, Dill," Pete said, "you had better confess. You don't want these ladies inconvenienced.

"The guy is crazy, I tell you," whined Dobey. "I never heard of the darn stuff."

"We shall begin with this cabin," said Larue to his lieutenant. "Inspect everything, don't leave a hole or corner unsearched or an article in the room."

Now began a systematic search of the salon. They pulled up the rugs, took down pictures, lifted cushions, tore the bottom coverings from divans, lifted from the bookshelves every volume and pulled open every drawer. In fifteen minutes the beautiful salon was a wreck.

Larue himself picked up the volume of La Fontaine fumbled with the clasp. If he had glanced at Dobey he would have looked no farther. The pickpocket was as pale as death, his eyes glittered and his fingers were twitching.

But another object caught the Frenchman's eye, and he laid down the book to follow his thought. After every possible hiding place had been visited, and the prisoners had been moved to the four corners of the room, the pirate swore with vexation.

Finally he set his followers to tear up the carpet upon the gallery floor. Then he determined to visit other parts of the ship, and, leaving the prisoners under guard in the wrecked room, he departed.

"Do you suppose they are on board?" whispered Butsy to Pete.

He nodded.

"Sure of it. Dill had them, he had the gall to confide the package containing them to me, and it was locked up in our deposit box for hours, the second time they were in our possession.

"The reason he came on board this yacht was to make his get-away with them; but it's a mystery where he has hidden them."

Dobey was talking to Beryl most earnestly, for he had discovered that she had turned against him. The maid had heard from the gallery the charges against Dobey. She had helped the duchess change and heard from the lips of that lady the allegation that all three Americans were dishonest and her love had grown cold. Dobey was trying to warm it without success.

"If he has them, and the thieves do not find them, I'll choke the hiding place out of Dobey after they have gone," Butsy whispered.

"What are you men whispering about?" demanded the duchess. "If you have anything to say, say it aloud. You are entirely responsible for our hideous plight, you know."

"We were brought here at your urgent invitation and for reasons of your own, your grace," said Pete firmly.

One of the guards put a stop to the argument. Not understanding English, he was alarmed at the conversation, so he made a menacing gesture and cried:

"*Un peu de silence, messieurs et mesdames.*"

Ignoring him, Butsy moved to the side of Artemis.

"Are you frightened?" he whispered.

She smiled brightly.

"Not a bit. Quite thrilled, in fact. Only I'm getting hungry, and the situation is so utterly absurd."

"Listen," he said. "I have an automatic pistol. I found it under one of the cushions, and I'm not going to stand this much longer without a fight."

"Butsy, don't be a fool," she whispered. "These men are desperate. French thieves are much more dangerous than our own.

"Promise me you won't attempt anything. You might be killed."

"Would you care?" he whispered.

Artemis bit her lip, looked away, then eyed him squarely.

"Yes, I would," she said frankly. "I—I couldn't stand it if you were hurt."

The big man smiled with joy.

"Watch me get rid of these fellows," he said. "I can do anything now."

"Butsy," she said, frightened, "I forbid you."

"You do love me," he declared in triumph.

"I don't know. Maybe. It can come to nothing."

"You don't know yourself yet, Artemis. Just your admission that you care some has given me a scheme."

"Give me that pistol," she demanded.

"What for?"

"Never mind. I want it."

"It will be more useful in my hands. Don't worry, I shall not run any risk."

It was an hour before Larue came back, his costume disheveled and his eyes burning angrily. He strode down the stairs with an air of determination.

"I have not found the jewels," he declared. "Now I am through with courtesy and consideration. I am going to get the information I need any way I can, and I shall use less gentle measures.

"Let me see, I think I shall begin with the young lady. If any of you men wish her saved from annoyance you had better speak now."

"We know nothing, I tell you," cried Sir Charles testily. "Try your third degree upon these Americans, and let the ladies alone."

"I'll reach you all in time. Mademoiselle, kindly accompany me to one of the staterooms. I desire to speak with you alone."

While the duchess was trying to conquer her fury so that she could articulate, Butsy suddenly stepped forward.

"Perhaps I can obviate the necessity," he said. "I do not care to talk here, but if you will give me a chance in private—"

"So," cried the duchess. "There, Artemis—that's the man. Now will you pay attention to what I say?"

"Butsy," cried Artemis, "I forbid you."

"It's all right, Artemis," he said. "I think I can satisfy this gentleman."

"Please to accompany me," said Larue. "I thought you would realize in time the futility of concealment."

"I won't talk here," declared Butsy.

"We shall go into a stateroom. Gustave, come with us. You others watch these people."

Larue led the way, Butsy followed, and Gustave brought up the rear. The Frenchman pushed open the door of Sir Charles's large cabin and motioned to the prisoner to enter.

Butsy seated himself upon the bed. Larue stood in front of him while Gustave closed the door and placed his back against it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE VALUE OF A CREATIVE MIND.

"NOW," said Larue, "speak. Where are they?"

"Just a minute," said Butsy. "You can't find them. Can't we do business?"

"Ha," cried Larue, who seated himself opposite the big man. "You are a thief."

"In a way," said the ex-poet. "We didn't steal the stuff at the Veglione, you know that."

"Naturally, since I took them myself."

"Oh, you wore the woman's costume?"

Larue smiled and nodded.

"But why did you plant them in my pocket?"

"Simply to get them outside the hall. We intended to pick your pocket in the street outside, but my man was stupid enough to pick the pocket of the wrong man."

"Well," said Butsy, "in New York, Hargreaves and myself are in business. We crack safes for a living."

"Burglars," smiled Larue.

"Yes. Stealing jewels at a ball is out of our line. I congratulate you upon your adroitness."

"*Merci, monsieur.* Gustave, this gentleman is a burglar in America."

"*Vraiment?*" exclaimed Gustave, who moved away from the door and took the other chair in the stateroom.

"Finding the stuff on our hands, naturally we decided to hold on to it, so we decided to watch all night. Unfortunately my friend fell asleep."

"True," said Larue. "He was sleeping like a baby in his chair when Gustave and myself entered your chamber. But how did you know that it was I who had the jewels?"

"Ah," said Butsy, drawing upon the imagination which made him so helpful to *Ginger Stories*, "you see, we knew several crooks in Nice, and one of them—er—an Englishman."

"*Sapristi,*" exclaimed Larue. "The Englishman! Gustave, I told you that cursed Philip Gwendon was playing us false."

Butsy, who had made up his Englishman, gasped with astonishment.

"So that was why you killed him during the carnival procession?" he said.

"Since we are alone, I don't mind saying, yes," declared Larue.

"Did you know that I was the masque in the jester's costume who was struggling with him just before he was killed?"

"No," cried Larue, leaning forward in excitement.

"Oh, yes. It was a plant to communicate with him. I was telling him we had recovered the jewels."

"Ah, ha," cried Larue. "The swine. It was at his suggestion that I planted the jewels in your pocket. Now I see it all."

"My friends and I were glad you killed him because we thought we would have the loot all to ourselves."

"But you counted without Gaspard Larue, my friend."

"Yes, you were too clever for us. However, you don't think I am going to tell you where the stuff is unless we make a bargain? You have got to split with us, fifty-fifty."

"No," said Larue, "thirty-five-sixty-five. We could take it all."

"You'll never find it by yourselves. Furthermore, once we get to Spain, I know how to dispose of the stuff."

"Very well," said Larue. "Fifty-fifty."

"Can I trust you?"

"I may be a thief, but I never break my word."

"There is a band of American jewel thieves in Spain. They are after the crown jewels," romanced Butsy. "You double cross us and you'll find yourself in hot water."

"The stuff is worth five million francs. There is enough for all."

"Well, I'll take a chance on you. Did you search this stateroom yourself?"

"It's not concealed here," declared Larue.

"Ah, you didn't know where to look. Take a look at that stateroom window."

Both Larue and Gustave turned their heads for a second, just long enough for Butsy to whisk the automatic out of his pocket and level it.

"Back up against the wall, quick!" he snarled.

Like a flash Larue turned, but he was too late. The consternation on his face was almost comical. He had personally searched Butsy and had him under guard since, and had ventured fearlessly into the stateroom with him because he knew the American was unarmed.

Now he saw in his hand the deadliest of all weapons, an automatic which could pour a stream of bullets into him before he could draw a gun.

"*Chameau,*" he hissed. "*Cochon.*" French words for camel and pig, the most insulting expressions of which the French have been able to think—after all, they are a polite nation.

However, he backed up against the wall and so did Gustave. Butsy reached into the pocket of his gondolier's pantaloons and drew out a revolver. He found both a knife and a gun on Gustave.

Having accomplished this much, the American stopped to think. There were still six armed men on board, and he had no further plan.

"You," he said finally, indicating Larue, "open the door and call those two fellows in. "If you try to signal them I'll put about six bullets in your body."

Trembling with wrath, Larue did as he was told.

"Raoul, Marie," he cried, "enter for a moment. Never mind the prisoners."

"Back in your position," commanded Butsy, stepping behind the door.

Wondering at the summons, the two guards entered, were disarmed in a second, and took their places in the line.

Butsy now had four revolvers and two knives as well as his automatic

He opened the door again and confronted Artemis and Pete, who had run up the stairs the instant the guards disappeared. Afterward he found that Artemis had started first and Pete followed her.

"Here," ordered Butsy, thrusting a weapon in Pete's hand. "You stand guard on these pirates while I take the ship. One cry out of you fellows and my friend here will shoot all four of you." He snarled at the prisoners. "We are desperate men."

"Monsieur," appealed Larue, "I will give you seventy-five per cent."

"Shut up," he bellowed. "Artemis, can you fire a pistol?"

"You darling," gurgled Artemis, devouring him with her eyes. "It so happens that I am one of the best woman pistol shots in England. Butsy, dear, how did you ever manage?"

"Somebody had to do something, so I just did it. I told you I would," he replied.

Butsy, as a matter of fact, was drunk with glory. Not to every man is it given to display his heroism and generalship before the woman he loves.

"Sir Charles," called Butsy, "will you come up here and help us recapture your ship?"

Sir Charles was on his way up the stairs. Although he might be rather dull, the baronet was not in the least bit a coward, and he grasped eagerly the weapon handed him.

"Give me a gun, feller," cried Dobey, "I'll show you how to do a few things with it."

"You get back downstairs," shouted Butsy. "Do you suppose we want you to hold us up after we have disposed of this gang of crooks?"

"I just want to help you."

"Then, you help us without a weapon."

"What is the plan?" demanded Sir Charles.

"We'll just rush the others," replied Butsy.

"Wait a minute," Artemis exclaimed. "Don't lose your head. Let's take the chief pirate with us, and force him to call the others one by one. We don't wish to have any killing if we can help it."

"Right," said Butsy, throwing her a glance of admiration. "You, there," he ordered Larue, "come out here. Pete, keep the rest of them covered."

"Leave them to me," said Pete. "Butsy, you certainly have surprised me."

"You never really were acquainted with me. I came originally from Missouri," grinned Butsy. "Now, Mr. Pirate, you are with three people who would just as soon murder you as eat dinner, and we are all very hungry. What is it, your grace?"

"Young man," demanded the duchess, who was already in the gallery, "do you mean to say that you went in there and captured all those thugs?"

"Use your eyes, mother, don't ask foolish questions," snapped Artemis.

"Cricky," exclaimed the duchess. "Give me a gun. I'm in this."

"Your grace, if you will just keep your

eye on that little thief in the saloon," Butsy suggested. "He can't be trusted."

"Beryl," called the duchess, "you grab that little beast by the collar and don't let him go. I'm coming right down."

As Beryl was nearly a head taller than Butsy, and the duchess was two heads taller and outweighed him by about a hundred and fifty pounds, Butsy thought that Dobey Dill would be safe for awhile.

"Come on," he said to Larue. "Artemis will help Pete hold those fellows in the stateroom. Where are your men stationed?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders in resignation.

"One in the pilot house, one forward, one aft, one in the engine room," he replied sullenly.

"Where is the crew?"

"Locked up in the forecastle, except the captain, who is steering the ship, and the engineer."

"Call the man stationed aft," Butsy ordered, adding, with a significant wave of his gun: "One mistake, and you go to glory."

They stepped into the companionway, while Larue shouted for his henchman. The man came running. He stopped with a cry of astonishment when he saw the guns, but submitted to capture, and Sir Charles marched him into the stateroom.

"Now, go outside and call the man forward," commanded General Buttman. "I'll be within three feet of you, ready to pump you full of lead."

Larue had no fight in him. He called, and the pirate joined the others in the stateroom.

Butsy, Sir Charles, and Larue then moved to the engine room entrance, where the Frenchman summoned his man, and the same process was repeated.

They moved on toward the pilot house. Here the first hitch occurred.

The crook who had been guarding Captain Groggins had heard voices on deck and looked out the window. By the dim light from the deck lantern he saw Larue coming, accompanied by two men who were not in costume, and he saw the glint of the gun in Butsy's hand.

With a shout the fellow thrust out his weapon and fired at the group. He emptied his revolver, shouting invectives as he shot. Larue and Butsy fell to the deck after the fusillade. Further shooting was prevented by Groggins, who dropped the wheel and grappled with the fellow. Sir Charles ran up the ladder and ended the struggle by striking the gondolier on the back of the head with the butt of his gun.

When he and Groggins carried the man downstairs they found Artemis sitting on the deck with Butsy's head on her lap, wailing and weeping. Larue writhed and groaned beside them unnoticed.

"Got them all?" cried Sir Charles triumphantly.

"Butsy's killed," sobbed the girl.

"No, I'm not," protested Butsy. "Just got a bullet in the shoulder. But keep on kissing me, I like it."

Captain Groggins had gone forward to release the crew, now with several men he carried Buttman and Larue to staterooms, where they were undressed, and Sir Charles inspected the injuries.

The baronet had considerable experience with gunshot wounds. He dismissed Butsy's injury as trivial, but found that the thief had received a bullet in the groin, and his condition was very serious.

Without consulting the duchess he ordered the bow of the vessel for the second time pointed toward Nice. Medical attention was vital. Besides, he had seven healthy pirates on board and did not wish to retain them a moment longer than was necessary.

Although he was in pain, Butsy could not hold back his laughter when they carried him through the companionway. Glancing down into the saloon he saw poor Dobey Dill flat on the floor, with the duchess and Beryl Murther sitting on top of him.

As the crew of the yacht were now armed, Pete was released from guard duty, and Captain Groggins removed the prisoners to the forecastle, where he placed them under lock and key. Dobey was locked in a stateroom. The last words he heard as they pushed him in was a stage whisper that he was a base deceiver from Beryl, who had turned completely against him.

Artemis, who had seen wounds during shooting parties at various places in England and Scotland, bandaged Butsy's shoulder neatly and efficiently, then she sat beside his berth with his left hand in both of hers while he told her how he had outwitted Larue, and learned the fate of Gwendon.

The duchess called for her dinner, now three hours late. When it was upon the table Pete insisted upon substituting for the girl as nurse while she obtained some nourishment. Butsy, now resting comfortably, confided to his friend the information he had secured from Larue as a result of his own flight of imagination.

"I never gave you credit for being a genius before," Hargreaves declared, "but the manner in which you captured the pirates and secured a confession from them both of the murder and the thefts at the Veglione places you in the front rank of imaginative workers."

"I don't know what made me say an Englishman had told us who had taken the gems from our room," Butsy admitted. "But when he immediately mentioned Gwendon, the whole thing dovetailed. Artemis had told you the fellow had no visible means of support, yet lived extravagantly, you had even wondered if he might not have tipped the thieves regarding her costume."

