ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

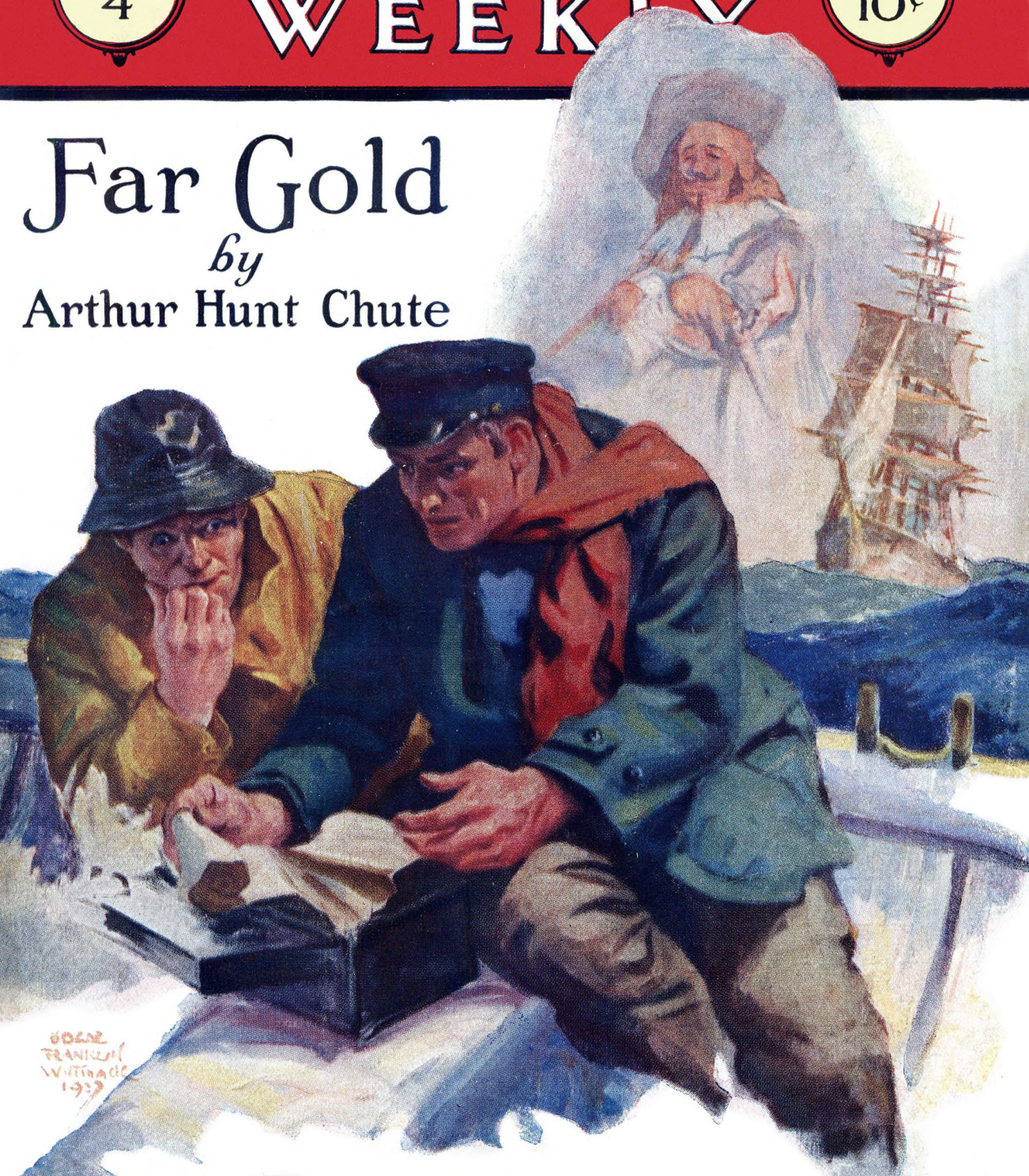
JUNE 4

PRICE 10¢

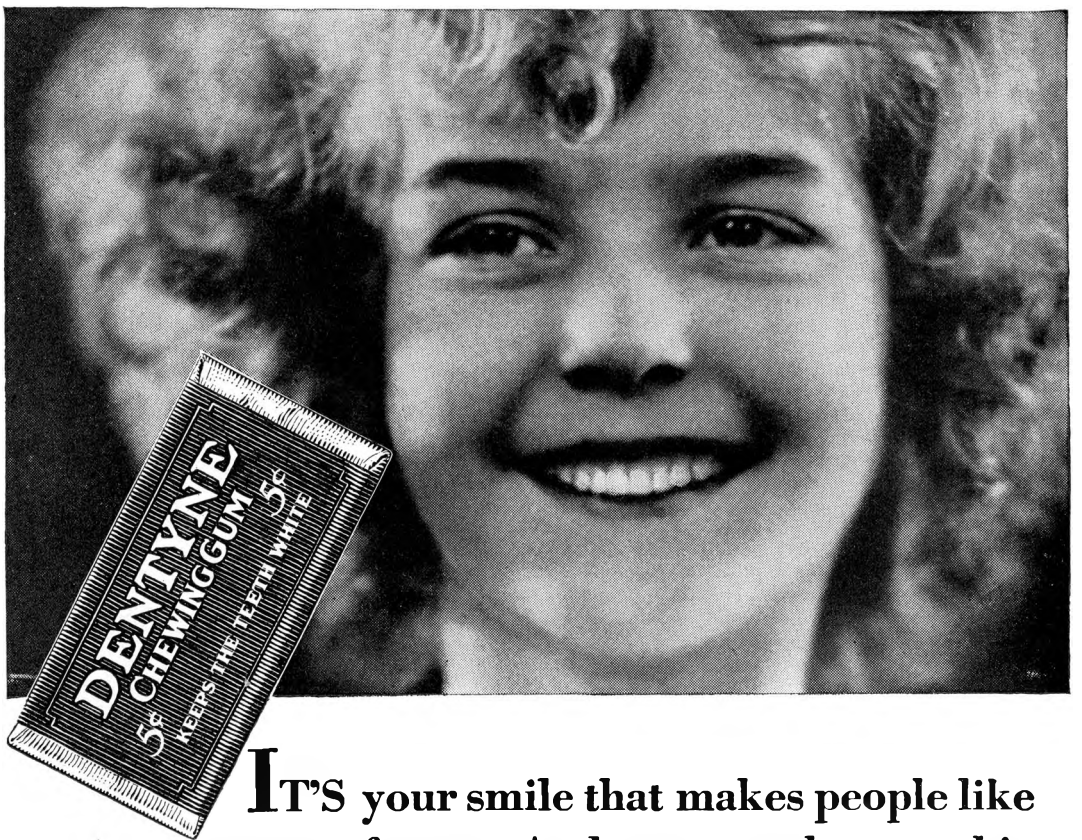
Far Gold

by

Arthur Hunt Chute



Chew DENTYNE *and smile!*



IT'S your smile that makes people like you—not your frown. And your teeth are a big part of your smile. Teeth form the background. Keep your teeth attractive—a flash of snowy white behind your smile. Chew Dentyne, the gum that keeps breath sweet, teeth clean and pearly white.

· KEEPS THE TEETH WHITE ·

Now I'm Ready for 800 Men who can Earn $150 a Week

I am going to show you how you can make $150 a week *in cash!* You will be your own boss. You can go to work when you want to. You can quit when you want to. You can set your own hours. You will get your profits in cash every day. You can start without experience, training or capital. And you can earn $150 a week in this easy, pleasant work.

A Wonderful New Suit!

I have just brought out a wonderful new suit for men. It's a good suit—up-to-date, fits fine—and wears like iron. It is made of a marvelous new special cloth that is unusually durable and long-wearing. It withstands treatment that would ruin an ordinary suit. And because these wonderful new suits are so wear-resisting, they are selling like wildfire. Hundreds of men in your territory will snatch at the chance to buy this most amazing suit.

A Red Hot Money Maker

Does that sound too good to be true? Then read the record of P. L. Hamilton. In less than a month's time Mr. Hamilton sold $813 worth of Comer suits. He takes 6, 8, 10 orders at a clip. B. Miller writes: "Suits sell very easily—in fact I find it easy to average one suit order every half hour." C. H. Mereness made $18 profit in half a day. Robert Rizalda cleared $32 in one day and finds it easy to average $4 an hour. Casey Hurlbut says customers come to his house. He makes as high as $15 an hour. And you have the same opportunity to make big money right in your own town.

Tremendous Demand

We are making this wonder suit in tremendous quantities—not one at a time—but by the thousands. All that modern machinery and efficient methods can do to produce big value at small cost is applied in making the new Comer suit. And finally, we are using the same modern efficiency in selling it—direct from factory to wearer through our local representatives.

The result is amazing. It brings this suit to the wearer at a price that is revolutionary—a price that everyone can afford to pay—a price that makes it the greatest clothing value in years.

AN AMAZING SUIT FOR ONLY $9.95

Think $9.95 for a good suit of clothes. You can see immediately that every man is a prospect. Every community in America is swarming with opportunities for sales. And now if you are interested in making money we want to show you how you can make it. We are appointing men in every locality to represent us—to take orders. That's all. We furnish all instructions. We deliver and collect. But we must have local representatives everywhere through whom our customers can send us their orders.

Experience is not necessary. We want men who are ambitious—industrious and honest. Men who can earn $10 or $15 a day without getting lazy—men who can make $150 a week and still stay on the job. If you are the right type—you may be a bookkeeper, a clerk, a factory worker, a mechanic, a salesman, a farmer, a preacher, or a teacher, that makes no difference—the opportunity is here and we offer it to you.

Complete Selling Outfit Sent Free

If you want to make $10 to $20 a day, if you want a chance at this big money-making opportunity, mail the coupon below. We will send you our complete selling outfit absolutely free. With it will come full instructions, samples, style book, order book and everything you need to get started.

WRITE TODAY Territories will be filled rapidly. Orders are now coming in a flood. Men are making money faster and easier than they even hoped. So don't delay. Write today for complete descriptions, samples of cloth and full information. Do it now. Don't send any money. Capital is not required. Just fill out the coupon and mail it for all the facts.

C. E. COMER, Pres., Comer Mfg. Co.
Dept. 311-L, Dayton, Ohio

GIVEN In addition to the big earnings I have a plan whereby you can get a Chevrolet Coach to help you in developing this great business. Mail the coupon for full details.

IMPORTANT!

The Comer Manufacturing Co. is one of the most successful businesses of its kind in the world, with 12 years of experience back of it. It owns and occupies a modern concrete steel building with 65,000 sq. ft. of floor space where it manufactures all of its merchandise. The business has been built on the policy of giving exceptional values to customers, and fair, square treatment to representatives.

MAIL NOW FOR FULL DETAILS

C. E. COMER, Pres., Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. 311-L, Dayton, Ohio

Send complete selling outfit on your suit proposition. Tell me how to earn as much as $150 a week. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

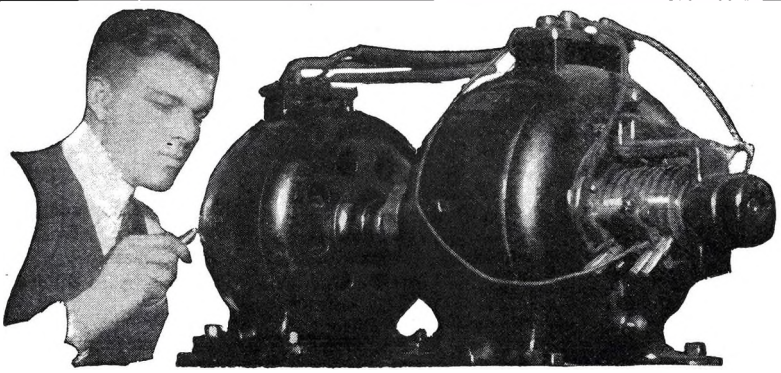
VOLUME 186 | CONTENTS FOR JUNE 4, 1927 | NUMBER 5

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C.2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Reaumur
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.
Entered as second-class matter July 16, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879



Amazingly Easy Way to get into ELECTRICITY

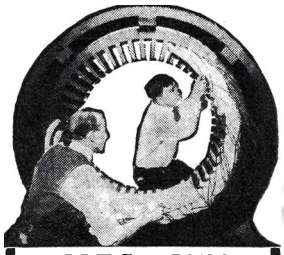
Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Now . . . and forever . . . say goodbye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me teach you how to prepare for positions that lead to $50, $60 and on up to $200 a week in Electricity—NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach that makes you a Real Electrician in 90 days! Getting into electricity is far easier than you imagine!

Learn Without Lessons in 90 DAYS

LACK of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! It makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have. That's why I have worked out my astonishing offers.

I PAY Your Railroad Fare When You Enroll

I pay your railroad fare to Chicago, and assist you to part time work while training. Then, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained . . . on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled . . . real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations . . . everything from doorbells to farm power and lighting . . . full-sized . . . in full operation every day!



JOBS OPEN

Here are a few of hundreds of positions open to Coyne-trained men. Our free employment bureau puts you in touch with openings to choose from.

Armature Expert	$100 a Week
Substation Operator	$65 a Week
Auto Electrician	$110 a Week
Inventor	Unlimited
Maintenance Engineer	$150 a Week
Service Station Owner	$200 a Week
Radio Expert	$100 a Week

No Books—No Printed Lessons

No dull books, no baffling charts . . all real actual work . . . building real batteries . . . winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc., etc. That's a glimpse of how we help to make you a master electrician, teaching you far more than the average ordinary electrician ever knows and fitting you to hold big jobs after graduation.

Jobs, Pay, Future

Don't worry about a job, Coyne training settles the job question for life. Big demand for Coyne trained men. Our employment bureau secures dozens of positions weekly. Two weeks after graduation, Clyde F. Hart got a position as electrician with the Great Western Railroad at over $100 a week. That's not unusual. We can point to many Coyne men making up to $800 a month. $60 a week is only the beginning of your opportunity. You can go into radio, battery or automotive electrical business for yourself and make up to $15,000 a year.

Get the Facts

Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 28 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by electrical industry. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs . . . facts . . . jobs . . . salaries . . . opportunities. Tells you how many earn expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

Get this FREE Book

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL

H. C. LEWIS, Pres.

Dept. A7-60

1300 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

Founded 1899

Mr. H. C. Lewis, Pres.,
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. A7-60
1300 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.
Dear Mr. Lewis:

Without obligation send me your big free catalog and all details of your Railroad Fare to Chicago offer. Free Employment service, Radio and Automotive Courses without extra cost, and how I can "earn while learning." I understand I will not be bothered by any salesman.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

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

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

Munsey's Magazine -
Argosy-Allstory Weekly
Flynn's Weekly - - -
Minimum space 4 lines.

Combination Line Rate $3.00 Less 2% cash discount

July 9th Argosy-Allstory Weekly Forms Close June 11th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

IF YOU ARE A MAN WORTHY OF THE NAME AND NOT AFRAID TO WORK I'LL BET YOU $50.00 YOU CAN'T WORK FOR US THIRTY DAYS AND EARN LESS THAN $200.00. Think I'm bluffing? Then answer this ad and show me up. Openings for managers. WONDER BOX SELLS ON SIGHT. The best selling proposition in America today. Write TOM WALKER, Dept. 190, Pittsburgh, Pa.

HOSIERY FREE and $12 daily. Sell nationally known Pure Silk Hosiery. Amazing values. Experience unnecessary. Free sample outfit mailed immediately. PURE SILK HOSIERY CO., 208 W. Monroe, Dept. P-127, Chicago.

NEWLY PATENTED POCKET LEATHER SPECIALTY. $6.50 value $3.45. No competition. $10—$25 paid daily in advance. We deliver. Full—part time. Free sample offer. INITIALITE CO. (Manufacturers), 22G Quincy, Chicago.

AGENTS—GENUINE BROADCLOTH NOVELTY SHIRTS for wear with or without coats—Great Summer Sellers. Write quick for territory and free samples. CINCINNATI SHIRT CO., Lane 17614, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS: $13.80 Daily in Advance (Sworn Proof) Introducing New Insured Hosiery. Guaranteed one year. No capital or experience required. YOUR PAY DAILY. Monthly bonus besides. Spare time pays you big. We supply samples. Silk hose for your own use **Free.** Macochee Hosiery Co., Road 27016, Cincinnati, O.

66 MILES ON 1 GALLON—Amazing, New, Wonderful Vapor Humidifier—Gas Saver—and Quick Starter. For all autos. Exclusive Factory Representatives wanted everywhere. 1 Free to introduce. CRITCHLOW, D-427, Wheaton, Ill.

MAKE $75 A WEEK AND UP, SELLING OUR FINE, MADE-TO-MEASURE, ALL-WOOL SUITS, DIRECT TO WEARER—ALL ONE PRICE, $31.50. BIGGEST VALUES. COMMISSIONS IN ADVANCE. WE DELIVER AND COLLECT. 6x9 SWATCH SAMPLES FURNISHED. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., DEPT. F-409, CHICAGO.

Agents make larger profits selling well known Ho-Ro-Co Soaps, Perfumes, Toilet Articles. Our lower prices give larger profits. Over 50,000 cans La-Em-Strait Hair Dressing sold last year. HO-RO-CO, 2702 Ho-Ro-Co Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—MONEY MAKERS. FAST READY SELLERS. Earn $15 daily. Pay advanced, selling tailored $10 value slickers $2.95. Striking colors—exquisite cloths. Slicker and selling outfit FREE. FISK WARNER, 443 So. Dearborn, Dept. M, Chicago.

SALESMEN—NEW INVENTION beats vacuum sweeper and all its attachments. No electricity required. All complete only $2.95. Over half profit. Write O. P. MORGAN, MGR., 762 GRIMES ST., FAIRFIELD, IOWA.

NOTHING SELLS LIKE SHOES. EVERY PERSON A PROSPECT. TAKE ORDERS FOR MASON SHOES DIRECT FROM FACTORY. 85 STUNNING STYLES. AMAZINGLY LOW PRICES. NO EXPERIENCE NEEDED. FREE OUTFIT. MASON SHOE MFG. CO., Dept. 23-O, Chippewa Falls, Wis.