"Yes, that explains everything," Hargreaves agreed. He was silent for a moment and then burst out: "Imagine the gall of Dobey Dill intrusting the stolen jewels to my care!"

"He must have them on board or he wouldn't be here," Butsy declared.

"I think so."

"Then you have got to find them, old man. I'm flat on my back."

"It's all right, you've done enough. It would be a card to recover the jewels as well as recapture the ship. It would make you solid with Artemis."

"I'm solid now," smiled Butsy in smug self-satisfaction. "She has told me she loves me."

"Carried off her feet, eh? She's a wise girl and she'll get over it."

"Bet she doesn't."

"What on earth would you live on with a girl like that, you idiot?"

"The Lord will provide," said the lover.

"Upon my word. Say—"

"What?"

"There is nothing to prevent us from going back to Nice. We've got the jewel thieves on board, the murderer of Gwendon. We're cleared. Old Lejeune must believe our story now."

"That's so, only I've got no witnesses about the murder confession."

"The man is going to die, so Sir Charles says. He'll confess, all right."

"Things are breaking pretty good for us," sighed Butsy. "Say, see if Artemis isn't finished, will you?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

ARTEMIS MAKES AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

THERE was a conversation going on around the dinner table which would have interested the Americans if they had heard it. Sir Charles, despite the excitement, had found time to get into evening clothes, and the ladies were already dressed. To look in upon them no one would have believed it possible that they had just been rescued from pirates and were the participants or spectators of a desperate little battle.

"Wasn't Butsy wonderful?" Artemis exclaimed, opening the ball.

Sir Charles nodded coldly.

"Give the rascal credit, he managed those dashed gondoliers. But you must remember, Artemis, that this was a struggle between two bands of thieves."

The girl laid down her knife and fork.

"Are you mad?" she demanded.

"My dear girl, they admitted having possession of the jewels. How do we know they ever had any intention of returning them? And this little chap with them is a bad one if I ever saw one. It's my belief they are pretending to quarrel with him for their own purposes."

"Don't be a fool, Charles," observed the duchess. "I agree with Artemis that the young men are not thieves, and they had already explained to her why the Dill

person came on board with them. When do we get to Barcelona?"

"Hum!" said Sir Charles. "We're on our way back to Nice."

"What?" she roared. "Again. I told you, Charles, we had to get away from there, I didn't give you all the reasons. Don't you know the fool police are accusing Artemis of causing the death of Philip Gwendon?"

"My word!" he exclaimed. "Why did you not say so before? Why, that's ghastly! How can they be such idiots?

"But I've two wounded men and a parcel of pirates on board. I've got to get a doctor."

Artemis smiled in a very superior fashion.

"Don't be alarmed, people," she said. "While Butsy was capturing the ship and you sat a helpless prisoner, Sir Charles, he also solved the mystery of the killing of poor Philip."

She leaned back to enjoy the sensation.

"You can return to Nice and you may be sure that mother and I are no longer in danger of police attention, thanks to Butsy."

In her explanation of what Buttman had told her she did not minimize his astuteness and his heroism, and when she was through the duchess was silent.

"He didn't take time to find the jewels while he was unoccupied?" asked Sir Charles.

She shook her head.

"Doubtless he will when he gets around to it."

"Artemis," said the duchess sharply. "Are you interested in this Buttman person?"

"One might use that word, although it doesn't quite describe my feelings. I'm in love with him."

The first sensation was nothing like the last.

"You are utterly and completely out of your mind," her mother declared. "It began when you put on that harlequin costume."

"I believe it was the first time I ever was sane."

"What are you going to do about the man?" asked the duchess in a voice which for her was feeble.

The girl calmly consumed a piece of beef before replying.

"I shall marry him, if he'll have me, and I think he will."

"But he's an American," objected Sir Charles. It sounded as though he had said: "He's a Hottentot."

"Yes, isn't it dreadful?" she mimicked.

"Darling," said the duchess cajolingly. "You are carried away by the spectacular and because he was grazed by a bullet. You can't marry a person like that. He's not your sort."

"I suppose that's why he appeals to me. I don't care much for my sort."

"Humph! Your dislike is of recent origin," the duchess replied, with sarcasm.

"Oh, I've been getting fed up with our life for a long time. I think I shall like being an American and living in a small house with only three or four servants. And I think I shall make a good cook with application."

"Pay no attention to her, Charles. She'll come to her senses. If he were one of those American multimillionaires it wouldn't be so bad, but this fellow is nothing but a playwright."

"And not a very good one, so he says, but I shall not mind."

"I'll have you locked up in an asylum," declared the duchess.

"Try it. I am of age and have a reputation for knowing my way about."

"But you have nothing, and the man has no means."

"After all," moralized Artemis, "it's a futile and stupid life we lead. I should like to be useful. I want to be with my husband all the time. I want children."

"Good God!" exclaimed her mother. "You? Ha, ha, ha!"

"After all, England is a dying nation and America is the land of the future. I shall love to live in New York and motor out to see the Indians and the grizzly bears."

"'Pon my soul, I believe she is in love. Most astonishing thing I ever heard of. Didn't believe intelligent people ever did that sort of thing," this from Sir Charles.

"Really, your discernment is astonishing," Artemis replied sarcastically. "That is just what I have been trying to tell you. And why shouldn't I fall in love? I realize that I am not behaving like the old Artemis," said the girl, "but something pure and sweet has come into my life."

"Faugh!" exclaimed her grace. "I've lost my appetite. To think that you whom I have brought up so carefully and taught all a woman needs to know, should carry on like a waitress or a shopgirl over a hulking brute of an American without a penny to his name. Think of the man with a girl like you on his hands, he can't dress you."

"Oh, I'll wear cheap, simple little things and not go out much," said Artemis. "I've made up my mind, mother."

"Well," sighed the duchess. "Fortunately, divorce is easy in the States. The fellow will divorce you in a year and serve you right."

"Butsy won't divorce me. I should like to see him try it. You must excuse me, mother, I promised to go read to him. Have you got any poetry on the yacht, Sir Charles?"

"I should say not," he replied emphatically. "Wouldn't have the stuff around. Lot of rot!"

Artemis had risen and was turning over the books on the table.

"La Fontaine," she exclaimed. "I can't understand you having a volume of La Fontaine."

"Never saw it before in my life," he protested. "It's French, isn't it?"

"Yes, old French."

"Mystery to me."

"I think Butsy would like to have me translate La Fontaine," she said softly.

Tucking the book under her arm, she ascended to the gallery while her mother looked after her with an air of profound discouragement.

"I say, here's a state of things," observed the baronet. "The girl is positively mushy. You're going to stop it somehow."

"She has the bit in her teeth," sighed the duchess. "It's no use to talk to her now, but I'll get hold of the man and show him why it is utterly impossible."

"He probably thinks she's rolling in lucre," nodded Charles.

"I'm going to undeceive him."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A LITERARY TREASURE.

IN the meantime Artemis had entered the sick room and dismissed Pete with a bland smile, then seated herself and regarded Butsy tenderly while his eyes bathed themselves in her loveliness. For a long time they talked, hours probably, with the volume unnoticed upon her lap. Finally she said:

"Now, I think you should sleep. Would you like me to read you La Fontaine until you fall asleep?"

"I'd like it, but you can bet I'm not going to sleep while I can look at you."

Artemis had lifted the old leather-bound volume and was fumbling with the catch.

"Some of these have locks," she said. "Perhaps—oh, I've found the combination. Why—what—"

She had opened the book and found herself looking into a box containing a parcel wrapped in tissue paper.

"It's not a book at all," she exclaimed. "It's one of those novelty cigarette boxes. But these are not cigarettes."

Curiously she lifted the parcel and opened it out, then dropped it with a cry of astonishment.

"It's the pendant, and the pearls and the tiara," she cried. "Butsy, I've found the stolen jewels in this book!"

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed. "Where did you get the book?"

"Why!" she gasped. "It was lying on a table in the salon. I asked Sir Charles about it and he said he had never seen it before. Now how did the jewels come on board, and how came they to be in such a hiding place? Why, Butsy, it's a mystery!"

"Some mystery. Let's see. We know how they came on board. Dobey Dill brought them. Artemis, will you call Pete. Let's discuss this before we tell your mother. We don't want her accusing us of being thieves."

"Oh, won't she be happy!" she exclaimed. "Everything is coming out all right. We have found the jewels, and know who killed Philip, and everything. It's positively providential."

"Get Pete. He's got a head on his shoulders, please, dear."

In a moment she was back with the wondering Peter.

"In the name of everything important, where did you get them?" he demanded at the sight of the glittering, gorgeous array of gems. "Butsy, have you been holding out on me?"

"Do you mean to insinuate that Butsy—" began Artemis, bristling, but the laughter of both men stopped her outburst.

"You can't be expected to understand, darling, but he's trying to be funny. It's American humor to intimate that your best friend is a thief."

"I never thought much of American humor," she snapped.

"Nor I of his variety. Pete, Artemis picked up a volume of La Fontaine to read to me and when she opened it she found it was a trick tobacco box, which contained the stuff stolen at the Veglione. I called you in to see if you can dope out how the deuce it happened to be lying on the table in the salon of this yacht."

Pete grinned.

"Sir Charles. Maybe that's the way he makes his money."

"You may go now, Mr. Hargreaves," said Artemis disdainfully.

Pete gazed at the imperious and glowing girl with a look in his eyes which she did not understand. What he was thinking was: "You are the most marvelous thing I ever saw in my life, but as a wife and daily companion you'd land me in the home for the hopelessly insane in a month."

"Nonsense," Butsy said. "Artemis, Pete is joshing. Let's get down to business, old man."

"Dobey Dill," said Pete. "The package he gave me to place in our deposit box was the size of that volume. I saw those books on sale in the lobby of the Ruhl, and Dobey must have bought one to hold his loot.

"Imagine his impudence in asking me to care for it. I certainly must have looked like an honest boob to him."

"But why was it lying on the salon table, quite unguarded?" said Artemis, frowning with intentness.

"We can sweat the facts out of him, but my guess is that Dobey saw the pirates board the ship and had some way of knowing why they came. He knew they would search everywhere and his only hope was to leave the book lying carelessly around, hoping they would not bother to open it.

"I should say that La Fontaine was about the safest book in the world. It's a cinch Sir Charles wouldn't open it, I certainly would not, but he didn't count upon a couple of highbrows like you and Lady Artemis.

"How are we going to convince Sir Charles and the duchess that we have nothing to do with it?" asked Butsy. "They are apt to think that we are giving up the jewels because the ship is returning to Nice and we would have to restore them because of the story the pirates will tell the police."

"We'll have to make Dobey Dill confess. Now that we have the jewels and can turn him over for a long term in jail, he will tell the truth quickly enough."

"The little beast!" sniffed Artemis.

"You know," began Pete, "I hate to hand the poor little rat over to the French police. I could see him sentenced by a New York judge and sent up the river for life without a pang of sorrow. Dobey knows American jails and could probably settle down contentedly there.

"He could get on the baseball and football teams, he could see a picture show once a week, have roast turkey for Thanksgiving and goose for Christmas, and he'd be among friends and acquaintances.

"But imagine the poor little fellow in a French jail with nobody who could talk his language, eating black bread and sour wine, sleeping in filthy beds, and being abused by French guards. Why, he would die in a couple of years."

"What of it?" asked Artemis. "He's a criminal."

"Artemis," said Butsy reproachfully, "how would you like it if Gwendon had

lived and had been arrested and convicted for helping in the theft of the jewels? Would you like to see him in a French jail?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Poor Philip," she said. "He was brought up in luxury, he was a wonderful soldier, and his income was suddenly cut off and he turned to crime because he knew no useful trade.

"I liked him and perhaps mother might have persuaded me to marry him if he had not been disinherited. It would have been terrible if he were locked up in any jail, particularly a French one."

"We feel like that about Dobey," retorted Pete. "The poor devil never had a chance to be anything else except a crook, while Gwendon had education and culture and every opportunity in the world to go straight.

"Besides, look at it this way. The jewels have been recovered solely because Dill picked the pocket of this thief who is dying here on board. If he had not picked the man's pocket, the Frenchman would have disappeared with the stuff and most likely it would never have been found. Butsy and I would still be in danger of arrest as accomplices in the theft, and you and Butsy would still be sought as possible murderers of Gwendon.

"Dobey brought the jewels home to us, drew the thieves after him, and as a result we are cleared of all charges, your mother gets her stolen pendant back and the other ladies can sport their decorative hardware once again.

"Instead of sending him up we owe him a vote of thanks. I believe in giving Dobey a fighting chance to escape."

"Second the motion," said Butsy.

Artemis smiled.

"You are right," she agreed. "We are really indebted to the poor fellow. But if we state the facts he will be nabbed by the French police and perhaps get a life sentence.

"However, Sir Charles and mother will not see it our way. You had better arrange his escape yourself, Mr. Hargreaves. We must tell the truth when we get ashore to clear ourselves. What's that?"

The engine had stopped, for the yacht was back at her moorings in the basin at Nice.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MISSING MR. DILL.

PETE left them hastily, walked to the stateroom in which Dobey was confined, turned the key which had been left in the outside of the door and entered. But Dobey Dill was not within.

He rushed out on deck to find Sir Charles and the duchess talking with Captain Groggins. Beryl Murther was hovering in the offing. A steam launch bearing down upon the yacht with great rapidity.

"It's the police," said Sir Charles, seeing Hargreaves approach. "We wirelessed an account of the boarding of the ship by pirates and the urgent need of a physician. I hope you gentlemen can give an account of yourselves which will satisfy the police authorities because I confess you puzzle me."

"That will be all right," replied Pete stiffly. "However, I came to report that the American thief is not in the stateroom in which we confined him. Have you transferred him?"

"No!" exclaimed Sir Charles. "By jove, has the fellow escaped?"

"It looks that way," said Pete. "Lady Artemis and myself have spent the evening in the cabin with Mr. Buttman, so you need not regard me suspiciously. If he got away it is through your own negligence and that of your crew."

He turned upon his heel, leaving Sir Charles and Captain Groggins to their discomfiture, and came upon Beryl. Her eyes were red with weeping, and she was still sniffling. Pete saw light.

"Look here, my girl," he said. "You did a lot of talking with Dobey Dill. I'm glad the poor little chap escaped, but I suspect that you let him out. Come now. I won't tell. Did you?"

Beryl nodded.

"You liked the fellow, didn't you?"

"He had such taking ways," she pleaded.

"I'll say he had," Pete chuckled. "How long ago did he get away?"

"Ten minutes ago, when we entered the basin, sir. He swam ashore."

Pete looked over the side and across the port.

"The water must be cold, but it's a short swim," he said. "I hope he made it."

"You see, sir," said Beryl. "I was by way of being engaged to him, and when it come out he was a thief, it would have ruined me in my profession. Why, they might have thought I helped him steal her grace's pendant. A girl has to be careful."

"Well, let's both pray they won't catch him," he said. "The poor little skate!"

He turned to confront M. Lejeune, chief of police of Nice, who was followed by four gendarmes, and Sir Charles.

"So!" exclaimed the official. "I have found you."

"Hello, M. Lejeune," smiled Pete. "I was wondering how you made out when you jumped out of the automobile."

"I was injured and you made your escape. But I have tracked you down. You and M. Buttman are my prisoners."

"On what charge."