ELECTRIC ALARM CLOCK

DARCHE "CALL-ME" ELECTRIC ALARM AND LIGHT CLOCK. No home complete without one. Will ring until you get up and stop it. Write for information how to get one FREE. DARCHE MFG. CO., 643 Washington Blvd., Chicago.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

MRS. O. B. H.—EARNS OVER $75 A WEEK FROM HER HOME. HER HUSBAND'S CAR HER ONLY EQUIPMENT. YOU CAN DO THE SAME. Delightful work, quickly learned. No canvassing or selling. First lesson and layout $1. THE CLIFTON CO., 14724 Clifton Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

$10 IS ALL I ASK DOWN ON 20 ACRES IN MICH. POTATO BELT. Very easy terms. Near markets, lakes and streams. Write for particulars now. G. W. SWIGART, M-1276 First National Bank Building, Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

Agents: Salesmen—Sell New Thermostatic Automatic Carburetor Control Attachment for Fords. Big profit, full or part time. Increases mileage 50—100%. Attached in two minutes. No drilling. Cadillac now using Thermostatic Carburetor Control under Blanckelicense. Sales guaranteed. $15.00 a day guaranteed to distributors. Write today. BLANCKE AUTO DEVICES CO., Dept. 740-H-X, 157 E. Erie St., Chicago.

Don't Sell For Others. Employ agents yourself. Make your own products. Toilet articles, household specialties, etc. 500% profit. We furnish everything and show you how. Valuable booklet free. Write at once. National Scientific Labs., 1976 W. Broad, Richmond, Va.

REPRESENT MANUFACTURER. Plaid back slickers $2.95 up. Latest patterns Rayons, Leatherettes, Scotch Plaids. Biggest commission. Outfit containing 31 samples free. JEROME MFG. CO., 207 S. Green, Chicago.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—TOILET ARTICLES, PERFUMES AND SPECIALTIES. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS — NEW PLAN, MAKES IT EASY TO EARN $50.00 TO $100.00 WEEKLY. SELLING SHIRTS DIRECT TO WEARER. NO CAPITAL OR EXPERIENCE NEEDED. REPRESENT A REAL MANUFACTURER. WRITE NOW FOR FREE SAMPLES. MADISON MANUFACTURERS, 564 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. SOAPS, EXTRACTS, PERFUMES, TOILET GOODS. Experience unnecessary. CARNATION CO., DEPT. 1040, ST. LOUIS, MO.

MAKE BIG MONEY. SELL OUR NATIONALLY KNOWN MADE-TO-INDIVIDUAL-MEASURE SUITS AND OVERCOATS FOR $23.50 AND $29.50. LARGE COMMISSIONS. FREE OUTFIT. WRITE TODAY. GENERAL TAILORING CO., 529 S. FRANKLIN ST., CHICAGO.

Would $100.00 per week interest you? Millions of photos all over the country just crying to be made into beautiful artistic medallions. We have new plan. Lowest prices. Speedy service. Experienced agents losing money every day they put off writing us. Art Medallion Co., Dept. 32, corner Campbell and Jackson, Chicago.

FOUR $7.50 SALES TO MERCHANTS NET YOU $20.00 DAILY. SAYERS SYSTEMS, EST. 1895—REF. DUN & BRADSTREET—2803 SHEFFIELD AVE., CHICAGO, ILL.

AGENTS MAKE $10.00 DAILY SELLING NON-SPLASH WATER FILTERS ON SIGHT. BEST CANVASSER'S ARTICLE ON MARKET. Investigate. Write for particulars DESK 25, SEED FILTER COMPANY, 73 Franklin Street, New York.

AGENTS $240 MONTH. Bonus besides. New auto given. Introduce finest line new silk hosiery, guaranteed six months. 126 styles, colors. High class proposition. New sales plan. No license to pay. Spare time satisfactory. Samples furnished. Write quick. Wilknit Hosiery Co., Dept. 999, Greenfield, Ohio.

REAL WHIRLWIND SELLER—Nopulout Custom Shirt. Every man buys them. Patented—no competition. Liberal commissions. Free selling kit. Make $15 up daily taking order direct from consumer at manufacturer's prices. District or local agents. Write NOPULOUT SHIRT CO., Dept. W, Hazleton, Pa.

MISCELLANEOUS

LAND FREE IF PLANTED TO BANANAS. BANANAS BEAR A FULL CROP THE SECOND YEAR. $5.00 monthly will plant five acres, which should pay $1,500 profit annually. Reliable companies will cultivate and market your bananas for 1-3. Bananas ripen every day and you get your check every 90 days. For particulars address JANTHA PLANTATION CO., Empire Building, Block 220, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Sell LIFE PROTECTION

$50 to $100 A Week **to Agents—Amazing**

Anti-Glare Device for Automobiles

prevents loss of life and makes big money for salesmen. Motorists buy on 30-second demonstration. Treated by secret process. Shields the eyes from dazzling head-lights. Also used by day as a rear-view mirror. Unique, mystifying. Big season now. Write for details of our generous trial offer and sensational money-making plan with special discount prices to agents. No obligation. Address

THE LEE SEE CO., Dept. 386, Kewaunee, Wisconsin

READ

Rhanney sold 108 in less than a week—Ballance made $40 in a day—$200 in a week—Grissinger sold six first fifteen minutes. It's a winner for salesmen.

If You Are A

MAN

worthy of the name and not afraid to work, I'll bet you $50 that you can't work for us 30 days and earn less than $200. Think I'm bluffing? Then answer this ad and show me up. Openings for Managers. The "Wonder Box" sells on sight.

TOM WALKER

DEPT. 43 - - - PITTSBURGH, PA.

LATEST STYLE WRIST WATCH

Direct from Switzerland

This fully guaranteed dainty ladies' watch cannot be manufactured in America for less than $12.00.

Send No Money — Pay on delivery $3.99 plus postage.

"FEDERAL" U.S. Swiss Agents, 561 Broadway, N.Y., Dept. L-85

A Better Lighter

QUICKLITE

Men and women wanted to earn big money selling this excellent pocket lighter. Lights instantly as cap is pulled off. Burns any inflammable liquid. Unequalled advertising novelty. Send 50c for highly polished nickel sample. Dozen $3.00.

Gold plated, in jewel box $1.00

RAPID MFG. CO. 799-T Broadway, N. Y. City.

NO JOKE TO BE DEAF

—Every Deaf Person Knows That

I make myself hear after being deaf for 25 years with these Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They stop head noises and ringing ears. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I got deaf and how I make you hear. Address

Medicated Ear Drum

GEO. P. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.)
88 Hoffman Bldg., 2539 Woodward, Detroit, Mich.

THE GREATEST ALL-FICTION MAGAZINE IN THE COUNTRY IS THE

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

MAKE MONEY IN PHOTOGRAPHY. Learn quickly at home. Spare time or full time. New plan. Nothing like it. No experience necessary. Write for particulars. AMERICAN SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY, Dept. 1455, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS. MEN—WOMEN, 18 UP. $1140 to $3000 year. Steady work. Common education sufficient. Sample coaching and full particulars FREE. Write today sure. FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. L-1, Rochester, N. Y.

HELP WANTED—MALE

MEN, GET FOREST RANGER JOB; $125—$200 MONTH, and home furnished; permanent; hunt, fish, trap. For details, write NORTON, 248 McMann Bldg., Denver, Colo.

MEN—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write AMERICAN FOREIGN DETECTIVE AGENCY, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

EARN $120 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. WE SECURE POSITION FOR YOU AFTER COMPLETION OF 3 MONTHS' HOME STUDY COURSE OR MONEY REFUNDED; EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

MEN WANTING FOREST RANGER JOB; $125—$200 MONTH, nice cabin. Hunt, trap and patrol. Write for list National forests. RAYSON, Dept. B-10, Denver, Colo.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

$6—$18 A DOZEN DECORATING PILLOW TOPS AT HOME. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. PARTICULARS FOR STAMP. TAPESTRY PAINT CO., 128, LAGRANGE, IND.

STORIES WANTED

STORY IDEAS WANTED FOR PHOTOPLAYS, MAGAZINES. BIG DEMAND. ACCEPTED ANY FORM for revision, development and submission to markets. Estab. 1917. Send manuscripts for free criticism. Booklet mailed on request. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO COMPANY, 401 Western & Santa Monica Bldg., Hollywood, Calif.

SONG WRITERS

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE COMPOSE MUSIC. OUR COMPOSER WROTE MANY SONG HITS. MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY, 236 West 55TH ST. (NEAR BROADWAY), DEPT. 109, NEW YORK.

SONGWRITERS—MUSIC PUBLISHERS. EXPERT PROFESSIONAL SERVICE. Particulars free. DIAMOND MUSIC CO., Dept. FMC, 799 Seventh Avenue, New York.

SONG POEMS WANTED: COMPOSING; COPYRIGHTING. COMPLETE SERVICE. SUBMIT POEMS TO WRITERS' SYNDICATE, HANNIBAL, MO.

TOBACCO

TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 812 Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

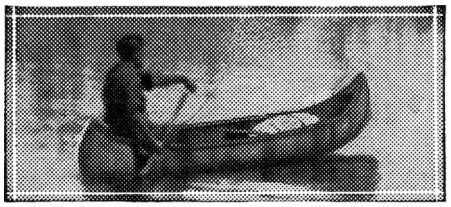
PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. Write for our free Evidence of Invention Blank and Guide Book. "How to Get Your Patent." Send model or sketch of your invention for our Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms Reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 419, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for our Guide Book "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank, sent free. Send model or sketch and description of invention for Inspection & Instructions Free. Terms Reasonable. Prompt Attention. Highest References. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND ADVICE. WATSON E. COLEMAN, REGISTERED PATENT LAWYER, 724 NINTH STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS PROCURED; TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. RICHARD B. OWEN, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 41-J Park Row, New York.