"Robbery and murder."

"By running away from you, chief," Pete replied, "we conferred a great favor upon you. We found your murderer and your robber, and we shall take great pleasure in handing him over to you."

"I shall make arrests, you hand nothing to me."

Pete took him familiarly by the arm.

"Look here, Lejeune," he said. "You are an intelligent man, and you do not want to make any ridiculous mistakes. You know you don't really believe that Buttman and myself had anything to do with those crimes. But, being in possession of certain facts, you felt it desirable to put us in a safe place. Am I right?"

"Perhaps," replied the chief.

"Very well. Sir Charles has told you that this yacht was seized by pirates who boarded us from a launch which was supposed to have taken part in the naval parade at Villefranche. The man who murdered Gwendon, and who stole the jewels, was the leader of this band.

"They were after an American crook who forced himself upon Buttman and myself at the point of the gun. He had the jewels, had stolen them from the original thieves. The jewels are on board and will be turned over to you; think of the credit of that."

"This is very edifying," said Lejeune, trying to control his excitement. "But how do you know this man is the murderer?"

"He confessed it to Buttman. And now he is badly wounded and probably dying. You can easily get all the facts from him."

"If what you say is true, of course you are completely exonerated. Am I right in thinking that Lady Artemis was the harlequin?"

"Yes. She was the harlequin, and Buttman was the jester."

"Sir Charles," asked the chief, "may I be conducted to this pirate? I have a physician with me."

"Certainly, sir."

"Good. And where is this American thief, the man who picked my pocket, is he not, Mr. Hargreaves?"

"I suspect that's who he is."

"It will be a pleasure to meet him," the chief said grimly.

"A deferred pleasure," Pete smiled. "In some way he has escaped from the stateroom where Sir Charles confined him. Are you sure you locked the door, Sir Charles?"

"I most assuredly did," retorted the indignant baronet.

"Then he must have picked the lock."

"Inexcusable carelessness," snapped the chief. "But how could he escape from the vessel?"

"I have no idea," lied Pete.

"He must have swum ashore. Therefore, he is in Nice, and I shall catch him with the greatest expedition."

But M. Lejeune did nothing of the sort. In some mysterious way Dobey got ashore and out of Nice and France. Six months later, when Pete met him face to face at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Forty-Third Street, the thief extended the right hand of fellowship, and Pete took it.

"How did you ever manage to get home?" he demanded.

Dobey grinned.

"I climbed aboard a fishing boat in the port of Nice, and then I went into a shop on the waterfront and bought some French clothes. I made for the railroad station, bought a ticket, and got to Paris, where I got some decent clothes.

"Then I went to a hotel and showed my American passport, told them I had just arrived from Germany, and got away with it. Next day I made a boat for the good old U. S. A. I suppose you found the junk?"

"Yes. It was restored to the owners."

Dobey sighed.

"The biggest haul I ever made and I had to leave it. You remember Beryl, the duchess's maid?"

"Yes."

Dobey flushed.

"I been corresponding with her. I told her I am going straight, and making lots of dough, and I think maybe she will take a chance and come to New York."

"Are you going straight, Dobey?"

"Sure thing," he said, hurt at the insinuation. "I'm off the old game and in a good business. All the cops are my friends."

"Really? What do you do?"

"I'm a bootlegger," said Dobey with proper pride.

But this is getting away ahead of the story.

Lejeune recognized Larue as a well-known Paris criminal, and identified all the others as local lights of the underworld. Being assured he would die, Larue told everything, and there was no longer any need for Lady Artemis or the Americans to avoid Nice.

Accordingly, to the relief of Sir Charles, the whole party went ashore within an hour, while Lejeune took possession of the gems until restoration could be officially made.

Butsy's wound was dismissed as a scratch from which he would be completely recovered in four or five days. After the physician had tended it, he was able to land with slight assistance and slept that night in his old bed at the Ruhl.

Morning brought them several letters, including one for Buttman, which he opened joyously, because it was from the producer of Didoes. A royalty check dropped out. His face fell, to see that it was for a much lower amount than he had anticipated, while the contents of the letter pitched him into the depths.

"Just tipping you off," said the manager, "that 'Didoes' is slipping. We are in the cut rates, and probably won't last six weeks longer. Road conditions are horrible, and it's too expensive a troupe to send on the road anyway, so I'll probably send the show to the storehouse and forget it. It did pretty well, I got my production costs back, and a small profit, but nothing like yours. So I guess you'll have to come back and go to work."

With a groan Butsy passed the letter to his friend and buried his nose in his pillow. Pete read it and passed it back silently.

"How much money have you got?" he demanded.

With this check, and what I have in the bank after everything is paid, about five thousand dollars."

"Enough to keep the average American family of five for three years, or to engage a suite on the Berengaria to take you and Artemis to New York."

"Don't rub it in," pleaded Butsy.

"You had better sit down and have a business talk with that girl," advised his chum. "Her idea of poverty is about twenty-five thousand dollars per year, a secondhand Rolls-Royce, and five or six servants. In words of one syllable you must explain what you are taking her into, and then see her back away."

"Artemis will stick," declared Butsy.

"You have had a wonderful romance with the most beautiful young aristocrat in Europe. Marry her and you'll spoil it. Butsy, you have got to back out."

"I'll write more plays."

"You didn't write 'Didoes,' you poor fish. You ought to be arrested for taking royalties from it. You can't possibly make more than ten thousand a year on the sort of fiction you grind out, and you can't sell your poems for the price of waste paper. I know how you feel, but you'll feel worse

when you tell Artemis you can't buy her caviar for breakfast.

"She's not like that. She said last night she was going to learn how to cook."

"The English cooks can't cook. Imagine what that lovely amateur would turn out. Besides, you couldn't buy her the raw materials."

"Perhaps she'll wait for me a year or two."

"Now you are saying something. Just arrange for her to wait until you make fifty thousand a year."

"You are absolutely heartless," moaned the man who captured all the pirates.

"Somebody has got to make you two idiots face facts. I'm not enjoying myself. Your speed, Butsy, is a nice little stenographer or a telephone girl, not the toast of London.

"Cheer up, though, maybe she has got her senses back after a good night's sleep. I thought she was a hard boiled baby, but I am afraid there is no such thing as a really hard boiled girl. She slobbered over your cheap heroism like any shopgirl."

"Do something for me?"

"Sure."

"Get the hell out of here. Alongside of you, Job's comforters were nice people."

"Want breakfast?"

"Not with you. Beat it."

Pete nodded, took his hat and coat and departed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HARGREAVES WINS AN ARGUMENT.

IT is very hard, when you are painting a personality for your readers, to describe a real human being and make people like him or her, because readers of English fiction have been taught to like heroes and heroines who were so perfect that the same individuals who loved them in the book would throw rocks at them if they encountered them in life. Lady Artemis, to many, will seem a very imperfect heroine, conceited, snobbish, arrogant, mercenary, ultra sophisticated and unpleasant. Nevertheless, she had fallen in love with a homely and none too intelligent young American who couldn't keep her in dog blankets, as Pete once expressed it.

Artemis knew perfectly well what she would be giving up to marry Butsy. She wasn't a blind little schoolgirl. She had had the opportunity to become the wife of the Viceroy of India or of an English cabinet member, and—refused them both. But now, as she had announced to the duchess and Sir Charles, she was in love.

About the time Butsy was reading his letter she woke up from her nap, and at her first waking thought she smiled happily. She was thinking of Butsy. Then she frowned. She was thinking of living in America.

She smiled again, because she would do it with Butsy; she sighed because they would not be able to afford more than one Rolls-Royce. But the smile returned at the thought that they might afford two children.

Then she got up and did something more heroic than Butsy's celebrated achievement of the night before. She went and sat down in a tub of icy cold water, splashed around for several minutes, and withdrew, gasping but refreshed.

"I'm an awful fool," she said aloud.

"Oh, miss," protested her maid.

"I certainly am," she added. "I have completely lost my senses and I ought to be shut up somewhere until I get sane again. But I'm glad I'm mad."

The maid fitted her into her negligee and backed away, regarding her with suspicion, after which she sought out Beryl Murther and informed her that Lady Artemis had "bats in her belfry."

While she was eating her breakfast the old Lady Artemis returned and made a desperate effort to drive the new Lady Artemis into the Mediterranean.

"You poor thing," said the old Artemis. "Imagine you married to an American and compelled to associate with all his friends and relatives—impossible people. Think of you with not enough money to buy a new set of sables if you see some you like, or unable to afford a shooting box in Scotland, or to spend the winter in Egypt, or to take a house in London and interfere in national politics! You poor, stupid creature!"

"That's all nonsense," replied the new Lady Artemis. "I don't want to have a shooting box in Scotland, at least not very much. And I don't mind in the least about the new sables. I have some that are quite good. And as for politics, one gets tired of it so quickly."

The old Lady Artemis had a good comeback, and the battle went on for quite awhile. The struggle was interrupted by the maid, who entered with a letter. Upon the envelope was the inscription of Scimp, Barmarlow & Smithins, solicitors, of London, England.

Artemis thought it might be a summons —occasionally her bills went so far as to bring her a notice of suit entered before she persuaded her mother to pay them—so she opened it gingerly.

The inclosure was very different from a summons.

DEAR MADAM:

We have great satisfaction in informing you that some months ago the Hon. Philip Gwendon made his will in which, after certain minor bequests, he bequeathed to you the balance of his property which at the time was only a matter of a few thousand pounds. As he perished most lamentably in Nice a few hours after his uncle and cousin of Flailflern, he inherited the title and estates, both entailed and unentailed. The title and entailed estates, of course, pass to the next male heir. But the unentailed properties—mines in Cornwall, steamships, a department store in London—all bringing in an income of about forty thousand pounds a year, come to you under the terms of the will above mentioned. We have represented the Earl of Flailflern for some years, and trust that we may be of service to you in the settling of the estate of our honored client.

Artemis read this delightful missive with increasing ecstasy, and when she finished it stretched both her hands above her head in a paroxysm of delight. Then she grasped her small dog and danced with it around the room.

Her mood suddenly changing, she sat down and wept for several minutes for poor dear Philip. She had never known he loved her so much. It must have broken his heart when she sent him about his business simply because he had no money.

Perhaps she had driven him to crime by her cruelty, and he had intended to leave to her his ill-gotten gains.

At the time she thought she loved Philip, but now she knew that his poverty would not have frightened her if she had really been in love, because she was now willing to give up everything for Butsy, who couldn't even earn a good living dishonestly, as Philip had been able to do.

Whether Artemis would in the end have sacrificed everything for Butsy and married him and made him a good wife in an apartment in Flatbush, we do not know, but we hope so.

Anyway, she was confident now that she would have done exactly that, only it was no longer necessary. She would not even have to leave London, and she could have the sables and the shooting box and meddle with politics and have a house in Mayfair, and Butsy too.

She rushed to the telephone and commanded Butsy to meet her downstairs in an hour.

Instead of being overwhelmed with joy as she had expected, Buttman was depressed by her news. Her wealth seemed to place a greater barrier than ever between them, particularly now that he knew he was practically penniless. To her proposal that this was no reason why they should not be married, he turned a deaf ear, and returned despondently to his room, where he told Pete what had happened.

To his great astonishment Hargreaves told him to go ahead and marry Artemis. She had expensive tastes, therefore it was only right that she should furnish the money necessary to gratify them, he asserted.

"It's this way, Butsy," Pete declared. "There is a certain sentiment in America to the effect that a poor man who marries a rich girl is a hound, a sentiment loudly expressed by poor men who married poor girls, and bachelors who have been refused by rich girls, and poor girls who are jilted because a wealthy damsel has hove in sight.

"When I was the editor of a magazine, I never dared purchase a story in which the out-at-the-elbows hero married a millionairess, because of this prejudice. But I

never heard of a man who loved a girl and refused to marry her because she was rich.

"In Europe the situation is quite the other way. On the Continent the young man takes the attitude that a young woman is very impudent to expect a husband if she is not well upholstered with dough. We know that without loss of social standing impecunious British noblemen may come to America and sell themselves to the highest bidder. Therefore I consider it an act of patriotism for you to take this advantage of your opportunity. Think of the indignation of the poor but noble Britons who see you cop a girl with two hundred thousand dollars a year."

"I feel rotten about it just the same," Butsy protested. "If I wasn't mad about Artemis—"

"That's your American hypocrisy speaking," replied Pete. "It's the same point of view which causes so many of our citizens to buy liquor from bootleggers and call a man a traitor who wants to monkey with the Volstead Act. Although you won't admit it to yourself, underneath you are absolutely tickled to death that you get your sweetheart and don't have to support her."

"I am not. I would love to have her entirely dependent upon me," Butsy declared.

"Don't be an ass, Butsy," chided Pete. "If there ever was a girl who ought to bring a great dowry to her husband, it is Lady Artemis. She has a collection of expensive tastes which would sink anybody not in the Henry Ford class. I give her full credit for being willing to take a chance with you on nothing a year, but I am certain that the experiment wouldn't last a year.

"Now you are on even terms; Artemis offsets the evils of her education and environment with vast quantities of mazuma, you will be able to pursue your literary career without a wolf biting pieces out of the seat of your trousers, and you may turn out a really good play under such favorable conditions—but probably won't.

"You and Artemis will be as happy as a couple of doves in a millionaire's dovecote, and I'll come to see you often and for long periods. I like easy living myself."

"You are a darned old cynic," grinned Butsy, giving in. "But Artemis likes you, and you must spend at least six months a year with us."

"If you'll kindly put that in writing," suggested Pete.

THE END

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SHE GOT THE JOB, BUT—

She had just finished a course in a business school and had been certified as a "secretary." She sought a job and found one with a lawyer. On the following Monday morning she was on the job, full of confidence. At ten thirty o'clock her employer called her to take dictation. He spoke rapidly.

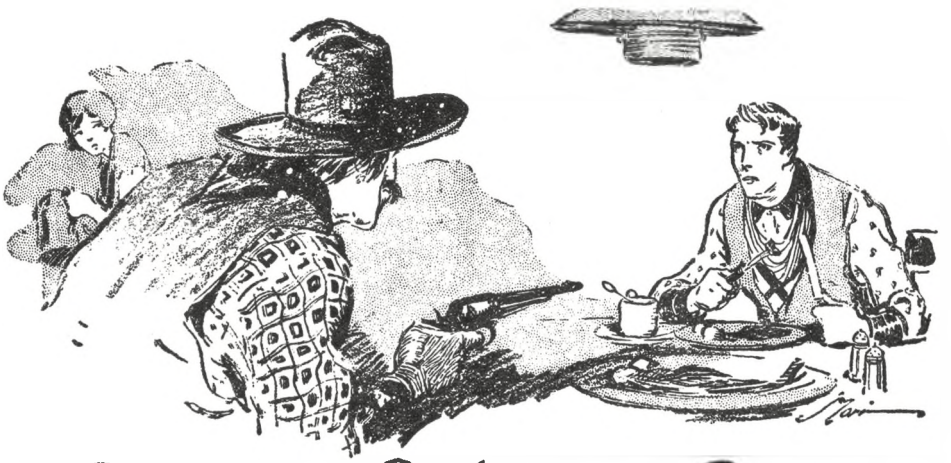
At the end of the first five minutes the young woman was hopelessly lost. What to do? Her mind was in a whirl. She was afraid to ask her new employer to repeat and go slower. She continued to make marks which the lawyer thought were stenographic notes.