"OLD TOWN CANOES" are durable and strong. They are light in weight and surprisingly easy to handle. Low in price too. $58 up. From dealer or factory.

Free illustrated catalog shows sailing canoes, square stern canoes, dinghies, etc. Write today. OLD TOWN CANOE CO., 726 Middle Street, Old Town, Maine.

"Old Town Canoes"

Accounting
THE CONTROL OF BUSINESS

Accountants command big income. Thousands needed. About 9,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S Many earn $5,000 to $20,000. We train you thoroly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is supervised by Wm. B. Castenholz A. M., C. P. A. assisted by staff of C. P. A.s Low cost—easy terms Write now for valuable 64 page book free.

This Book FREE!

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 676-H, Chicago

PIMPLES

Cleared up—often in 24 hours. To prove you can be rid of Pimples, Blackheads, Acne Eruptions on the face or body, Barbers' Itch, Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin, simply send me your name and address today—no cost—no obligation. **CLEAR-TONE** tried and tested in over 100,000 cases—used like toilet water—is simply magical in prompt results. You can repay the favor by telling your friends; if not, the loss is mine. WRITE TODAY.

E. S. GIVENS, 413 Chemical Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

BUNIONS GONE IN 15 DAYS

I end bunions forever with my new Pedodyne Solvent treatment. Pain stops almost instantly. Actual reduction of the enlarged growth starts so fast that your next pair of shoes can be a size smaller—often two sizes smaller.

PROVE IT FREE—Just send your name and address, no money, and the full treatment guaranteed to bring complete results may be yours to try. No obligations—Address

KAY LABORATORIES

Dept. D-320, 180 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Ill.

GET RID OF YOUR FAT
Free Trial Treatment

sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. I have successfully reduced thousands of persons, without starvation diet or burdensome exercise, often at a rapid rate. **Let me send you proof at my expense.**

DR. R. NEWMAN, Licensed Physician
State of New York, 286 Fifth Ave., N. Y. Desk M

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

192 Pages of the Finest Fiction
Available at any price.

On sale at all news-stands. 25c a copy.

Hit the Trail ... to Joyland!

SLIP away from crowded streets and stifling heat. Spend never-to-be-forgotten hours at the lake, on the beach, in the breeze-cooled country. Short spins. Long trips. Picnics—outings—vacation tours. All yours with the powerful, dependable Harley-Davidson Twin. Upkeep is only a fraction the cost of a car—2¢ per mile for gas, oil, tires and all. Plenty of room in the side-car for a friend and your outfit. Prices as low as $310 f. o. b. factory—on easy Pay-As-You-Ride terms. See your dealer—

Send coupon for Catalog.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
Dept. A. F. Milwaukee, Wis.

The Single—our famous solo mount that travels "80 miles per gallon" and is priced at only $235, complete, f. o. b. factory.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON
Motorcycles

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Far Gold

By ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

Author of "The Roaring Forties," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A SPANISH COIN.

SPROTT GABEREAU was rich because he was contented, contented because he was rich. But, as you shall see, his contentment, priceless beyond rubies, was evanescent as morning mist.

With the sealing fleets of the Southern Ocean he had amassed a tidy fortune—tidy as fortunes go in Nova Scotia—and was able to say, "Thank God, I can afford to pay for my desires."

His home, situated at the end of a long street of silver poplars, was built in the style of Normandy, with high gables, whitewashed walls, massive shutters, and little dormer windows peeking out amid the apple blossoms in the springtime. The venerable house had belonged to sire and grandsire from those brave days when Louisburg was the Dunkirk of America.

There was a mile-long street athwart the town, grass grown and shaded, a street of sylvan solitude, listening ever to the muffled note of breakers. A place of stirring past, of sleeping present, of quaint beauty, of quiet charm—Arichat with its song of the sea.

Captain Gabereau referred to this haven in his native tongue as "un refuge sûr"—a safe refuge. Here Acadian folk had found indeed a sure refuge, from storms of persecution, from storms of the outer ocean.

To step ashore in Arichat was to step back a century in time. A few miles of sea channel had been a wall against the changing years. Nova Scotia, on the mainland, belonged to the modern world. Isle Madame, with its little town, set there like some pearl of price, belonged to the old world and to the long ago.

Sprott Gabereau was born at Arichat fifty years before. The town had always seemed to him like a little bit of heaven—his life had known much of the other extreme. He sprang from a race of Acadian peasants for nigh two centuries racy of the same soil, the kind that put down their roots like the mighty oak. Change was utterly foreign to their nature. At least, this was true until the generation to which the ubiquitous Sprott belonged. His was a sort of vagabondism in the blood.

Speaking of master mariners, we encounter something truly epic when we behold Captain Gabereau fitting out his little schooner at Arichat—for sealing expeditions that were to take him to the farthest seas. The Falklands, South Georgia, the Crozets, Vancouver Island, the Bering Sea, the Japan Grounds, all were alike to him.

Neither law of God nor man could hold him back when there was prospect of large gain. For poaching on the Russian sealing preserve he had done time in the salt mines of Siberia. But his indomitable spirit, which could bluff the Horn in a tiny schooner, was not the kind to quail before the Russian guard. After eleven months in the mines his chain mate died. Tearing off the bonds binding him to the dead man, he began a terrific journey which old sealers still point to as a supreme example of endurance.

Back in Frisco he rejoined his vessel. Dreading a repetition of their skipper's awful experiences, all hands were for putting back. But Sprott was not the kind to traverse two oceans for nothing. Straightway he set out for the forbidden ground, and after chucking the devil under the chin, came back with a priceless cargo of skins, preaching as always from his favorite text, "The bold man seldom gets hurt."

It was all in the day's work for Sprott to watch the Nova Scotian shore go down astern, and sight nothing again until he picked up the high coast of Staten Land in the boisterous regions of the Horn.

Hunting for South Sea seals, he would circumnavigate the globe, in the high south latitudes, spending months on end in lonely, desolate seas, frequenting Antarctic coasts, uncharted, unexplored.

Whether lost in wintry blizzards of the roaring forties, or in the sure refuge of his native isle, always and everywhere, he was self-contained and self-sustained: a calm, steadfast, and enduring man, gracing with Drake and Cook the name of Navigator.

The *South China Herald,* of Hongkong, once referred to Sprott Gabereau as "the most outstanding figure in the seal fisheries of four oceans." With his day's work done, with rovings ahead, little did he think that all this was mere training, as it were, for quest of the treasure at the end of the world.

Gabereau sighed with satisfaction as he listened to the evening benediction sounding from the twin spires on the hill. There was something heartsome in the sight of his high chimney sending up its smoke like incense in the gloaming, and the garden full of mingling, pleasant odors.

For a passer-by the swinging gate opened welcomingly. The stranger, who had landed that afternoon in the mail boat, stood for a moment irresolute, gazing through the mass of bloom at the house beyond. He who was to be the destroyer of the peace of this quiet home did not enter, but stood for a moment to spy out the land, and then, having satisfied a momentary interest, passed on toward the village.

Captain Gabereau heard him pause, and though he could not see, bent to listen as those footsteps rang out with something of strange challenge, conveying a quick, aggressive movement that sounded alien to the leisurely genus of this place.

Night came down quietly over the port. Almost before he knew it, closing hour had come, and Yvonne, tripping brightly along with Paul, her sweetheart. There was the accustomed parting at the gate, whispers, caresses, and fond sighs. Then, after many murmurs, at last the good-by, and with a rush Yvonne came toward the cap-

tain's chair, flinging her arms around him from behind.

"Hey, there, blinding me, so's I can't see your sweetheart, eh?"

The girl danced away, tingling with suppressed excitement. A dark-eyed blonde. Who could mistake such rare distinction. Eyes of night, contrasted by hair of golden flax.

Beside the rough uncouthness of the skipper, she appeared delectable and dainty as some bandbox beauty. There was about her a strange blending of weakness and of strength, a blending as of the clinging vine and the mountain ash, suggestive of a girl that could lean, abjectly helpless, upon a man, and who, upon occasion, could stand entirely on her own.

She came to Gabereau, as to her father, and yet there was a reticence about her, a sort of high-born reserve, that made the rough old sea dog instinctively aware of something better.

"And what's the news to-night, my pretty?"

Yvonne drew back, aglow with expectancy.

Holding her hands behind her, she exclaimed:

"Guess what I've got here, Old Snookums?"

"Laces?"

"No."

"Ribbons?"

"No. You'd never, never guess."

"All right, I give it up, then. Let's see?"

The girl disclosed her hand, and there in the open palm lay a Spanish gold coin.

The eyes of Sprott Gabereau narrowed sharply. There was a quick intake of the breath.

"Where did you get that, girly?" asked Gabereau.

"From a dark-looking man with a pointed beard, who came into the store to-night to buy supplies."

The calm and steadfast mariner, who could gaze imperturbable at a hurricane, was visibly moved. Taking the coin from the girl's outstretched palm, he gazed rapturously upon its gleam of gold, while from within he felt the surging of long dormant passion.

In that moment Sprott Gabereau was suddenly poor, because he was discontented; he was discontented because he was poor.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK CASE.

GABEREAU did not sleep soundly. After he had kissed Yvonne good night, there were strange presentiments that came to ward off slumber.

Yvonne, his adopted daughter, knew nothing of her kith or kin. As a baby girl she had been rescued from an abandoned lifeboat in those lonely and desolate seas somewhere below the fifties south. Captain Gabereau, in his sealing schooner, rounding the Horn from the Bering Sea, had overhauled a bobbing craft in which he found a dead mother, and child still living.

Along with the rescued babe, he had taken from the lifeboat a black chart case, of japanned metal, which bore a crown stamped upon its upper face. This crown was instantaneously recognized as the mark that Andrea Fererra, a Spanish swordsmith, had once graven upon Scottish broadswords of peculiar excellence.

The meaning of that embossed Fererra crown put Gabereau into a fever of excitement. Here was a clew from him who had raped the richest cathedral treasures of the south. The skipper and Dirk Dugas, his mate, sworn to secrecy, opened the case together. The cover had rusted on with sea water, and required prodigious tusseling back and forth before the top finally loosened and came away.

At the sudden opening there tumbled out a lone Spanish gold coin, and another chart case hermetically sealed together with a parchment communication. Skipper and mate bent over and examined the coin, as they gazed upon its yellow gleam, and answering light came into their own hard faces. This doubloon was a rare appetizer.

The parchment had been rolled like a chart, and tied with a silk string. At first touch the rotten string burst open. Both were greatly surprised as they unrolled the parchment. The sheet was so large that one

naturally inferred a long communication, giving all instructions, with perhaps some personal expressions of the pirate.

Instead of drawn out detail, the whole message was written in india ink with a quill pen, in pithy conciseness. It read:

> This inner chart case, bearing with it a curse, was sealed with the sign of the cross by a dead hand. If any but the rightful one shall break this seal, ruin and misery shall be his portion.
>
> (Signed) ANDREA FERERRA.

Under the name was the famous seal of the Spanish crown.

Gabereau was a stolid, unimaginative person, but holding that inner chart case, in that moment, a cold, clammy fear took hold of him, as though a dead hand of the long ago was raised in warning.

Greatly to the disgust of Mate Dugas, the skipper, in respect for this presentiment, refused for the time being to break the seal.

Thus had begun that chapter of calamities which from the coming of the black case dogged the sealing schooner like fell death. Driving before the westerlies, they had crashed in fog upon a hidden berg, and found themselves embayed completely in the ice. Limping out of that death trap, they were finally towed into Puntas Arenas by a Chilean cruiser.

In that town at the end of the world, where it never does to inquire into one's past, Gabereau entered upon a chapter of murder and intrigue, all centering around his unopened clew to the Fererra treasure.

Bold as a lion, he held his own against the worse, and finally, in spite of assassins and cutthroats, effected his repairs, and got away again to sea. But before he was out of the Straits of Magellan, Dugas had inflamed the crew to mutiny, so reluctant were all hands to turn their back upon the hoped-for treasure.

Hitting fast and hard, the masterful skipper had stifled the first flames of revolt; then, and as an awful warning, he had placed the recalcitrant mate in an open boat and left him bobbing about helplessly without oars on trackless ocean.

"That 'll teach ye to start yer shines aboard my vessel," was the captain's parting shot.

To which the raging mate replied: "I'll get you, Sprott Gabereau! I'll get you yet, even if I have to come up from the cellar o' hell."

Gabereau's answer was a taunting laugh, while his vessel held to her homing course.

Many times, on that northward passage, he had fondly fingered the mysterious chart case, promising himself that once ashore he would brave the curse and break the seal. Then, with a new vessel and a trusty crew, he would sail away again and claim that vast pirate hoard, greater even than that of Captain Kidd, for was not Fererra in his day reputed the richest man in the Americas?

Gabereau remembered having heard his grandsire tell across the fire: "Why, the jewels alone, packed in nineteen boxes, were worth five hundred and seventeen thousand pounds. But that isn't half of it. There are precious stones, and specie, and silver bullion, and gold, and ivory, the finest possessions of some of the grandest cathedrals of South America."

But always, after these glowing pictures, would come that cold and clammy dread, so that the rest of the voyage for Gabereau was an amazing mixture of exaltation and depression.

There was nothing psychical or metaphysical in the make of this sealing skipper. The appeal to reason with him had always taken the form of "a kick in the slats" or "a sock in the jaw." Fists and feet were the only persuaders with which he was acquainted. Argument was something which his forthright, downright nature could not abide. But in spite of a breastplate of triple armor, from the moment that he came by this grim possession he found himself continually the prey of fear and dread.

"This thing will do ye no good; throw it overboard," one voice would adjure. Then another voice would caution: "Hold fast! Hold fast! Do not let this secret go!"

So, he who was bold as a lion and utterly fearless began to find in the unseen a dread that he had never known in the fury

of the Horn. But in spite of doubts and fears, the avarice of the man, deepest instinct of his nature, saw to it that he kept this mysterious case.

On Christmas Eve, in sight of the lights of home, while her skipper was filled with dreams of far treasure, the Santa Anna driving before it with everything lugged on, crashed into a sunken derelict and foundered by the head before a single boat could be manned.

Over the reefs of Petit de Grat, where the North Atlantic retched and thundered, on a piece of broken wreckage, Sprott Gabereau had been swept into a sandy cove, as into a cradle of sheltering love. With him out of the angry sea he had brought the babe Yvonne and the chart case, the clew to the forbidden treasure.

CHAPTER III.

DISTURBING MEMORIES.

BACK in Arichat, when Gabereau confessed his perplexity to M. le Curé, there had been nothing equivocal in that good man's advice. "Throw it away; nothing good will ever come of it."

Conscience told Gabereau that he should heed this word, but still he hesitated, for conscience was never strong in his matter-of-fact make-up.

"Nay, I care not what M. le Curé says, that black case belongs to Yvonne. I will keep it for her."

With this he had hidden the source of perplexity out of sight and out of remembrance, in a secret drawer of an old camphorwood sea chest. Perhaps it would not have come to his mind to-night but for the sight of that gold coin which Yvonne had thrust under his eyes. This glimpse had awakened a past, not dead, merely slumbering.

To think of Yvonne was to think of gold. She carried with her the lure of fortune. He had but to glimpse the doubloon held out in her pretty hand, and the call of treasure was sounding in his veins. He told himself that he could be content with what he had, but he could not be content when he thought of her, a daughter of Old France ordained for purple and fine linen.

The simple folk of Arichat could do quite well with the product of their carding and their spinning, but Yvonne was made for something better.

At the pretext of thinking only of the girl, Gabereau got out of bed, and, taking up the golden coin from the mantel, he stood in the moonlight gazing upon its yellow sheen.

Visions of wealth began to crowd upon him as he stood there in the mystic shadows, that room became for him indeed a place for enkindling vision.

He looked out of the window at plowed fields, at snake fences, at forest clearings, everywhere evidences of incessant labor. The toil of generations had claimed this land in the beginning, and the toil of generations had been ceaselessly required to hold it for a pittance.

"No one ever got rich on the soil in Arichat," complained Gabereau bitterly.

His thought went to sire and grandsire, who had spent their lives for those plowed fields, and who had finally gone to the churchyard leaving naught but the eternal challenge of the soil.

"Who ever got rich at the farming? Who ever got rich at the fishing? Aye, it's a poor, poor country, and what's more, they are all poor, poor people," said Sprott. "And what have I got to show for the years of toil put into this hillside? Nothing more than my fathers. They were fools, but I was a bigger fool, for I knew better."

Gazing fondly at the doubloon, there came to him a flood of new desires. With the touch of gold he was suddenly conscious of those unnumbered good things which Arichat, a quaint, impoverished seaport, could never offer.

As he was placing the coin back again upon the mantel, his eye caught a text hanging above, a text which had hung in the house ever since the first Gabereau carved out the joists of their dwelling from the forest primeval:

SUCCESS TO THE FISHERIES
AND
SPEED THE PLOW

The sight of this text in his present mood threw Sprott Gabereau into a sudden fury;

it seemed to hang there for the express purpose of flaunting him.

Ripping down the old frame from above the mantel, he flung it out of the window with an oath. Then, returning to his bed, tried to sleep, but somehow rest and composure would not come.

At length, moved by curiosity, he arose, lifted the heavy cover of the old sea chest, and there in its secret drawer was the case of japanned metal just as it had appeared on that morning when he took it from the dead grasp of Yvonne's mother.

Gabereau was not given to nervous apprehension, but a shiver ran through him as his hand closed upon the cold metal. At that same moment afar in the night there came a long-drawn cry. He started ominously.

" God be with us, what's that?" Then, as the cry sounded again, he recovered his composure. " Only a heron flying low over the marshes. I seem to be getting into a bad state. The trouble is, every little thing seems to have an unhallowed meaning when one gets ahold of this accursed case."

Like one who steeled himself for some desperate deed, Gabereau advanced to strike a light; the moon was waning, and it was growing dark. While he was still fumbling for a match there came an unmistakable footfall on the gravel pathway.

Once again high-tensed nerves went taut, while his heart seemed to sound against his very eardrums.

But in spite of apprehension, his presence of mind did not forsake him. Placing the black case back in its secret drawer, he went stealthily down the stairs and stole out into the night.

He was prepared to meet the most desperate assault, as he issued forth, but was not prepared to hear the voice of Yvonne from her dormer window whispering love messages to Paul.