He continued his dictation—half an hour, an hour, an hour and a half. Then he rose, stretched and said:

"That will be all for this morning. You may go to lunch now and transcribe that this afternoon. I will be in court the rest of the day, so when you are finished you may put the brief on my desk and at five o'clock go home."

Needless to say he never saw the transcription or the young woman again.

The foregoing, from the New York *Sun*, causes one to speculate as to how so incompetent a person secured her diploma in the first place, which, in turn, suggests the idea of getting from our readers their experience in the matter of landing jobs. Not all graduate from business schools, but many write letters of application for positions. Just what to tell a prospective employer must puzzle thousands. *We should be glad to publish letters which have "brought home the bacon," or other methods of approach which have landed positions.* It may be recalled that one ARGOSY reader told us of securing a job through using a device suggested in one of our stories.



Check Your Guns.

By CHARLTON L. EDHOLM

"STRANGER, ef you're lookin' for trouble, you've come to the wrong place." Lon Currier spoke emphatically.

His companion, a young and very alert-looking cow-puncher, dressed in all the finery of a knight of the range, gazed sharply at the old hotel keeper with a pair of remarkably keen blue eyes.

" I'm not looking for trouble, Mr. Currier," answered Con Carney, " but on the other hand I'm not side stepping it. As a matter of fact, I have some important business with the hard-boiled ruffians that play hob on both sides of the border, and I am tipped off that I'll find some of that breed in this town of Boot Hill."

" Somebody told you wrong, young man. Why, this town is plumb peaceable. We only have to pay one man to keep order here, an' he just took a prisoner to the county jail, a greaser named Pablo."

" What was Pablo arrested for?"

" Nothin' much. Only knifin' another greaser. Why, Boot Hill is so quiet that just a dog fight is excitement for a month."

" Yeah? What about Latigo Charlie?"

" Oh, him? Yes, he's a bad hombre, sure! But he don't do his hell-raising here no more. He lives in the mountains over yonder, and when he blows into a town for a frolic, he picks on Carizo."

" Thanks," said Carney. " Now I've got it all straight."

Con Carney, better known on the southwest border as Chili Con Carney, was sitting in the dining room of Boot Hill's one and only hostelry, while the owner passed out this information. The establishment was a ramshackle frame structure with a rickety veranda extending clear across the front of the building, innocent of paint and blotched with bullet holes, yet it boasted the name of Grand International Palace Hotel.

The " Grand Palace " part of the title was pure frontier flowers of speech, but the " International " part was correct, for the settlement of Boot Hill was only a rifle shot from Carizo, the first Mexican town beyond the line.

And Carizo, otherwise known as " Little Hades," was the settlement where Latigo Charlie made his headquarters when he wanted to have a hot time by shooting up the town.

From the dining room window, Chili Con Carney could see the straggling dirt road that led across a sand wash to the collection of adobe huts and a big ungainly bull ring that made up Carizo.

He knew that the huts were all saloons or equally villainous resorts, and that the dark-skinned population made a living by trimming the tourists who ventured across the line to get a thrill out of the wild life of Old Mexico.

Carney knew also that Latigo Charlie, wanted in several States for stabbings, train robberies, and shooting from ambush, was the Czar of Carizo, levying tribute on Mexican dive keepers and their American patrons.

No haul was too big for Latigo, and no loot was too small. He had been known to rob the poorbox in a church, and was reported to have smashed a slot machine with an ax in order to get a pocketful of nickels.

On the other hand, one of his train robberies had netted him thirty thousand dollars, and resulted in two express messengers being killed. But whether the loot was large or small, Latigo was perfectly ruthless in taking what he wanted.

For many years he had been used to crashing his way through all opposition until at last the population was too terrified to put up a fight.

"Say, listen, Mr. Currier," said Chili Con Carney, "I want to say that I'm tickled to death to find a peaceful town like this. I need a chance to lay off and take a little rest, so if you'll give me a room in the hotel and take care of my mare, Tabasco, out in the corral, I'll stay for quite a spell."

"That's fine!" The hotel keeper was so pleased that he insisted on shaking hands. "Fact is, I don't get much trade here. I'm glad to have a guest."

"Why not? Lots of people go through to Little Hades."

"Sure. But when they go, they are in such a hurry they can't stop."

"And when they come back?"

"Some never do come back. And the rest are broke. Trimmed by those sharps in Carizo."

Carney laughed and turned to his supper that Josie, the "biscuit shooter," brought in. It consisted of ham with two eggs fried "straight up," that being the vernacular for fried on one side only.

Beside the platter was a cup of black, steaming coffee, a condensed milk can, and some hot, leathery biscuits.

The proprietor adjusted the big hanging oil lamp that was over the table, pulling it down to light it, and raising it again on its heavy chain. It was an ill-smelling contraption, monstrous with its big flat shade of tin, but for all its size it shed only a sickly light.

"Hope you like your supper, Mr. Carney," remarked the proprietor. "There's plenty more coffee and there's some dried apple pie comin'."

Carney fell to with a hearty appetite, and after Lon Currier had left the room, he banged on his cup with a spoon until Josie, the scared-looking "hasher," came in with more coffee.

She was a rather pretty girl, blond and slender, but apparently too nervous to be happy. Carney addressed her with a frank smile:

"What's the matter, sister? You look worried about something."

"Oh, no, I'm all right. Don't get enough sleep, that's all."

"Why don't you get enough sleep? Too many parties?"

"Parties! I sh'd say not. There's nothing like that in Boot Hill. I'm kept awake worrying; that's the trouble."

"What have you got to worry about, Miss Josie?"

"It's that wild lot of crooks and bad hombres over yonder in Carizo. I keep frettin' for fear they'll raid the town some night and shoot us all up."

"Well, you've got some husky looking men here."

"Sure. They *look* husky, but they're like a pack of old women. The town marshal, Ruddy Davis, is the only man in town with any sand in his craw. And he's away now, worse luck!"

"Well, don't fret, sister!" Carney reassured her. "I don't reckon the gang will pull any rough stuff right away. And your

sweetie—I mean Ruddy, will be back in a few days."

With an angry glance, the waitress swept out of the dining room, and Con Carney, just for his "kidding," failed to get the slab of dried apple pie that went with the dinner.

But later, smoking a cigarette that he rolled on the veranda, the young man looked across the line to Carizo and wondered what he should do if the rough gang made a sudden raid.

He was not quite sure.

Across the border the lights blinked gayly from wide open amusement joints, and the sound of hoarse singing and shouting was borne to him on the wind.

Once, as it grew late, there was a noise of shots, as if a pair of six-guns had been emptied in a hurry. But after that things quieted down.

Boot Hill was asleep. There was not even a game of poker that he could sit in, and about midnight, Carney was ready to turn in when the sound of awkwardly galloping hoofs made him look into the darkness toward Carizo.

Out of the night came a big, clumsy mule, carrying an ungainly rider, who almost fell off his mount in front of the hotel.

Lon Currier came out running, and the newcomer stammered something in the Mexican border lingo.

"Hell's clinkers!" cried the old man in dismay. He turned to Con Carney and added: "Did you hear what this half-wit greaser came to tell me?"

Carney looked from the excited hotel keeper to the Mexican boy, who was babbling and stuttering in terror. Carney could not make head or tail of it.

"What's the ruckus?" he asked.

"Trouble's comin', mister. That's what! This here greaser says that Latigo Charlie sent him over here with a message. Latigo aims to pay us a visit to-morrow mornin', and he's got the nerve to tell us ahead of time."

"All right. Let him come."

"But you don't savvy. Latigo is *bad.* Bad clean through. He sent word that he don't want no trouble, and every man in town has got to leave his gun at home."

"Latigo says we've got to check our guns!" cried Carney. "Well, I'll say that's the nerviest line of talk I've ever heard."

"Don't you cross him, stranger!" cried the hotel man. "Latigo is a killer. Ef he sees a man toting a gun after what he said, he'd just as soon plug him on sight."

"Well, well, well! That's interesting!" drawled Carney. "Suppose we-all shoots first? Then what?"

"You don't know what you're up against," warned Currier. He lowered his voice. "Fact is, Latigo has friends all over this part of the country. Some are regular pals of his. Others would like to pick up a little of his loot, and do him a favor on the chance that he will give 'em a hand-out. You never can tell where Latigo's friends are, or who they are—why, the bum that cleans out the saloon may be one of Latigo's lieutenants. Or maybe the postmaster himself. Latigo's so tricky that he plants his spies everywhere."

Carney laughed dryly.

"It's easy to see that he's got this town buffaloed!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you'll check your gun when Latigo tells you to?"

"Will I? Stranger, I'm takin' no chances. I'll bury my old smoke wagon under the floor. Latigo will have no excuse to plug *me!*"

"Why don't you take a chance and tote your gun? If you see Latigo first, bring it out, and bring it smokin'."

"That's big talk, mister, but not for me. I've lived a long time, but I want to live a while longer." With these words Lon Currier shuffled off to spread the news about the town of Boot Hill, while Carney, snorting in disgust, went to his room and turned in.

Part of the night he slept, but the rest was spent in angry thoughts.

He resolved to defy Latigo and wear his six-gun as usual, buckled around his waist. Then he remembered what Currier had said about the town being full of Latigo's friends, and that seemed to make it plain suicide. Why, he might be shot in the back without even having a chance to set eyes on Latigo Charlie.

Carney wondered whether he could conceal the weapon under his clothes, then, after a little experimenting, he decided that it would make him too slow on the draw. He'd never get the old smoke-wagon going in time. It would be like cutting his own throat to fumble around for a gun after going up against Latigo.

Finally the young man got out of bed and wandered about, too restless to sleep. He walked up and down his own narrow room, out through the dark corridor, and so on into the dining room.

There an idea occurred to him that seemed good enough to act on right away.

Ten minutes later he had rolled up in his blanket and was fast asleep. His dreams must have been pleasant, for there was the lingering trace of a grin on his smooth, boyish face.

Next morning before breakfast, Chili Con Carney strode over to the corral, saddled his mare, Tabasco, and took a little ride around the settlement.

The air was crisp and cool, the mare was full of high spirits, and once in awhile started in to act like the rodeo outlaw she had been before Carney tamed her.

A cloud of dust on the road to Little Hades told the rider that some one was coming and splitting the wind. Chili Con Carney rode to meet him, guessing who the stranger would be.

He guessed right: it was Latigo Charlie.

The notorious border ruffian tore along like a madman, reins flying loose and his sombrero flapping in the wind. Below the brim was a dust-streaked, unshaven face, with bloodshot eyes that were ablaze with pure meanness.

The outlaw's lips were loose hung and tobacco stained, and fringed by a drooping black mustache with ragged ends as if they had been gnawed.

He was an older man than Carney and heavily muscled. In height they were about the same, but there all resemblance ceased, for Latigo was as swarthy as Chili was fair, and the older man was a sloven in his dress, while the boy was arrayed in all the cowboy finery.

Only one part of his outfit was missing.

Latigo grinned maliciously as he galloped close enough to make sure, and his hand left his revolver butt.

"Well, my gay young buckaroo!" chuckled Latigo Charlie. "I see you are wise enough to heed my warnin'. You done checked your gun like I said."

"I did what all the others did," replied Carney.

The big fellow guffawed.

"That's rich!" he shouted. "Haw, haw, haw! I've shore got that town buffaloed. When I say 'jump,' they all jump. When I say 'lie down,' they do it, and when I say 'roll over,' they roll like a passel of trained poodles."

Chili Con Carney smiled. He thought that Latigo had described accurately the citizens of Boot Hill.

"What *you* grinnin' about?" demanded Latigo Charlie. "Hell's clinkers! You are as meek as the rest."

"Oh, I'm just a stranger," answered Carney. "I follow the custom of the country."

"Is that *so?* Well, the custom in this part of the country is to fork over anything you've got, if *I* want it."

"That's interesting."

"You'll find it interesting all right. I may take a fancy to that cayuse of yours before I go. How would that strike you?"

"I'd hate to lose it, mister," the other answered, but as he spoke, Chili Con Carney could hardly restrain his grin.

He was hoping Latigo would covet his mount, for he knew that Tabasco would make short work of the bully. In fact he had gone out to meet the bad hombre hoping that Latigo would take Tabasco by force and try to ride her, which would almost certainly result in the outlaw being killed or disabled. Tabasco had killed more than one rider in her day.

But Latigo did not bite at the bait.

"Later on, I'll see about that," he growled. "My hoss suits me pretty good. Got any money?"

"A little."

"Hand it over!"

Carney passed him a small roll of bills, which the outlaw stuffed in his pocket with a contemptuous glance.

"Chicken feed!" he snorted. "You

follow me, boy, and I'll show you how easy it is to get money. Then the next time a gentleman asks you for a roll you won't insult him by a measly little handful of small change."

The terror of the border rode up and down the main and only street of Boot Hill and cast a malignant eye at every man he saw. Not one carried a weapon. They all looked ill at ease, hoping that Latigo would not notice them, and the big fellow swore in disgust.

"Hell, they won't put up a decent scrap!" he remarked. "It's like taking candy from a baby."

Latigo swaggered into one of the stores and, slamming his six-shooter on the counter, demanded: "A box of ca'tridges for the old smoke wagon. And pronto!"

The proprietor, Jess Mason, a big, raw-boned Westerner, who, like the others, had left his gun out of sight, produced a box of .45 cartridges, and asked ingratiatingly: "Is that all, Latigo?"

"Sure. That's all. Now gimme the change."

"Change for what?" stammered the proprietor.

"Change for the hundred dollar bill I done give you!" roared the outlaw.

"I didn't see any hundred dollar bill," Jess Mason protested feebly.

"*What!* By shot, you tryin' to short change me? You dirty thief!"

"No. But I don't think you paid me."

"How's that?" Latigo bellowed. "You say I'm a liar, hey? Why, you wall-eyed, lumpy-jawed maverick, I ain't got no right to let you live. Come across with that change in a hurry, or I'll plug you first and clean out your cash box afterward."

Trembling in his haste, Jess Mason handed out the change for a hundred dollar bill that did not exist.

With a grin that showed all his yellow fangs, Latigo swept the money into his pocket and left the counter.

At the door, he turned to the storekeeper and said: "Hey you, Jess. You forgot something."

"Yes. What is it?" answered the surprised man, trying to force a smile.

"You forgot to say 'Thank you kindly, Mr. Latigo; please call again.' By the hinges of Hades, you thank me for my trade or I'll carve all the meat off your bones!"

"Thank you kindly," quavered Jess Mason, while the onlookers snickered.

Chili Con Carney detached himself from the crowd that followed Latigo from store to store and from saloon to saloon. Looking in, he could see that the performance was being repeated in each establishment.

Latigo would buy whatever struck his fancy, demand change for a non-existent hundred dollar bill and get away with it.

In every case the proprietor was roundly cursed and insulted to boot. In fact, Latigo seemed to enjoy the bullying as much as the profit.

Disgusted by the spectacle, Con Carney went back to the hotel dining room and ordered his breakfast. It was exactly what he had ordered for supper—ham and eggs, coffee and biscuits.

Before the terrified Josie could bring on the meal, there was a jingle of spurs, a stamping of heels, and Latigo clattered into the room.

"How's this, gal?" he shouted, banging his revolver butt on the table. "Whar's my breakfast?"

Josie answered with a timid squeak as she fled to the kitchen, and Latigo shouted after her: "A big juicy steak, French fried an' a gallon of coffee. An' say, I want a stack of wheats about a foot high to finish up on."