He came up to his bedroom again, mumbling great oaths that had not done service since his days in the sealing fleet.

" God only knows what I'm comin' to. A pretty kettle o' fish it is when a man can't get out o' his own honest bed without jumping at every slightest whisper. Sure the heron's cry was as good as a murder, an' them two sweethearts, God bless 'em, were worse than a mutiny."

Taking out a bottle of rum, he helped himself to a stout jorum, and then returned to his bed. But something would not let him sleep—perhaps it was the rum, perhaps it was the pictures awakened by the gold coin, perhaps it was the fever of excitement into which he had thrown himself by withdrawing the black case.

At all events, he fell to thinking on the fact that he had never been able to lay his hand upon that accursed case without alarming sensations within. It had been so twenty years before; it was so to-night. As if the spirit of the dead was still on sentinel duty there to guard momentous secrets.

The more Gabereau thought about it, the more resentful he got of his own fears. The thoughts of the gold coin and the awakening fires of avarice were causing him to put his nervous apprehensions to one side, and to view the whole thing calmly and dispassionately, when the chimes of the cathedral began to sound for midnight

Gabereau's ears were strained for the last stroke, when somewhere down the village street he caught the same nervous, apprehensive footsteps that had awakened his interest early in the evening.

Something told him that the swift walking stranger was coming to his own house, and in the next instant, sure enough, the gate opened, and there was the crunch of gravel on the garden pathway.

Before the untimely arrival had time to knock, Gabereau threw up his window, calling:

" Hi, what d'ye want down there?"

" To see Captain Gabereau."

" A pretty time o' night for a stranger to be making calls. Go on, I'll see ye tomorrow."

" No, I can't wait; it's got to be tonight."

" And what's yer errand?"

" You must come down to find that out."

" But what if I won't? No decent folk ever come calling at Arichat at this ungodly hour."

" I can't hold myself to customs in the

back o' beyond," said the stranger dryly. "You've traveled around too much in your day, captain, to sit on ceremony. I've got something important, that ought to be enough."

"All right; wait a minute, and I'll be there," growled the captain.

A moment later he descended the stairs, fastening his trousers as he came.

Lighting the lamp in the hallway, the great iron bolt was thrown back, the door flung open, and the captain stood there on the threshold, peering out into impenetrable gloom. While he stood thus, against all expectation, a strong arm suddenly shot out of the darkness and sent him reeling down the doorstep onto the pathway below. In a twinkling the stranger, who had been standing without, had jumped inside and banged and bolted the door in the captain's face.

CHAPTER IV.

BARRED OUT.

AT first Gabereau was too dazed to take in what had happened. As he picked himself up, it dawned upon him that his house had been entered by some unknown and dangerous stranger; that he himself was virtually a prisoner outside his own door.

At thought of the black case within he was filled with sudden panic. As long as he held that secret in safety its spell remained quiescent, but now that it might be snatched away horror seized hold upon him.

That black case never seemed so desirable as now, just beyond his grasp. With a bellow of rage he rushed against the door, crashing into it with might and main. But the stout oak and the heavy bolt were made to withstand just such assault, and his frantic efforts were in vain.

In that moment of hesitating impotence, to add to his agony there came a scream from Yvonne's window, which spluttered out as though some one had just bound and gagged her.

Turning from the impassable door, Gabereau next essayed the windows, but every one was closed with a heavy shutter secured from within. The lower floor of his home was indeed in fit condition to stand siege, like some feudal stronghold. It was the custom of the sealing skippers, after a long and successful voyage, to often bring much wealth into the house for safe keeping, hence all entrances were doubly fortified.

Cursing the defenses which so effectively barred him out of his own domain, he went from shutter to shutter, pounding and tearing until his hands were in a frightful state with torn finger nails and bleeding knuckles.

The mere thought of losing that black case plunged him into such frantic fear that the power of calm reasoning seemed to have utterly forsaken him, with the result that he kept up his futile attacks on doors and windows until nigh exhausted.

Finally withdrawing for a moment, panting and spent, a faint glimmering of reason began to assert itself.

"This thing is making a fool of me," he muttered. "I must be steady."

With a calmer consideration came the idea of forcing an entrance by one of the upper windows. No sooner was the idea in mind than he was off to the barn. He was back in a jiffy, and was just placing the ladder against Yvonne's open window, when he heard a stealthy footstep behind him on the gravel.

Whirling about, the skipper found himself face to face with a black-looking creature, who on first sight appeared almost gigantic. There in the moonlight, by his copper-colored skin, painted face, black hair close upon the forehead, brilliant eyes, and massive brawn, Gabereau recognized him as a Yhagan Indian, an Antarctic Highlander, from the region of Cape Horn.

He was almost bare to the cold night winds, but that autumn air was a mere summer kiss to one accustomed to pass shelterless and naked in a land of fierce and freezing storms.

The captain was a six-foot heavyweight, a giant among his own race, but this Yhagan was fully a head taller, with a physical development like one of the sons of Anak. His countenance at first seemed stupid, but

on closer inspection Gabereau caught a gleam of low cunning that flashed through the dull mask. The face, darker than that of a Canadian Indian, was painted and bedaubed, a broad line of red alternating with a stripe of black.

He spoke in a heavy, deep voice, with guttural tones.

"Yo waitee 'ere, miser."

Gabereau's answer was to stoop down and hurl a heavy rock at the savage's head, but for all his great size he was agile as a panther. Ducking, so that the missile just glanced across his shoulder, he sprang upon the retreating skipper, who fought furiously. But the odds were altogether too great.

"Yo waitee 'ere, miser. Yo no movee, see?"

With this injunction, he proceeded to tie Gabereau securely hand and foot against the ladder, splaying his arms and legs, and chuckling to himself, with a merry, contagious laugh, at the trick which he was playing upon the white man.

When at last the skipper was effectively secured, the Yhagan vanished as mysteriously as he had come, leaving the spread-eagled skipper to his own devices. For some time he struggled to break the thongs, but the binding was too secure and finally he gave it up as hopeless.

Later there came footsteps, as if some one departing through the back entry, hushed comings and goings, and then once more the abandoned silence of the outer darkness.

All through that awful night Gabereau remained there a prisoner, lashed to a ladder outside his own home. His physical discomfiture was excruciating. As the hours dragged on, the cruel torture of the thongs increased, but this was nothing to the mental agony which he endured as he told himself that every hour his enemy would be getting farther and farther away with the black chart case with its promise of wealth untold.

Again and again he lamented that he had not long before opened up the secret of the black case.

"It's the great, grand fool I was," he told himself. "Ye never appreciate what ye have till some one comes to snatch it from ye."

Just after dawn his nephew, Paul, came up to do some early chores around the place. Great was his consternation to find this unexpected prisoner.

When Paul cast off the thongs the skipper lost no time in doubling round to the rear, where, as he expected, the door was still standing open.

Not waiting to give any explanation to his astounded nephew, the skipper rushed straight into the house.

"Whew! They sure have made one frightful hurrah's nest out of this place," he muttered.

All the lower rooms were in disorder, but for some mysterious reason his own bedroom appeared undisturbed.

With feverish apprehension Gabereau went straight to the secret drawer, which the Chinese craftsman had so cunningly concealed. He hardly dared to open it. Holding his breath, in dread lest the worst should have happened, he pulled it out, and there, against all expectation, he found the inner case, safe as ever. He was just starting to breathe a sigh of relief, when Paul suddenly rushed in, his strong face tensed with horror.

Just then at peace with the world, Gabereau beamed upon him.

"Well, what's up, young feller?"

"My God, Uncle Sprott, Yvonne is gone!"

CHAPTER V.

BEST BELOVED.

IN that soul-revealing moment, Sprott Gabereau knew that the black chart case, this mysterious possession, had indeed become more precious to him than his little Yvonne. As long as he retained the clew to the Fererra treasure nothing mattered. He received the news of the girl's disappearance with philosophic calm. But Paul, on the other hand, was almost beside himself in frantic fear.

"We must give a general alarm, Uncle Sprott, and get the whole town out in search of her."

"We'll do no such thing."

"But we can't merely trust to ourselves."

"We must trust to ourselves. Not a word of this can be noised about the village."

"Why?" Paul was aghast.

"Because there are matters at stake in this affair, Paul, far beyond your ken."

"I don't understand. Nothing in the world can be more important to me than my Yvonne, if we do not know where she is, everything should be put to one side until we find her."

"Not so fast, not so fast, my lad. Your love has made you too impetuous. I shall not leave a stone unturned in helping to find her. But the matter must be kept strictly between ourselves. I can't tell you just what is behind this thing. It will suffice to let you know that there are matters at stake in this affair far beyond the personal considerations of you or me, or any one else."

"But let us be going, then. While we wait here, nobody knows where they have taken my sweetheart."

"They can't snatch her off Isle Madame without knowing it. So just keep calm, and make haste slowly."

"What course would you suggest?"

"Simple enough; whoever they are, if they try to get away with her, they must go either by the mail boat, or aboard one of them coasters lying in the harbor. We'll take a dory first, and go out and see that they ain't aboard any o' them vessels in the stream."

"All right then, hurry, hurry," admonished Paul, as he started to lead the way.

But Gabereau still hung back, looking for a place in which to hide the secret case, dreading lest some one might come and rob him, during his absence.