Chili Con Carney, sitting where he had taken his supper the night before, only looked at the other casually as the bully drew up a chair.

"Young feller," said Latigo, "now I've showed you how easy it is to make money. Six hundred dollars afore breakfast! How's that?"

"Business is good—if you're handling chicken feed," answered Con Carney with a touch of scorn.

"Huh? How's that? You call six hundred dollars chicken feed?"

"I'm used to handling thousands myself," Chili Con Carney remarked in a superior manner.

"Oh, is that so?" Josie had entered the

room with a tray containing the boy's breakfast, and Latigo, aiming to impress the girl, began boastfully: "Well, my young squirt, I'm used to handling thousands, too. Lemme tell you, I grabbed off thirty thousand dollars once in a train robbery at Dragoon Pass. Yessiree! I drilled a pair of milk-faced boys like yourself because they interfered. Mebbe you call thirty thousand dollars chicken feed!"

"That's more like," Carney answered and leaned back in his chair to allow the trembling Josie to place his breakfast before him.

Latigo leered at the girl and as she finished, motioned for her to come closer. When she obeyed, terrified, the ruffian seized her about the waist and exclaimed: "Hey, peaches! How about taking a little ride with me? You come over the line to Carizo, and I'll treat you swell. You can be my gal!"

With a squeal of fright the girl wriggled loose and ran from the room, while Latigo let out a roaring haw-haw of amusement.

Carney had taken up his knife and fork, but at the violence to the girl he was ready to pick up a chair and lay it over Latigo's skull. Josie's escape made that move unnecessary, however, and Carney prepared to attack his ham and eggs when the bully reached over and seized the platter.

Placing the revolver on the table beside the plate, he coolly remarked: "I guess that's my breakfast, young feller. Ham and eggs is what *I* ordered."

"I beg your pardon. Didn't you order steak and French fried?" asked Carney with assumed politeness.

"You heard me, kid! Ham and eggs is what I told the gal to git."

"My mistake," replied Carney. "Let me pass you the salt and pepper." He did so and then calmly rolled and smoked a cigarette while the big fellow wolfed his breakfast.

But when the trembling Josie placed a two-inch-thick steak before the outlaw, Carney deftly pulled the plate across the table and set to work on it without a word.

Latigo started up angrily at the boy's presumption, then bellowed with laughter.

"Keep right on eatin'," he said with grim amusement. "I've read as how a condemned man always gits a good hearty breakfast just before the execution."

"Yeah? You know all about executions?" answered Carney. "That's fine. It will make your own go smooth as silk."

Latigo scowled. He did not care for such repartee, and picked up his six-shooter from beside his plate.

Carney calmly went on eating the outlaw's steak, and did not look up.

Latigo stared hard at the boy, fingering his gun and then used the weapon to stir his coffee.

"Have some sugar?" he growled.

"Never use it," answered Carney dryly, and, seizing the bottle of tabasco sauce, he shook a generous dose of the hot mixture into his cup.

Latigo stared at him. There was something uncanny in all this: a young, smooth-faced chap who was not afraid of him.

The outlaw was so used to dealing with men like whipped curs that he began to feel uneasy at Chili Con Carney's fearlessness. He stared at the boy's vest to see whether a gun was concealed beneath it, and glanced around the room to make sure that he was not being covered by one of Carney's hidden friends.

But with undiminished appetite the younger man demolished the tenderloin and the French fried potatoes.

"Say, who the hell are you?" demanded Latigo sharply.

"Chili Con Carney."

"Seems like I've heard of you before. How about it?"

"Maybe you read my name in connection with some of those executions you were telling about."

"Hells bells! You ain't a hangman, are you?"

"No, sir. But I have caught more than one red-handed killer and turned him over to justice," answered Con Carney in icy tones.

Instantly Latigo was on his feet, the gun in his big fist.

"Stick 'em up!" he roared in a voice hoarse with fury. "Put up your paws, quick! You ain't going to turn *me* in."

"Careful!" said Chili. "That gun

might go off. And then—" There was menace in his unfinished sentence.

Nevertheless his hands went up, and the big fellow kept the boy covered while he walked around the table and began feeling Carney's body for concealed weapons.

"Ef I find a gun hidden in your clothes," he growled, "I'll take you across to Carizo and hang you up by the thumbs till you're dead. By Heaven, I'm goin' to see that your finish is slow and painful!"

But, in spite of the outlaw's search, nothing was found under Carney's vest or the waistband of his trousers.

Latigo sneered: "I've got your number! You're just a four-flusher. You try to bluff me when you don't even dare tote a gun against my orders."

"That's right. I checked my gun like you said," answered Carney, and his voice was so cool that the ruffian felt certain there was something amiss.

He stooped over to examine the lad's high boots, hoping to find a revolver stuffed down the leg, when Carney played his ace.

Reaching swiftly to the hanging lamp, he seized his revolver, which he had placed on the metal shade during the night. The boy had figured out that when his hands were high it would be just as well to have the gun "checked" in a lofty place.

With a crash he brought down the weapon on Latigo's head, as the outlaw searched for a gun in the boot leg, and the blow was echoed by the roar of a .45 as the ruffian's gun went off wildly.

But the bullet only drilled a neat hole in the floor.

When Lon Currier, Jess Mason, Josie, the biscuit shooter, and a scattering of the Boot Hill population crowded into the dining room they saw something unexpected.

They had been laying bets on how soon Chili Con Carney would be drilled, and they came in looking for his corpse, but instead of that they saw the young man very coolly hog-tying the still unconscious Latigo.

"Where did you shoot him, mister?" cried Lon Currier.

"I didn't need to dirty my gun barrel on that big windbag," answered Chili Con Carney. "I pistol-whipped him to a standstill, and now I'm going to take him to the county jail. If Latigo Charlie gets free of the murder charge, there's enough other crimes on his record to keep him in the pen till he's too old for further mischief."

"Gosh!" sighed Josie, "I thought my Ruddy was a grand town marshal, but if this guy wants the job, Ruddy will have to go to work."

"Don't worry, sister," answered Carney with a smile. "I've got a feud against outlaws, and that's why I'm cleaning up the border. But it's a long, long line and a dirty one. I'll not come back any more, and you and Ruddy can get hitched up in peace. What's more, his job will be a whole lot safer, now that Latigo's attended to."

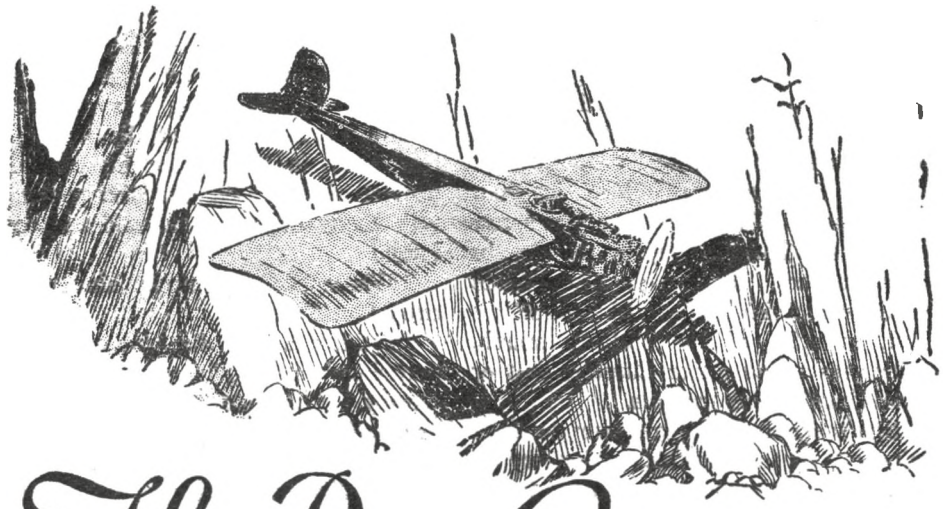
He helped the half dazed outlaw to his feet, saw him tied to his horse, then, mounting Tabasco, set off with his prisoner across the desert to the county seat, where the new concrete jail was yawning for just such tenants as the border terror, Latigo.

THE END

THE RESPECTABLE MANIACS

By RICHARD F. MERRIFIELD

You have all enjoyed the Albert and Viola stories, detailing the haps and mishaps of everyday married folk in a big city. Next week you will have a Complete Novelette about the same couple and, believe you us, it's *some* story.



The Big Crevasse

By HENRY MORTON ROBINSON

THE telegram was desperately brief. Hugh Carsten, president of the Arctic Trading Company, handed it to his son Roger.

> Two more fur traders killed. Suspect Skagway crowd. Can't get pelts through glacier country to coast. Awaiting orders.
> CALLENDER.

"It's the old feud, Roger," said the elder Carsten gloomily, "breaking out again after a ten-year truce. The Skagway outfit never forgave us for beating them to that Siskewan post on the Copper River. We have taken a half million pelts out of their hands, crushed them as Alaskan competitors, and naturally their trigger fingers are getting itchy.

"While you have been on that Hudson Bay expedition they have opened fire on our bateaux, and to date their snipers have picked off three of our men."

"What's Callender done about it?"

"Nothing decisive. He hasn't been able to get a pelt down the river for three months. As a result, we haven't filled those London contracts—and stand to lose a cool hundred thousand on the deal. This telegram is Callender's only reply to my personal order to ship twenty thousand raw fox immediately. He hasn't been able to produce—that's all—and it looks as though the Arctic Trading Company was riding for a wicked spill."

Roger Carsten surveyed his father in curious amazement. Ten years ago the "admiral" would have torn the telegram to bits, hurled a poncho and a Colt into a duffel bag, and started for Alaska on the next packet out of San Francisco. Now he sat helplessly in his office, seemingly incapable of coping with a situation that demanded swift and masterful attention.

"But surely, admiral"—Roger's voice was charged with the wet battery of impatience—"surely you aren't backing down on this challenge, are you? Just because that Skagway gang have potted three of our men and stolen ten thousand pelts, we can't let them romp unchallenged all over our Siskewan territory. Let's trek north, join forces with Callender, and give this bunch of fur pirates a fight, a nice steel-jacketed quarrel if they want one. What's

the verdict, admiral? You can leave the office to Selden."

Hugh Carsten rose slowly and walked to the northern window of his spacious San Francisco office. He was still a huge mass of a man, ruddy-skinned and silver-haired, with the remnants of enormous shoulders still bulging under his coat. Almost wistfully he gazed toward the north.

"It's twenty-five hundred miles, Roger—the last five hundred through a miserable, man-killing country of glacial snow and mud. If I were five years younger, I'd undertake it, boy. I'd face those sniping rascals, yes, and outface them too. Even now, I'd like to go. But—but—"

The admiral's voice trailed off into bitter, helpless silence, and for the first time in his life Roger Carsten realized that his father had been outflanked by age and was no longer the indomitable fighter that had been for thirty years the czar and terror of the Copper River fur country.

Young Carsten strode to his father's side and put his hand on the elder man's shoulder. The resemblance between father and son was arresting, dramatic. Carsten Junior had inherited the steel torso and granite profile; the leonine hair and powerful deltoid muscles were identical. Roger Carsten at twenty-two was a reproduction of all that Hugh Carsten had been forty years earlier.

"I'm sorry, dad," the younger man said humbly. "You must not mind my blowing off like that. I can think of ninety reasons why you shouldn't hit the glacier trail, and ninety more why I should. You were fighting that Skagway crowd before I was born, and now it's my turn to take a hand in this fur feud. I know the glacier country like a book—lingo, geology, natives—you taught me all that when I was a kid."

The admiral smiled at the young man's eagerness, but Roger continued:

"Besides being your son, I happen to be vice-president of the Arctic Trading Company, and as such I'm rather interested in filling that Royal Fur contract for twenty thousand pelts within the next month. Admiral, say the word, and I'll be in Siskewan inside of three days!"

"Three days! Why, boy, it 'll take you three weeks to get there at this time of year. Waterways all frozen, roads aren't open—"

"A good monoplane road is always open," laughed Roger. "If the Falcon can fly to Hudson Bay and back, I guess I can fly to Alaska.

"Look here," he exclaimed, pointing to a map of the West Coast, "I'll make Vancouver in one jump. Then I'll hop off for Juneau—that's the biggest leg of the voyage; and from Juneau it's only a pleasure jaunt to Siskewan. Within forty-eight hours I'll be romping all around Shoat Callender's trading post, scraping those pelts together and seeing them through to the coast myself. Now, Mr. President, what's your vote on the proposition?"

Hugh Carsten was silent for a moment. Then the worried wrinkles at the corners of his eyes relaxed.

"As president," he said, "I vote yes. It's the only way out of a mean situation. But as plain old man Carsten, your dad, I say"—the old man's voice was a trifle foggy—"I say—keep the Colt well oiled, and not too much slack in the trigger."

II.

At five o'clock the next morning Roger Carsten clambered into the cockpit of his single-motored two-hundred-horse-power Falcon monoplane, struck a course north by northwest, and thirty-four hours later landed on a sheet of glacial morain outside the trading village of Siskewan, Alaska. Stiffly emerging from his plane, he looked about him, and recognized the familiar landscape of the Copper River glacier, rising like a muddy mountain half a mile to the south.

To the west, in the dim murk of an arctic afternoon, he saw a huddle of cabins known on the maps of the world as Siskewan, the fur trader's paradise, the heart of the wild-trapping region of the north.

By this time a mixed rabble of Chinooks and half-breeds, women, children and yelping dogs had gathered about the plane. Scanning the crowd, Roger's eye fell upon a semi-intelligent face.

A half dollar and a sharp command in

Eskimo jargon sent the fellow scudding villageward bearing the news to Shoat Callender that a flying devil wanted to see him out on the morain.

About ten minutes later Callender came sauntering over from Arctic Company headquarters. He was a lanky, corduroy-skinned Yankee who had come out to Juneau in the gold rush of 1906, and after prospecting for ten years had decided that there was more gold in fur trading than in most sluice-bottoms.

Hugh Carsten had picked him up half frozen in Juneau, and had given him a clerking job in the company's store at Cordova. For the past five years Shoat had been the manager of the Siskewan post. Until the recent sniping campaign he had handled the company's affairs profitably and without serious trouble.

He was almost paralyzed with astonishment, however, when Roger Carsten advanced a few steps to meet him, thrust out his hand and shouted:

"Greetings, Shoat. Got your telegram, and decided to take a spin up here to see what all the shooting's about."

Callender gasped: "But I didn't expect you so—so soon."

"How long do you think it takes to come by plane—a month? Well, here we are, anyway. Made a non-stop record from Frisco to Cordova—tell you all about it bimeby. Now, Shoat, just detail a good man to watch over this plane, will you? Then let's get over to the office for a powwow and something to eat. We'll rig up some sort of a hangar before I turn in tonight."

Grumbling, and obviously dazed, Shoat told off a stolid half-breed to watch the Falcon, and then led the way to a stoutly built log hut bearing a sign "Arctic Trading Company." Over a bowl of lukewarm stew, served up by a dubious-looking female whom Shoat introduced as his wife, Roger listened to Callender's version of the recent shooting.

"For five years," Shoat began, "I've been floating pelts down the river three hundred miles in the company's bateaux. When they get to Cordova, Macumber, the agent there, puts them on board the Penguin, which hauls them down to Vancouver. Well, the big fireworks started about three months ago.