While he was still temporizing, there came a ripple of bell-like laughter from the garden, and in another moment, Yvonne herself burst in upon them, fully dressed, and flushed from a walk in the brisk morning air, looking none the worse for her misadventure of the previous night.

At the girl's unexpected appearance, Paul rushed forward, clasping her in his arms, smothering her with caresses, fondling her wavy, golden hair, reveling in the flashes of deep love which her eyes gave back to him.

"Oh, darling, darling, I was nearly crazy when I found that you were gone. I can't tell you how glad I am that you've come back."

"I couldn't leave my own dear Paul," she answered simply, pledging her words with a rapturous kiss.

With a love that believed and trusted, Paul had no doubts, no questions.

But his uncle was different. As soon as the lovers had broken away, he let out a snort of rage, exclaiming:

"That's nice actions. Are ye a man, Paul Gabereau, or are ye just a softie, and a village bumpkin?"

Paul turned upon his accuser in amazement, while he continued: "Why don't ye ask her where she's been?"

"I believe in her always."

"Umph. It's more than I do. Never seen the woman yet I'd trust to midnight prowlings. This thing looks mighty funny."

"Well, I'd believe in my little Yvonne, whatever happened," said Paul, with his arm around her, his every attitude expressive of completest trust and faith.

Disgusted by his nephew's attitude, and still harboring doubts, Gabereau demanded of the girl point-blank:

"Where were you, anyway?"

Looking him squarely in the eye, she answered: "I can't tell you, Uncle Sprott."

"Can't tell me," thundered the other.

"No."

"Well, things are coming to a pretty pass when a young lass can go out in the middle of the night with robbers who break into my house, and then come back in the morning, and bleat out: 'I can't tell you.' Where were you anyway, and who was it that you went off with?"

This time the girl merely shook her head, while the old skipper swore furiously at his own inability to extract from her any slightest clew.

But the storm that came between them was of short duration, like a hard squall quickly past.

Detecting the stern look softening on the grim, hard face, Yvonne suddenly and impulsively threw herself upon him, exclaiming:

"Oh, you dear old Snookums, what made you say such dreadful things?"

As the skipper bowed over the black chart case, his face suddenly seemed to grow old and gray. With quick sympathy, Yvonne noticed it.

"I wasn't the only one that went away," she whispered.

While his eyes still questioned, she continued:

"You know, if you ever love anything better than me, you old Snookums, your little Yvonne may be gone for keeps."

CHAPTER VI.

UNWELCOME STRANGER.

FROM the loiterers around the village store, Gabereau heard rumors next day that did much to disturb his peace of mind. A light had appeared in the haunted house, the night before, and suspicious characters had been seen going thither, hiding their movements under cover of darkness.

The description of a tall, black-looking fellow, with a pointed beard, at once made Gabereau think of Dirk Dugas, his treacherous mate. At the very thought of Dugas, a baleful shadow seemed to pass over the peaceful harbor, lying there in sunshine, blue as an angel's eye.

Puntas Arenas, and hell holes on the other side of the world might give asylum to this villain, but what was he doing breaking in upon the pure tranquillity of Isle Madame? After so many years, why this intrusion? Why couldn't he stay in his own place? Why couldn't he keep to his own pack?

The more Gabereau thought about it, the more enraged he became at the intrusion. He had sought out Arichat, as a sanctuary, as a place inviolate. He had come back here above all because of Yvonne, because of her he had settled down to the peace of this Acadian village. Peace, he told himself, was all he wanted, but what peace could remain if this knave had found him out?

From Baptiste LeBlanc, former cook of his sealing schooner, he heard a confirmation of that which he already feared.

Baptiste joined him on the road home, with the exclamation:

"Hey, cappen, who d'ye s'pose I met las' night."

"Search me."

"Well, I'll bet ye couldn't guess if I gave a thousand chances. Dirk Dugas is back again."

"How do you know?" Gabereau's voice sounded with a sharp, irascible note.

"Because I seen him with me own eyes.

"Where?" In spite of his usual self-control, a feverish agitation had taken hold of Gabereau. Baptiste looked at him, amazed.

"I met him comin' down Main Street, saw him fair and square right under the light. Even before we met I was thinkin' about him, perhaps because I heard his footsteps, them quick, sly, stealthy steps that always seems like Dugas.

"It was about a half hour after midnight, I'd been havin' a few drinks with some o' the boys on one o' them rum runners from Saint Pierre, an' if it hadn't a bin fer seein' him fair and square under the light, I would 'ave thought that it was just the booze that was makin' me imagine things.

"First, I heard them footsteps that always made me feel creepy like, and next thing, with his slouch hat over his eyes, an' his head down, Dugas goes by me, doin' his best to keep from bein' recognized. But there's one ugly looking cuss that ye can't do no mistakin' of, whether ye meet him on the Barbary coast, or here right under the shadow of Our Lady."

"What makes ye so sure?" continued the captain, still hoping against hope that Baptiste's encounter had been the hallucination of a troubled brain.

In the next instant he realized that this rumor was true beyond a peradventure.

From under his coat Baptiste drew forth the outer chart case.

"I picked this thing up half way toward your place. I knowed at once that it was

the same black case that we'd taken off that lifeboat, down in the fifties south, and I knowed then that I wasn't dreamin' when I seen him go sneakin' by me, in the shadow, with his hat pulled over his eyes."

Gabereau saw in a flash what had caused the intruder of the night before to ransack the lower part of the house, and then to leave his own room untouched. He had evidently mistaken the outer case for the object of his search, and had made off with it at once. Later, on the road, in his anxiety, he had opened the case to find that he had unwittingly been fooled, and in disgust had thrown the false clew into the gutter.

Gabereau adjured Baptiste to keep to himself what he knew about this matter.

"It will only make trouble in the town, so don't say a word about it," was his parting shot.

"Don't worry, cappen, I won't say a word," he replied.

But this rare titbit was too good a piece of village gossip not to be shared with at least two or three boon companions, with the result that the whole town was soon agog with fabulous tales of the black case, of hints at far-off treasure, and of dread yarns pertaining to Dirk Dugas, accounted as dead, now ushered so strangely into their midst.

A still greater surprise was waiting for Sprott Gabereau, when he returned to his own home.

He had once said, "I never know what to expect next, when I'm up against Dirk Dugas."

As though to bear out this saying, there was the sleek and oily fellow waiting for him in his own parlor, as bland and calm as though his errand were the most commonplace occurrence.

Gabereau was thankful that Yvonne was out, so that he could express himself freely.

"What the hell are ye doin' here?"

"Ah, good morning, Captain Gabereau. You're getting gray, I see, like all the rest of us. But alas, you are no more polite than you used to be."

"Polite? You'll find out from the toe o' my boot how polite I am. This is a white man's home ye're in now, no place here for dirty greasers. Why the devil can't you stay where you belong?"

"I belong anywhere that's on the trail of pleasure, captain. I've been searching for the Fererra fortune all the way from Nome to Diego Ramirez. There isn't a place on the North Pacific, or the South Pacific, where old Fererra laid his keel, that I haven't covered. Men who are following after a quest for years, my captain, are not turned aside easily, as you may imagine."

"Well, what d'ye want to come dogging me for? What have I got to do with ye an' yer cursed treasure?"

"Ye know that, captain, without asking."

"And what do ye want of me now?"

"The same thing we wanted from you twenty years ago, at Puntas Arenas."

"But ye didn't get it at Puntas Arenas, and what's more, ye won't get it in Arichat."

"That remains to be seen." The sleek, oily tone changed to sharp inciseness.

"Are ye comin' up here to threaten me?"

"No, we're up here to do something more than threaten. You got away the last time with the case and your life. This time, you'll give up one or the other, perhaps both."

There was something of unexpected decisive in the speaker's voice.

"You are talking pretty cocky, ain't ye, Dirk Dugas?"

"Aye, an' I got a reason to."

"How's that?"

"'Cause, this time, I ain't here fer myself. You and me both know, skipper, that there is a curse on the wrong man, if he breaks that seal."

"And who's the right one, pray?"

"Don Juan Fererra, my captain, when we next sail to find this treasure."

"An' who might he be?"

"The rightful heir of all this fortune."

"Ye mean, ye hopes he is, but I'll tell ye, the heir to this fortune is the guy who holds its secret."

"Well, we'll have that secret, don't you fret, Sprott Gabereau. Our schooner's fittin' out over there on the mainland in

Canso, we're supposed to be bound fer the sealin' grounds of the Southern Ocean, but everybody knows our real destination is the Island where old Fererra hid his treasure, and when we sail we're taking that there black chart case with us, as sealed orders."

"You are, eh?"

"Yea, because it's ours, by right."

"Well, it's mine by might," thundered the skipper, rising in sudden fury, "and ye get out of this house, ye dirty low-down crawling snake, get out o' here, and don't let me ever see yer face around again, fer if I do, I'll turn yer head backward so far it 'll never look for'ard."

Recognizing the ring of the man-master in that well-remembered voice, the erstwhile mate made haste to go, while Gabereau sped the parting guest with a rousing lift from the toe of a heavy brogan.

CHAPTER VII.

FERERRA'S TREASURE.

EVER since she had brought the gold coin home that night, Yvonne had been fired by the excitement of the village. Paul, of less ebullient nature, answered her bubblings over with exclamations of distrust. It was Yvonne's own idea to take her doubting lover up to hear the truth from M. le Curé. She felt sure that he at least would be able to give them something beyond the mere chaff and winnowings of gossip.