"We loaded up two big scows with fox and marten—ten thousand pieces altogether—and hired a river pilot named Beltran to tote them down stream. Beltran's steady and reliable, far's I know. He had an Indian, Gaspee he called him, to steer the second boat. Looked kind of dumb, but seemed handy enough, as Indians go. Well, sir, the two of them started out of here with one of the best shipments in years—"

"Did the Skagway crowd know about Beltran's shoving off?" interrupted Roger. In a chipped mirror hanging on the wall he could see Callender's wife nod a vigorous "yes" to her husband.

"More'n likely," Shoat explained. "Y' see, they've got a kind of halfway agent here—Ginley his name is. I saw him snooping around the wharf while we were loading up the bateaux."

"You couldn't bring a man to court on that evidence, Callender. Well, what happened after Beltran left?"

"Why, he was gone about two weeks, and I didn't hear anything from him, so I began to get worried. Usually the round trip takes about ten days. Still there was not anything I could do. About a week later I thought I'd send another boat down the river to find out what happened to Beltran, when Gaspee, the Indian, straggles into camp looking like he's been chawed by polar bears.

"He said that Beltran and himself had just about reached the widest part of the river, down there by Jollikek, when they were fired on by an armed band, hiding along the river bank. Beltran was killed outright, the Indian wounded; the pelts were stolen. Gaspee crawled back here to Siskewan and died the next week from exposure and gangrene."

"Have you any suspicions as to who did the shooting?"

"I've got plenty of suspicions, but as you just pointed out, you can't send a man to jail on suspicions. The Skagway Trading Company needs furs, and is pretty desperate trying to get them. Now, suppose

they see ten thousand first-grade pelts floating down the river? Naturally, they are going to make a pass at them, ain't they? Sounds reasonable, don't it?" Shoat queried nervously.

"Reasonable enough," said Roger noncommittally, as he watched the woman hovering like a slatternly wraith in the back of the room. "But now get along with your story."

"Well, after losing that shipment and two men, I had a devil of a time getting a couple of pilots to take down the next load of skins. The word went round that it was plain suicide to steer an Arctic Company bateau down the river. But finally I hired a couple of Swedes who were leaving Siskewan and needed passage money to the States. They left here about six weeks ago, and I haven't heard from them since."

"In other words," put in Roger, "four boatloads of furs and their pilots have mysteriously disappeared in three months."

"That's about it," conceded Shoat. "But that ain't all. Here I've got ten thousand skins waiting to be shipped right now, and I can't hire a man to take them down the river for any price."

Roger Carsten rose from his chair as Callender finished his tale. Out of the tail of his eye he saw the woman leave the room.

"Shoat," he said quietly, "there's something awfully queer going on around this post. So far, I haven't been able to figure it out. But there's one thing I *have* figured out: Shoat, you and I are going to take ten thousand furs down to Cordova—the ten thousand you've got on hand—and we aren't going to float them down the Copper River either."

"How'll you get them down, then? You can't drive them down by sledge until the river freezes over. And you can't take them over the glacier. It's full of crevasses a mile wide. You couldn't go five hundred feet without falling into a pothole."

"I know all that, Callender. But I don't intend to drive them down by sledge."

"Well, how are you going to do it then? Maybe you think you can carry twenty ton of furs in that air jitney of yourn."

"No, I don't think the Falcon would stand up as a freight car. And if I had to make a forced landing it would mean an awful crackup."

Roger Carsten smiled. "Shoat, for a man who's been a prospector and a fur trader, you sure lack originality. It's true I'm not going over the glacier—but how about going *through* the glacier?"

Shoat Callender was speechless. He surveyed Carsten as though he were an acknowledged lunatic.

"Yes, sir," went on Roger, "it's a real idea. Have you ever noticed the stream that comes out under the glacier at Cordova, and tumbles into the channel about a mile south of the harbor? It's big enough for a bateau, and gushes out free from rocks and mud in a full, clean stream. Ever notice it, Shoatie?"

"Sure I've noticed it. But what good is that going to do us?"

"I've got a hunch—pretty well backed up by my knowledge of geology—that it's a subglacial river that starts up around this part of the country somewhere, and travels through the glacier to the ocean."

"Yeh, that's fine. But where does this nice, convenient river start?"

"That's what I intend to find out tomorrow, in the monoplane. I'll make a few observations in the plane, get the lay of the big fissures, and chart our route accordingly. Shoat, I'll find that river or bust a gasket! In the meantime, let's get out and hunt up a hangar for the Falcon."

III.

ROGER CARSTEN was flying southward over the Copper River glacier at an altitude of one hundred feet. Under him lay as desolate and forlorn a section of the earth's surface as an aviator ever viewed.

The glacier was a treeless, blackened area four hundred miles square, without enough herbage to support a brace of ptarmigan. At irregular intervals huge crevasses split its surface longitudinally, opening deep gashes in the surface of the ancient ice sheet.

An atmosphere of stark terror rose from these chasms, and communicated itself to the solitary birdman who had been flying

for nearly two hours over the glacier. He estimated that he was about one hundred miles south of Siskewan, and somewhere in the vicinity of Jollikek, the scene of the fur pirates' operations.

Thus far his search for the subglacial river had been fruitless. Crevasses there were in plenty; frothing torrents crashed underneath his plane; but none of the streams gave any indication of diving underneath the glacier. Carsten had almost decided to skim his plane even lower in a swift reconnoitering survey, when a jerky sputtering of his motor warned him that something was seriously wrong with his power plant.

His sensitive, practiced ear told him that the trouble was somewhere along the gas line. The gas gauge showed him that his tank was three-fourths full; he switched from the main to the auxiliary tank, but the sputtering and gasping continued.

The speed of the motor was abating, and the plane threatened to fall into a deadly tailspin. Only by sharply jamming up his ailerons did Roger manage to keep the plane in the air.

The motor choked, as if an unseen hand were strangling it to death; an immediate landing was imperative. Barely a hundred feet below the glacier opened in a huge crevasse, and by sheer intuition Carsten decided to make a landing in the cañon, rather than risk annihilation on the jagged surface of the ice sheet.

He was now directly over the crevasse. His plane continued to sink; already it was below the level of the glacier, and was gliding with terrific momentum toward the floor of the crevasse.

Carsten's sole hope was for a level body of water; next best would be a fairly unbroken surface of ice. He glided lower, and breathed in frank relief when he saw that the bottom of the crevasse was opening out before him in an amphitheater of huge dimensions.

"Luck," he murmured. "Birdman luck and nothing else but. Now for a circus landing."

He taxied along the wide floor of the crevasse, as smooth and slippery as a dancing pavilion. The motor was now completely dead, and the frigid silence was broken only by the calm swishing of a glacial river at his side.

Bringing the plane to a stop, Carsten climbed out of the cockpit and grimly uncoupled the gas connection underneath the main tank. The filter sieve was clogged with pebbles and coarse dirt, which had completely choked off the gas supply.

Carsten examined the pebbles closely.

"Two fistfuls of good Siskewan quartz—or I'm no geologist. Nice dependable boy you detailed to watch this plane, Callender—one that could be counted on to throw dirt in the gas tank. Well, now that we're here, let's look around."

Nibbling at a square of chocolate, Carsten walked toward the river that was coursing like a broad mill stream through the bed of the cañon. Obviously it was the glacial river he had been seeking.

The walls of the crevasse, worn down by centuries of erosion, were smooth as polished glass. Carsten followed the stream for nearly a mile, and observed that it was meandering broadly, as if it were flowing through a level plain.

But while the floor of the big crevasse was evidently widening out, its upper walls were converging, like train tracks in perspective, until only a narrow slit of sky was visible. Soon even this disappeared, and the crevasse began to arch over Roger's head.

Continuing his exploration downstream, he found himself in a vaulted hall of darkly glittering ice.

His pocket searchlight showed him that he was in a glacial cave, whose floor was a broad meadow of ice, bisected by a leisurely flowing stream. Tremendous icicles hung like diamond pendants from the ceiling, and the translucent walls of the cave refracted a blue glow which the searchlight broke into a reredos of prismatic jewels.

The roof of the cave was sustained by natural pillars of ice, giving the impression of a Gothic nave, coldly beautiful and deathly still.

The river flowed so slowly at this point that it had begun to meander in wide curves, forming numerous elbows and bays. Coming out upon one of these bays, carved

like a blue scimitar out of ice, Roger saw four bateaux anchored to a huge pillar.

He ran toward the boats, bobbing silently at their strange anchorage. All four were heavily laden with pelts, lashed down by canvas tarpaulins. And upon the low deck house of each boat was stenciled in large white letters: Arctic Trading Company!

"Twenty thousand furs in cold storage," murmured Roger. "Now I wonder where the guardians of this tidy little swag can be found?"

He went aboard the largest bateau and opened the deck house door. Everything was in order. A crate of provisions had been drawn upon, but was still more than half full.

"Which reminds me," said Roger, breaking open a tin of corned beef and some ship's biscuit.

He ate a few mouthfuls and then continued his inspection of the four boats. The hold of each craft was laden with fox and marten, lashed down by heavy canvas. The boats were in readiness for immediate departure from the glacial cave, which was obviously a cache for stolen furs.

Roger had barely finished his inspection when he heard voices.

To run would be fatal. The sound of his footsteps would have been magnified by a thousand cold echoes. Concealment, except on the bateau was impossible.

Roger made a trigger decision. Tearing free one corner of the tarpaulin, he crawled under it and flattened himself against the furs. Once under the canvas he regretted his decision.

"You're trapped," whizzed through his mind.

The voices drew nearer, and Roger could hear them excitedly discussing the presence of the monoplane in the crevasse.

"Look here, Ginley," said a voice with a rough Scotch rasp, "it can't be Callender. He isn't due here till next week with the last ten thousand skins. I got the dope straight from his missus only last Saturday. She made Shoat send a phony telegram down to old man Carsten, plastering suspicion all over the Skagway gang. She figured it would be three weeks before Carsten could get here—and by that time we're in Canada with thirty thousand swell skins. Shoat stays behind to make everything look regular. Ginley, that little girl's got a great head."

"Yeh, but supposin' young Carsten jumps up here in a plane, and is on the ground right now? It 'd kinda throw a wrench in the works, wouldn't it? I tell ya, Scotty, we gotta locate the guy that's flying this plane, and we gotta put him where he won't do no damage."

"Don't worry, he isn't goin' to get very far. It's too late in the game to take chances with a snooper. Let's look through the boats for this flyin' gazabo, whoever he is. Sure as boathooks we'll find him around here somewhere. Then it's curtains."

"Curtains it is," thought Roger, pressing himself against the pile of raw furs as Ginley and the Scotchman began to rummage through the first boat.

Roger was in the last one down stream, and could count on a maximum of ten minutes in which to plan and execute his escape. Lying under the tarpaulin he went over the possibilities one by one.

"I can't get back to Siskewan in the plane—that's certain. There's too much dirt in the gas line. Besides, Callender wouldn't give me a very warm welcome, now that I've fathomed this Skagway hocus-pocus he was pulling over on the old man. And I'm not going to stand much of a chance for my life with these two roughnecks when they find me hiding under this canvas.

"Roger, my lad, the only thing for you to do is cast this bateau loose and drift down stream through the glacier. A trial trip, so to speak. If it works, we'll come back and take the rest of them down the same way. If it doesn't—why, it won't—and that's that."

Noiselessly crawling out from beneath the canvas Roger peered about in the blue light for the mooring rope. It was made fast to a stanchion in front of the deck-house.

While Ginley and the Scotchman were rummaging through the second bateau, Roger slipped the rope off the stanchion and let it fall quietly into the water. The

current seized Roger's boat, and in a moment he began to drift down stream.

Then he crawled back under the canvas —and waited.

The bateau had drifted a quarter of a mile when Roger heard the first shouts and swiftly running feet of Ginley and his companion. They had discovered the drifting bateau, and armed with boathooks were racing in pursuit, fusillading shots and curses as they ran.

The river was at this point nearly forty feet wide, and as long as the bateau held the center of the stream a boathook was useless to any one on the bank.

But the curving course of the river often brought the boat bumping into an elbow of ice, and it was the hope that such an elbow might snag the thing, that kept Ginley and the Scotchman in pursuit.

For a mile they trailed the drifting bateau, pouring a hail of revolver bullets against its stern. Two bullets clipped the canvas, six inches from Roger's head.

Almost imperceptibly the current began to run faster, as though the river were gently sloping downhill. Roger, hidden under the canvas, felt the acceleration and grinned with delight.

"Five miles an hour faster—and we leave the amiable Ginley in the distance."

Scarcely had the thought left his mind, when the bateau crashed into a projecting ledge of ice. The keel grated threateningly, as though it were ripped off by the shock.

The boat stuck fast. It had run aground, tight and proper.

In a pattering rain of lead Roger leaped to the bank, braced himself against a pillar of ice and gave the bateau a violent shove. It responded sluggishly, as if unwilling to slip back into the icy river. Ginley's revolver was spitting in a swift staccato as Roger bent all his strength to the stranded craft.

Seizing a boathook he thrust it leverwise under the bow, and pried with all his might. The boat started to slip gradually into the water, but Ginley and the Scotchman were only fifty feet away, and coming fast.

Two revolvers barked simultaneously, and Roger felt two sharp flames pierce his arm and shoulder blade. With a final desperate effort he wrenched the bateau free, leaped aboard, and shoved it off into the swiftly moving stream.

The zing-ping-zing redoubled in fury—but Roger Carsten did not hear it. He was lying unconscious on the deck-house floor.

IV.

He awoke from a fearful ice-dream to a still wilder nightmare of racing horror. The glacial river had gone mad with spinning fury; and the bateau was hurtling downward on the crest of a foaming torrent.

Overhead, the ice-vault sparkled with blue light. Weird, flickering shadows leaped and twisted across the swirling stream, as boat and man plunged forward through a channel of ghastly beauty.

Fortunately the channel ran true as a line, having been cut deep and straight by years of chiseling water. A curve or projection would have battered the boat to splinters.

Occasionally the river would emerge from the vault of ice, and Carsten would catch a glimpse of dark sky. The cañon was too deep for him to estimate the height of its walls, but by the constantly increasing speed of the boat he knew he was falling deeper into the heart of the glacier.

Once he saw a single star; it seemed as though he were viewing it from the wrong end of an enormous telescope. Then the upper walls of the crevasse met again, blackness closed around and the star was seen no more.

The air grew colder and the bateau began to rush along as though it were sliding down a mountainside. Roger was drenched to the marrow; the lining of his lungs seemed frozen with spray. But his right arm and shoulder were burning with stabbing jerks of flame, where the two bullets had lodged.

In desperation he clung to the tiller, attempting to hold the boat straight on its course. But one might have tried with equal success to control an avalanche.

The channel grew narrower, the water struggled through the icy pipe; and like a fighting salmon the bateau leaped through the sub-glacial darkness. Twice Carsten lost and regained consciousness while the

fur-laden craft staggered onward in dumb terror.

Finally, when it seemed that the cruel buffeting must crush the boat and its cargo, Carsten felt one final heart-sickening swoop. The bateau fell straight down through space, and landed right side up in the comparative quietness of a smoothly-flowing river.

Daylight opened in front—and a few moments later Roger was drifting in the open air along the Cordova harbor-front.

He had come through the heart of the Copper River glacier, descending two thousand feet in altitude and traveling over two hundred miles in less than six hours!

He staggered to the deck-house bunk, and for a long time lay as if he were dead.

When he came to, he saw a dimly familiar figure holding a cup of coffee and smiling down at him. It was Macumber, the Arctic Company's agent at Cordova.

"Hello, Mac," he said weakly. "How—how did you get here?"

Roger tried to rise, but fell backward, spent and shivering. Then for the first time he noticed that he was in a strange bed, and that his arm and shoulder were heavily bandaged.

"What's all this?" he queried.

Macumber handed him the coffee.

"You've been asleep eight hours," he explained. "This morning I heard that one of our boats was stuck in the ice, so I jogged down on a sledge and who should I find but Mr. Roger Carsten, half-frozen, full of lead, and just about ready to pass out entirely. I lugged you home, and got a medico to tie you up."

"Are the furs in good shape?"

"Aye, lad, that they are; but I don't see yet how you happened to be drifting around in the harbor this morning. You couldn't have come down the river—it froze solid last night. How in hell did you get here?"

"I came through the glacier."

"Good Lord, man, you can't mean it. Why, it's never been done; it—it can't be done."

"Well, I did it," grinned Roger, revived by the coffee. "And now, Mac, let's not waste time arguing about something that's already happened. Our present job is to double-quick back to Siskewan with a couple of dog-sleds and a warrant for Callender. Conspiracy, murder, fraud—I've got evidence that 'll convict him on any one of those charges. That crook holds fifteen thousand Arctic Company pelts, and all we need is nerve and speed to get them."

Roger tried to rise, but a spike of pain nailed his shoulder to the bed. Macumber saw the wincing pallor of his face, and leaned over him anxiously.

"Be quiet, lad. Some one's given you a double dose of lead that's going to keep you from dashing around in dog-sleds for quite awhile. Two weeks in bed—"

"But I can't go back on the admiral now," groaned Roger. "I've got to get those fifteen thousand pelts off to Vancouver—"

"Now listen here, lad. We'll be shipping you back to Vancouver in a nice cool box if you get careless with that shoulder. You've had your part of the fun, now let the rest of us in on it. You stay right here, while me and my brother—he's sheriff of Cordova—saunter up the river and put the irons on Mr. Shoat Callender. How's that sound?"

"O K," grumbled Roger—"but for the Lord's sake, Mac, get *going!*"

"Righto," and Mac, reached for his holster.

V.

A MONTH later Roger Carsten sat in the San Francisco office of the Arctic Trading Company. His right arm was in a sling, but otherwise he was the same granite-shouldered adventurer that had turned the Falcon's beak northward five weeks before.

"Callender came through clean," he was saying to the admiral. "When Macumber lugged him down to Cordova and brought him up to the room where I was lying in bed, he broke down and blubbered like a baby. It seems he married Ginley's sister about a year ago, and she put him up to this fur-pirating racket. Told him he was being abused, worked for a sucker, and all that.

"She directed the whole business from her kitchen, invented the Skagway yarn—which was a pure myth, and coached Cal-

lender from the back of the room whenever he had to do any talking. When she heard the sheriff was coming up the river she beat it with Ginley and the Scotchman—who was her light o' love—leaving poor, misguided Callender up a nasty tree."

"He'd have swung from that same tree in the old days," grunted the admiral.

"Well, I told him that inasmuch as his conscience would probably torture him the rest of his life for double crossing his employer and best friend—meaning you, dad—that I wouldn't prosecute the conspiracy charge if he'd lead Macumber to where the furs were cached. He agreed, and Mac had the whole shipment on the Penguin four days later. I had to hang around Cordova till the shoulder got strong enough to fly the plane back. Which I did in exactly thirty-five hours, bettering my previous time by fifty-five minutes. Not so bad for a mere vice president, what?"

"Vice president, nothing," roared the admiral. "There's only one presiding genius in this company—and, boy, after what you've done, you're *it!* And the first proceeds of your administration came in this morning," added Hugh Carsten, handing his son a slip of paper.

Roger looked at it carefully. It was a certified check for one hundred thousand dollars, payable to the Arctic Trading Company, and signed by the Royal Fur Importers of London, England.

THE END

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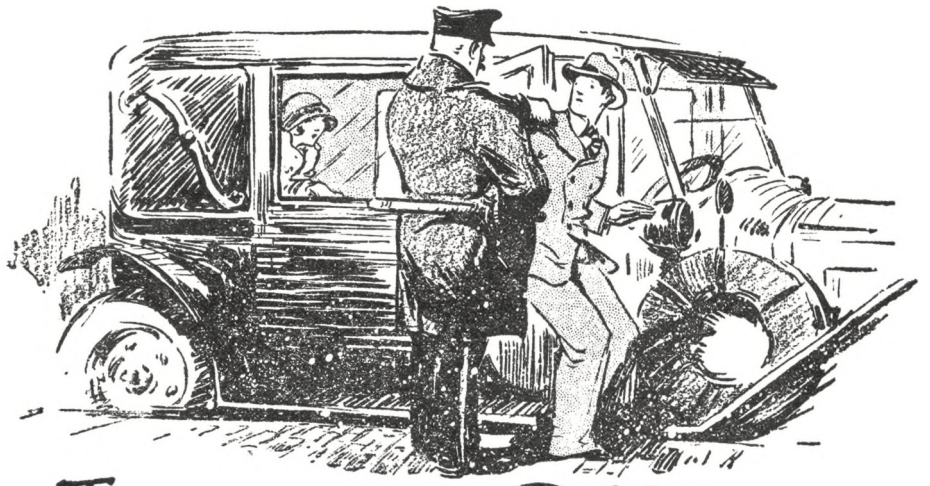
I KNEW HIM WHEN—

I KNEW him when in pomp and power,
Like that of potentates and kings,
He came upon me in an hour
Tipped with the beat of magic wings,
An hour wherein all care was hurled
Aside, as just my dreams and I
Rushed from the worries of the world,
Flying as geese and eagles fly.

I knew him when from out the blur
Of springtime mist and spiraled dust,
He hurtled as if furies were
Pursuing him with murderous lust;
Past like a thrusting blade he flew;
Halted—and you will understand
Why I stopped, too;—and so do you
When traffic's "finest" lifts a hand.

I knew him then, as oft before
When he had trailed my petrol's smudge,
And heard again his raucous roar:
"'Thirty?' Aw, tell it to the judge!"

Olin Lyman.



Innocent Thieves

By BEATRICE ASHTON VANDEGRIFT

JOHNNY RILEY watched with indifference and contempt as the entire office force surged to the window. What did it matter to him if the boss had a new car, evidently a whiz, judging from the gushings of the silly stenographers and admiring whistles of the draftsmen? What did it matter that he, Johnny Riley, could not even boast a tin can on wheels?

He had his two strong legs, he'd tell the knock-kneed world. Let old man Gallagher keep his car and his gout.

"Hey, Johnny!" called a red-headed caresser of the clattering keys. "You're missing it. Come on over and look at the old man's beautiful boat. Gee, it's got disk wheels 'n' everything. Look—the old man's getting out. Now the missus is ordering Jeemes to drive on. Ain't that rich?"

"The old dame is certainly putting on the dog," commented another of the shorthand sisterhood. "She's been ritzy ever since the old man put over that big deal. Now she's out for high society. Thinks she can crash the gates with her new Tremendous Eight like the tanks crashed the Argonne.

"High society is right," agreed one of the draftsmen bitterly. "She's making him cut his old friends like Maggie makes Jiggs in the funny paper. Old Gallagher and my dad used to be great pals. Don't know how many corner stones they've laid together—in bricks. And now the old dame won't even let Gallagher salute dad across the street. Poor old Gallagher—but I'd like to be in his shoes at that."

"You mean bedroom slippers," put in Johnny Riley sourly. "He hasn't worn shoes for two years, not since high living gave him the gout."

"All the same I'd like to own a bus like that," continued one of the girls. "Or marry a guy with one. He could even have gout and you wouldn't catch me sighing for lost romance. A ritzy car like that will cover a multitude of shins."

"Yeah, that's what the gold diggers say. But all dames aren't like you," grunted Johnny ungallantly. "There's still some that appreciate a real man, I guess."

"Meaning who?"

"I know who I mean all right," answered Johnny doggedly.

From this you may gather that Johnny was naturally mean-spirited, ungracious, and spiteful. But such is not the case. Johnny's layer of sour indifference simply cloaked a stratum of apprehension.

During the last week he had stumbled and painfully fallen for a certain pert and pretty Edna Metz, who clicked the keys at an insurance office down the street.

He had worshiped her from afar, across the catsup bottle that divided them in the Blue Mug Cafeteria, frequented by the young business men and women of the district. Finally he had smiled, then spoken, then made a date.

It was for this very evening. He was to call for her at seven o'clock at her home on South Hemlock Street and take her down town to the movies.

They would either walk or go by trolley. Hence Johnny's apparent indifference to all plutocrats and their limousines. Needless to say he would have given his ears to possess a car like his employer's—one that he could pridefully flash before the big brown eyes of Edna Metz.

"Gee, it's gone now—snaked from the curb like a thief in the night," went on the poetic stenographer rapturously. "You should have seen it, Johnny."

"I've seen automobiles before," returned Johnny indifferently. "They don't mean nothing in my young life. When I buy my bus it's going to be an airplane."

"Yeah, *when* you do. Take me up in it, Johnny, won't you—if my great-grandchildren 'll let me?"

Johnny scornfully curled his lip and resumed his work. He was the only one occupied in legitimate pursuits when old Gallagher limped in.

A general flurry ensued with much rustling of paper and scraping of chairs, but Gallagher seemed not to notice it. He wandered through to his inner office with weariness. High society was killing him, and he was as passive a party to the act as a guinea pig on a dissecting table.

II.

At a quarter before seven Johnny swung down from a trolley at South Hemlock and Twelfth and walked back half a block to the home of his lady.

Johnny was resplendent in a new gray suit with coat two sizes too small for him and trousers two sizes too big, a style then in fashion. He wore his only pair of silk socks, which kept rolling down over his shoe tops, and a striped tie that bore the colors of Harvard, or they might have been Princeton's. He simply knew that the tie was collegiate.

Edna's house was a two-family one. The street on which she lived had been fashionable in the day when her father and mother were riding tandem bicycles, and the houses still wore an air of reminiscent grandeur.

The lower stories of some of them had been converted into delicatessens and dry cleaning establishments, and those residences that boasted grounds also flaunted filling stations in their front yards.

In front of Edna's house Johnny noticed a green sedan, shining with newness and beauty. The sight stabbed Johnny with a peculiar intensity that he had never before experienced on viewing automobiles. But he would have given his eyebrows to possess its like that night.

Johnny mounted the wooden front stoop, hesitated, then rang. His heart was hammering painfully.

He felt the embarrassment of extreme youth whenever he had a date.

He had bolstered himself with a small bag of hard candy to eat in the movies. He had thought at first of getting caramels, but caramels were so sticky that if you wanted to hold hands afterward it was very unpleasant.

Besides, hard candy lasted longer and filled the mouth so that you didn't have to talk when silence was so much sweeter.

He rang the bell again, and Edna herself came to the door—Edna in periwinkle flannel, straight and close-fitting, and her rebellious blond bob swirling around her little ears.

"Oh, Mr. Riley," she cooed, airily gracious, "I really didn't expect you so soon. Please come in and wait a minute."

Edna's mother—at least it must be the mother, though Edna did not introduce her

—asked Johnny to sit on the sofa, while Edna whisked from the room with a "Be right back."

"It's a cool evening, Mr. Riley," remarked Mrs. Metz affably. "A real relief after the heat. It must be terrible hot in the office. Edna just bakes where she works."

The thought of Edna baking alarmed Johnny.

"But we manage to keep real comfortable here," resumed Mrs. Metz, glancing about the room. "It's not what we've been accustomed to at all, but at least the neighborhood's decent and the house is very nice—or would be if it wasn't for the people in the other half. They're "—she lowered her voice—"just terrible!"

She raised her head and sniffed.

"Pff!" She wrinkled her nose distastefully. "Do you smell it?"

"What, ma'am?" asked Johnny, also wrinkling his nose.

"Corned beef and cabbage. They are always cooking it, and it—it odors up the whole place. Sometimes I think I'll complain. And they have the most awful poker parties. Late into the night you can hear them—a whole bunch of vulgar men—bricklayers—ditch diggers—oh, it's terrible!"

Mrs. Metz said this with pardonable superiority. *Her* husband was a plumber.

"And I think they're going to have a party to-night," went on Mrs. Metz. "I'm so glad you're taking Edna out. Those men get to talking so loud and rough. You can hear every word through the partition. And sometimes their language is not refined."

Johnny sat stiffly, at a loss for comment. Personally, corned beef and cabbage, poker and unrefined language were not distasteful to him, but he could appreciate Mrs. Metz's finer sensibilities. She seemed a real lady. No wonder Edna was so sweet.

In a few moments Edna returned, a white fuzzy tam on her wayward locks and a little more powder on her nose. From next door rose a crescendo of loud, masculine voices and hearty guffaws. Johnny could almost hear the peeling of coats and rolling of shirt sleeves. The party was getting under way early.

Mrs. Metz shivered.

"Go on, children," she urged them. "Go—and have a nice time."

Edna preceded Johnny down the dark steps.

Johnny glanced down the street for signs of a trolley. It was seven twenty-five and there should be one along on the half hour. But Edna had ideas of her own.

She walked straight to the shiny green car by the curb, opened the door and slid in, gracefully leaving the wheel to Johnny. He paused, paralyzed.

A car like that—the car of his dreams—*and it was Edna's!*

He was miserable. She was rich then. He might have known it. Being a stenographer didn't mean that she was a working girl. Lots of society girls played at making their own living.

His poor little dreams deflated as suddenly as a flivver's tire on a loose gravel road. How could he last through the evening?

Oh, well, he would have to go through with it. He would do his part, then stalk out of Edna Metz's life forever.

He slid in bewilderment behind the mahogany-spoked wheel. There is scarcely a young man of his age in these United States who doesn't know something about cars, and Johnny was no exception. He had even driven one or two makes, belonging to more affluent friends, on several different occasions.

He switched on the starter and tentatively grasped the agate-tipped gear shift, sliding it carefully to what he thought must be low. The car snorted and jumped alarmingly backward.

"I guess this—this must be reverse, isn't it?" he inquired of Edna.

"Why ask me?" she answered indifferently.

"Guess I know my way now," he muttered, glad that the darkness hid his rising blush. "Just got balled up for a minute. Now this is low, second, high—yeah, bo—we're off!"

"You haven't been driving very long, have you, Mr. Riley?" put in Edna, her shoulder close to his, but her voice curiously distant.

Johnny's flush mounted.

"Oh, no, not long," he admitted. "But autos don't mean nothing to me. The airplane's the thing."

Edna's glance was more admiring, if he could only have seen it. But his eyes were hard upon the shadowy road before him.

Every time he came to a street lamp he drew a sigh of relief. The intermittent red tail-lights that danced down the street ahead bewildered him, and when a car approached, its glaring lamps made his head whirl. He had never driven at night before—much less a car with a fancy gear shift.

"It's real cool driving, and this is certainly a nice car, isn't it, Mr. Riley?" asked Edna, comradely.

Johnny's heart swelled at the softness of her tones. It was on the tip of his tongue to blurt out: "Oh, please don't call me Mr. Riley. Call me Johnny." But how could he ask the owner of this high-priced sedan to indulge in the least bit of familiarity?

Especially when she praised her own car in that self-satisfied manner. It showed she was conscious of it and of her own high social position.

They drew up at length before the narrow little theater that heralded in winking electric lights the arrival of Buster Jones in the "Bucking Broncho's Last Stand."

Johnny let Edna out in front of the building with the professional air of a chauffeur and parked the car with difficulty around a corner on a side street. He was glad that the street was comparatively dark, because he had scraped too close to an adjacent vehicle, and a long, grinding crunch made his heart sink.

He got out, lit a match and discovered that the shining fender of the other car was less shining by one long, wicked scratch. Golly, he hoped the owner would not notice the damage until he was at least three blocks from the environs of the Gem Motion Picture Theater.

Johnny resolutely wrenched his four-in-hand to the correct position upon his shirt front and nonchalantly sauntered to the lobby of the theater where Edna was scanning a lurid poster of a lady in pink negligee being confronted by a gentleman in evening dress and pistol.

"That's to-morrow," announced Edna. "I bet it's going to be good. A real society drama. Oh, well, this one to-day will be awful funny, I guess, and I do love comedies about the West."

She followed Johnny into the dark, close depths of the little theater and waited for him to guide her to a pair of seats in the center of a row of tired business men who rose with resigned sighs as they passed.

The seats had no arms between them. This would have rejoiced Johnny if it hadn't been for the thought of that slick, shiny car of hers—the car that Edna owned and he did not.

He could never now unfold to her the thoughts that had been bubbling in his heart for the past week. Everybody in the office would call him a male gold digger.

Edna snuggled down into the hard seat with the twisting movement of a wild young animal before it makes its bed on the ground, and favored Johnny with two inches more of her nearness than she gave her neighbor on the other side. This should have encouraged Johnny because the neighbor was a good-looking young sheik, a senior in the high school Johnny had attended up to that summer.

But Johnny's heart was of the substance whereof sinkers are made, and he only focused his gaze more intently on the film that flickered and flashed before his eyes.

After awhile he recollected the candy that was bulging his hip pocket and tendered it politely to Edna.

"Oh!" she murmured in ecstasy. "Caramels! Oh, no, they're jaw breakers. I thought for a minute they were caramels. But anyhow I love jaw breakers. Not so sweet."

"Not so sweet as you," Johnny was aching to say, but refrained.

You wouldn't catch *him* making up to a dark green sedan with four wheel brakes and balloon tires. Not on your life! He had some pride.

III.

THEY sat through the picture, an interminable one as it seemed to Johnny,

while Edna read the captions aloud in an effort to be amusing. She insisted on staying for the news reel, as it might be showing the Prince of Wales or Tunney this week, and Johnny lingered with an air of martyrdom.

He'd give her anything she wanted to-night. Daughters of the rich always expected to have their own way.

Well, she would have it to-night and to-morrow he would forget her and buckle down to work. In five years or so he'd be rich himself and then he'd show her.

They came out at last into the cool evening air that was as bracing after the suffocation of the theater as a piece of ice down the back of the neck. Edna clung to his elbow a minute as a group of other outgoing people crowded her.

The contact smote Johnny's aching heart, but he grimly set his jaw and indicated where he had parked her car around the corner.

"I suppose you want me to drive it home, too—seeing I make such a good chauffeur," he commented, lightly and bitterly, and was about to climb in when a firm hand on his shoulder arrested him. The hand was not Edna's.

He wheeled and confronted an officer of the law.

His frantic mind flew to the scratch on the fender of the car beside them. The owner had discovered it and was having him arrested!

"Well, young fellow, you hie with me," growled the officer. "Think you can sail off with somebody else's car and get away with it in *this* town?"

"What?" gulped Johnny in bewilderment. "Why—why, I don't get you—sir. I—why, this car belongs to this young lady here. I was only driving it for her."

At this Edna uttered a peculiar shriek. Sudden doubt stabbed Johnny. She wasn't an heiress. She was an auto thief.

Upon Edna's shriek, the policeman turned his gaze from Johnny to her.

"So that's it," he deduced. "*You*'re the mainspring of this outfit and this poor sap is only your accomplice."

But Edna returned his gaze bravely and with hauteur. She was quickly recovering her composure, though her cheeks were still pale.

"It's not so," she denied grandly. "This car *does* belong to Mr. Riley here. He came to take me out in it to-night."

A glimmer of dawn broke in upon Johnny. The astounding thought struck him that he might have been driving a car that belonged to neither of them!

"Well, this car *don't* belong to Mr. Riley here—not by a blamed sight," repeated the officer in a mimicking falsetto. "This car belongs to a gentleman, and he's waiting at the station now to prefer charges. And said station is where the both of you are going."

The officer shoved them to the green sedan.

"Get in there," he ordered. "And you're not going to do the driving either, young fellow. I'm taking no chances."

They got in, quaking at the thought of being so adjacent to a dreaded arm of the law. The policeman eyed the gear shift and resolutely seized it.

The car sprang forward, bucking the curb, while the front fender scraped raspingly against the fender of the car Johnny had previously marred.

Johnny secretly exulted. They wouldn't be able to get him now on *that* score!

The officer muttered something under his breath.

"Yeah, it fooled me, too," murmured Johnny sympathetically. "I thought reverse was low and you thought low was—"

"Never mind what I thought!" snapped the officer of the law. "You just sit tight and remember you're under arrest. And remember also that the police department don't take suggestions from nobody."

"Maybe that's what's wrong with it," whispered Johnny to Edna, and she giggled. She really was proving a dandy sport.

IV.

As they motored down the dark street on the way to the police station, the gravity of the situation began to impress them. They were going to jail! How long would they have to stay there? And would the owner of the green sedan prosecute them

harshly? They hoped he'd be a kind old bird and let them off easy.

They'd explain all about it—how Johnny thought it was Edna's car and Edna thought it was Johnny's. Wasn't that a scream? Or it would have been if the consequences hadn't been so dire.

But an exhilarating thought almost superseded the terror in Johnny's soul. That insidious green sedan did *not* belong to Edna! She was only a poor working girl after all.

Now he could tell her what he had wanted to for so long—ever since he had met her at the cafeteria last week. But she must have faith in him.

"You don't think I stole this blamed car, do you, Edna?" he inquired anxiously.

"Oh, no, Johnny," she said softly.

How easily they were lapsing into the familiar Christian names! How closely danger binds two hearts!

"But I did think it was yours, at first," she added ruefully.

"You should have known I wouldn't be owning a high-priced bus like this," chided Johnny, snuggling a little nearer to her to give the officer more room.

"Why, how should I know you wouldn't be owning one?" she asked, with wide, childlike eyes. "I thought you were rich, Johnny. Don't you remember, the second time we met, you said you were in line to be a junior partner?"

Johnny had said that. He recalled it with a saving blush.

"Sure I'm in line," he reaffirmed stanchly. "But the line's so darned long, Edna."

"Shut up there!" growled the policeman. The shifting lights of traffic bewildered him. He had run by a stop signal twice. "You're forgetting you're under arrest and that includes your mouths."

Johnny and Edna subsided, but their hearts partook of comforting communion.

They drew up before the police station, illumined by two large lamps as round as blue moons, and the officer hustled them out roughly. Johnny's heart sank. He had never been inside a police station before.

"Here is where the owner 'll confront you," boomed the law's stalwart limb. "You'd better mind what you say."

"Maybe we should have read up on etiquette," whispered Edna mischievously. "Is there any chapter on how to conduct yourself when being arrested?"

Her tone was airy, but the little hand that burrowed down inside Johnny's was cold.

They were led before a large, desklike affair from the top of which boomed a brass-buttoned voice, hurling words that rebounded from their hammering ears like hail from a cement sidewalk.

They were being charged with fearful things. Their heads reeled. All was lights and strangeness and confusion.

Then Johnny heard a familiar voice. He turned and met the stony glare of his own boss.

The officer who had arrested him hissed: "There's the owner! Now you'll get yours."

Johnny caught his breath in terror. Old man Gallagher owned the ritzy green sedan!

Why, oh, why hadn't Johnny rushed to the windows with the rest of the office force that morning? Then this never would have happened. But what was the boss's car doing in front of Edna's house?

"Good Lord!" ejaculated old Gallagher, as amazed as Johnny himself. "If it isn't young Riley! Of all the high-handed—"

He became inarticulate, his face purpling.

Johnny saw that things would not go gently with him. Old man Gallagher! Would that the owner of the glorious green sedan had been anybody else!

Mr. Gallagher was thundering something to the desk sergeant. He requested that all manner of fine, imprisonment and what-not be imposed upon that blamed scamp Riley.

Mr. Gallagher was in a towering bad humor. His gouty foot was making purgatory seem like paradise, his wife had just laid down an extravagant program of social activity for the coming season, the corned beef and cabbage dinner hadn't agreed with him and he hadn't won a jack pot all evening.

On top of this his car had been stolen, perhaps damaged. What would he say when he got home that evening? Or rather, what would be said to him?

The sergeant wanted to question Mr. Gallagher on several points. Where was the chauffeur when the car was stolen?

Mr. Gallagher flushed. The chauffeur, a sportsmanlike fellow, who usually let his employer win back half his month's wages, had been indoors with Mr. Gallagher himself. But Mr. Gallagher didn't care to make this known.

"The chauffeur," stated Mr. Gallagher with recovered dignity, "was on an authorized errand. The car was parked at the curb. This young bandit simply ran off with it—this young ingrate and his flapper accomplice."

The flapper accomplice flared. Her eyes had been narrowing, studying Mr. Gallagher intently.

The sergeant was musing upon the merits of the case. Mr. Gallagher was known to be a wealthy man and one politically influential. He was a man to be conciliated. And the young thief was, indeed, of brazen quality. He should be held.

Edna's gaze was still fixed on Mr. Gallagher. The sergeant opened his mouth to speak, but Edna got there before him.

"Oh," she breathed. "I know you now, Mr. Gallagher. You're the old bird that keeps coming next door to play poker—and eat corned beef and cabbage. I know you now, by your voice. I've heard you cussing through the walls. I didn't recognize your car but I do *you*, Mr. Gallagher."

She said this all very sweetly.

Mr. Gallagher paled and faced her with wavering eyes.

"Next door?" he stammered. "Why, do you live next door to—"

"Jake Murphy, the bricklayer," she cooed. "The one that throws those wild boiled dinners. You know."

Mr. Gallagher drew out a handkerchief. His brow was damp.

What if Millie, or rather Millicent, as he had recently been commanded to call her, should get wind of this? He trembled at the thought of the disclosure. He had been charged on pain of death never to be found within the residence of that particular low-brow, Jake Murphy.

The sergeant scowled with severity upon the by-play and cleared his throat preparatory to speaking. But old Gallagher stayed him.

"That's all right, sergeant," he stammered. "I've made a mistake. This young man is not an auto thief. He is, in fact, an employee of mine. I might say a *trusted* employee. He was fully authorized to use the car. I—I have made a mistake."

Horrible visions of three-inch headlines and Millie reading them smote his eyeballs.

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Gallagher," beamed the sergeant, suppressing an amused smile, for Mr. Gallagher was a very influential business man. "We all make mistakes. Next case."

The officer who had arrested Johnny and Edna let them go with reluctance. He was new on the force and this was only his third arrest. One had been the wrong man and the other had escaped. He hated to see Johnny go.

Johnny and Edna walked out joyfully and with a certain air of injured hauteur. Mr. Gallagher hastened after them and laid a detaining hand on his trusted employee's shoulder.

"Er—" he said. "Riley, I'm sorry. I—er—am very sorry." His voice lowered, became confidential.

"Perhaps," he whispered, "we had better just let this whole incident drop. Not say a word about it to—any one."

"Sure, Mr. Gallagher," promised Johnny affably. "I won't say anything."

Mr. Gallagher turned his gaze to Edna. He didn't like her airy independence at all. Such a creature should not be at large.

"Are you working somewhere, miss?" he inquired.

"I have a position at the Rock Bound Insurance," she returned with dignity. "Stenographer."

"Is that so?" said old Gallagher. "Well, you seem to be the kind of young lady I would like to have in my office. I don't want to tear you away from the Rock Bound Insurance Company, but will you come?"

Edna eyed Johnny gleefully and giggled.

"I will, sir," she told Mr. Gallagher pertly, "for five dollars a week more than I'm getting."

"Settled," laughed old Gallagher with relief. "But if you get a raise young Riley here will have to get one, too. Oh, well," he chuckled good-humoredly. "It's worth

it. I've always meant to raise Riley anyhow. I've had my eye on him. Fine young man is Riley, and knows how to keep his mouth shut—one of my trusted employees."

He laughed again, dryly.

Johnny's brain was whirling. He wondered what was causing the sudden wonderful change in his ferocious old boss.

"Wow! You're coming to our office, Edna," he whispered exultingly. "Now we can see each other every day."

Mr. Gallagher walked to the curb and put one gouty foot on the running board of the beautiful green sedan. He paused.

"Here, you, Riley!" he called suddenly. "We've got to see this young woman home in style. Jump in back, both of you, and I'll play chauffeur. I—I know where she lives."

Johnny and Edna sank luxuriously onto the deep plush seat. The way they were sitting, three more could have found room beside them.

Lights and waving trees sped by them in the night.

They said nothing for a long while. Then Johnny broke the silence, his voice wistful.

"Well, Edna," he said. "I guess this is the last time you'll ever ride in a bus like this—unless"—and the thought smote him—"you're intending to take up with some rich guy."

Edna snuggled closer. Her voice was very sweet.

"Johnny," she returned. "If I ever take up with any rich guy it 'll be you, Johnny."

Johnny's chest swelled.

"Guess I *will* be rich by the time I'm twenty-one," he said. "With a man like Gallagher behind me. And then," he added shyly, "we can be married, Edna."

She sighed luxuriously.

THE END

"WAIT FOR THE WAGON"

The spreading use of the motorbus for long runs of an interstate character recalls the days of the old stage coach, although, as a matter of fact, the only thing in common between the two is that both use the highways instead of the rails. As late as the sixties, if one took a transcontinental trip, there was no other choice as means of travel. The Union Pacific Railroad was not completed until 1869, and as a boy the writer made two journeys from New York to Utah and back. The trip out in each case was by rail as far as Nebraska, thence by covered wagon to Salt Lake City. The return both times was by the Wells Fargo stage route, equipped with Concord coaches, each drawn by four horses. They ran day and night, and all the sleeping that was done by the passengers was in their seats, sitting up. Stops were made three times a day for meals at what were called "home stations," and oftener, to change horses, at "swing stations," which may be likened to the filling stations of to-day. In his trips the writer never encountered any hostile Indians, but he has vivid recollections of being roused out of a sound sleep at three in the morning to walk across the ice of a stream which the driver felt was not thick enough to bear the weight of the loaded coach.

Possibly among our readers there are several whose recollections will hark back to similar journeys. The writer's memory is hazy as to the average number of days it took to make the trip between Salt Lake City and Omaha, and we should be glad to print information that could throw light on this point from the personal experience of others.

The covered wagon trip was, while slower, more interesting and much more comfortable, for here it was possible to stretch out and sleep in a natural position. Camps were made each night, beside a stream if such could be found.

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We make it THIS way

FUDGE CENTER: 1½ cups pure cane sugar; ½ teaspoon creamery butter; 1 cup rich, full cream milk; 1 cup corn syrup; white of one egg.

CARAMEL LAYER: 4 teaspoons creamery butter; 1¼ cups corn syrup; 3 cups rich, full cream milk; ¼ teaspoon salt.

PEANUT LAYER: 3 cups prime No. 1 Spanish whole nuts, roasted in oil (hulls removed).

CHOCOLATE COATING: Melt one pound pure milk chocolate.

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