They found the good priest, after supper, seated in the rectory garden, gazing with reflective eye on a sunset sea that fringed the peace of their blessed isle. His face lighted up as he saw them enter the rectory gate. With grave dignity, he bade them welcome, motioning them into a seat, beneath the trees.

"Well, what is it to-night, my children?"

"We have come, father, to ask you to tell us about the Fererra treasure."

"You've got the fever, eh?"

"No. We just wanted to hear about it."

"Well, I hope it will never be more than that, my dears."

"Why, father?"

"It is a very fetching story, but at the same time, very dangerous for the peace of our parish."

After lighting his pipe, and stretching his feet out on the sea before him, M. le Curé took up the tale.

"You've both heard of the haunted house?"

"Oh, yes, back of the town, on top of the hill."

"Well, that place once belonged to a man named Andrea Fererra, a descendant of the famous Spanish swordsmith of the same name. Over a hundred years ago, this young fellow arrived in Arichat, apprenticed to one of the Jersey Companies. He remained here as a clerk for five years. Then, tiring of the humdrum life of the fishery stores, he finally broke away, and went to sea, where his decision of character quickly advanced him to the position of master.

"During the Revolutionary War of the thirteen colonies, with letters of marque from the British government, he went forth to raid American shipping. His career as a privateer was tremendously remunerative.

"With the signing of the peace, he was still wedded to the life of the freebooter. As a man of sagacity and judgment, he was not the kind to run amuck against the Great Powers, so, with that discretion which always marked him, he transferred his operations from the North Atlantic to the South Pacific.

"Making his base on Desolation Island, he preyed successfully upon Spanish shipping for a score of years.

"From the time he sailed away from Arichat as a privateer, his home town knew him no more, until he came back incredibly wealthy and famous.

"Many rumors were current as to how he acquired his fabulous wealth. There is no doubt that a large part of it came from raping the cathedral treasures of South America, as no reverence for man nor God restrained his predatory expeditions.

"During his years of absence from here, he had assumed terrible proportions as a bloodthirsty cutthroat and brigand. Great was the surprise of his fellow-townsmen, when they beheld the retired pirate

coming ashore with all the quiet, ascetic dignity of some old justice of the peace. Possessed of the courtly reticence of a Spanish don, the very restraint of the man commanded respect from those who had been loudest in denunciation.

" Cutting off entirely from past associations, Fererra set out to enjoy his ill-gotten gains. In his day, he was reputed to be the richest man in British America. With the feudal instinct in his blood, he started to build up a manorial estate on the finest situation in Isle Madame.

" He brought back here with him a wife, whom he had married at Valparaiso. They had four boys born of their union; to them the elder Fererra looked with pride as the future scions of a great house. A soaring ambition burning in his soul, backed up with his fabulous riches, made it appear as though all things were possible.

" But there was a breakdown somewhere in his pompous schemings. Perhaps it was merely the caprice of chance. Perhaps it was because wealth, which comes with evil, brings evil. At all events, the retired pirate never got much pleasure out of all his gains.

" Morgan, the famous buccaneer of the Spanish Main, after an amazingly remunerative career, was able to wash his face, to become a vestryman in the Church of England, a governor of Jamaica, and finally, in the fullness of time, was knighted by his sovereign.

" Andrea Fererra was wont to meditate on the career of friend Morgan, which began sulphurously and ended with the odor of sanctity. A career like this was exactly to his own taste, but the hand of fate was against him.

" He was always more or less ostracized by the upright people of our parish. As worthy servants of the soil, they were not easily led away from an appreciation of clear and honest values. And so the man of riches dwelt apart, more lonely and isolated ashore in his sumptuous home, than he had ever been afloat on his pirate craft.

" Sensitive, proud, high-spirited, he was stung to the quick by the social stigma which rested on him. This was his first disappointment. A still more bitter pill awaited him as his sons came to manhood, each striving to outdo the other in lechery and debauchery. The first son ran away with a chambermaid, the second flaunted the parish with a brazen strumpet, and the other two got so low that no amount of their father's money could serve as whitewash.

" Finally, in utter shame and heartsickness, the old pirate ordered his vessel, the Carmencita, to be made ready for sea. Some of the good people of the community allowed that his majesty's cruisers should be warned of this sinister preparation. But the mayor expressed the general opinion when he said:

" ' Let him go. God knows, it's the easiest and safest way of ridding the parish of his unwholesome brood.'

" The last incident before he sailed did much to soften the hearts of the people.

" On the day prior to embarkation, large cases filled with jewels and specie, were carried down and stowed in the hold of the Carmencita. At this unexpected occurrence, the two worthless sons, who still remained, suddenly showed a spark of interest in their sire, and both alike came down to the vessel to plead for another chance.

" Andrea Fererra listened to their pleadings with a supercilious smile on his don-like face. He heard them through to the end, then, without a word, went into his cabin and came out again with a handful of gold coins.

" At sight of this, the faces of the sons brightened. But their hopes soon faded, for in the next instant, the father pitched the handful of precious coins over the taffrail and watched them sink into the sea.

" ' What a thing to do!' both sons exclaimed, aghast.

" Ignoring their shocked manner, Fererra held out his empty hand.

" ' Where is the money I had?'

" ' It is gone.'

" ' You threw it away like a fool.'

" ' Aye, my sons, and that's the way you have done with your opportunity.'

" ' But just give us one more chance, father. Just one more chance,' they plead.

" ' No, no, never again will I be respon-

sible for such miserable and unworthy curs. The worst of my scoundrels and cutthroats afloat was the soul of honor compared to such as you. Not one more penny of the wealth will Andrea Fererra pass on. At least, not unless you can pay the price. If you ever again get your hands on this gold of mine, it will cost you as much to find it, as it did for your father to gain it.'

"That was the old pirate's last word. Next day the Carmencita weighed anchor and sailed out through the Western Passage."

When M. le Curé had finished his story, Paul still sat there gazing steadfast and unmoved at the quiet night coming up out of the sea; for him it was merely a story. But not so for Yvonne. For her, somewhere beyond the rim of that mysterious skyline, fancy was already beckoning.

"My, I wish that I were a boy," she sighed, half aloud, half to herself.

"Why in the world should you wish for such an unnatural thing as that?" inquired M. le Curé.

"Because, then, I could go after the treasure," she said in an awed whisper.

"Tut, tut, you shouldn't even mention such a thing, my dear," chided the priest. Notwithstanding the chiding, Yvonne went home to dream of just such quests.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

THE house of Andrea Fererra, called "Domraney," was situated a short distance outside of the town on a lonely stretch of road leading out to the back of the parish.

The house itself was built on a windy promontory overlooking the harbor and the outer sea. Time was when gardens smiled inside the great stone gates, when the lawns and grounds were kept with scrupulous care. But generations of disuse had given to the place an atmosphere of abandoned wretchedness.

The gates were broken down. The wooden picket fence had long since rotted. Grass and shrubs grew over the driveway, while the forest itself was slowly advancing, closing in again on what had once been a glorious landscape of lawns and gardens.

Children coming home from school used to commit themselves to acts of frightful hardihood by pausing to peek around the stone gate posts, but a scream of excitement from some one always served to send the whole pack at full cry down the hill.

The children were not the only ones that held a horror of this place. Their elders and betters, who had to pass there on windy, darksome nights, felt a sudden tightening of the breath which did not relax again until they were well along the Marsh Road.

Some were inclined to speak lightly of this, as an idle superstition. It was easy enough to ridicule unknown horrors in the safety of the town, but out on the lonely road after dark, listening to the thunder of a northern sea, it was quite another story.

Domraney had become a dead hand in a living present. Behind the town of Arichat it was a sepulchre for melancholy memories.

No blithesome smoke was ever seen curling from its chimneys, no ray of sunlight was ever permitted to steal through its fast closed shutters.

Baptiste LeBlanc, who had a forge down the Marsh Road, used to tell of hearing wailing voices from the place in the dead of night. Once, those cries had sounded so human that the hardy smith, armed with his heavy sledge, had approached as far as the outer gateway. Then, something in the spirit of the forest answering back to the haunted house caused him to drop his sledge and flee for dear life.

Telling about it afterward by the glow of his own forge, Baptiste declared:

"Christ's cross be o'er me, I seen old Andrea Fererra himself. 'Twas him and no other walkin' up and down in front o' the drive, a wringin' his hands, and wailing like some soul in purgatory."

"Why didn't ye take a swipe at him, Baptiste, wi' yer sledge?" inquired one of the scornful.

"Go on try it yerself," chided the smith, safe in his reputation as bravest of the brave.

Had it not been for the fabulous wealth of the old Arichat pirate, the haunted house would doubtless have been allowed to lapse into oblivion. But such is the resuscitative power of treasure, that the ghost of Andrea Fererra renewed its youth with each succeeding generation.

Mothers told stories to the little ones about him, always with the warning:

"If you aren't good children, Andrea Fererra 'll get you."

In Sunday sermons, in the church of Our Lady, M. le Curé used to point to the deserted house as a horrible example of that which was the root of all evil.

But in spite of the warnings of loving mothers, in spite of exhortations of the man of God, there were those in the parish whose minds were ever returning to the fascinating shadow of Andrea Fererra as it hovered over the peace of that Acadian town.

There were tales that were told by the adventurous spirits, after dark across the firelight, of the treasure, of its possible hiding place, of its quest, and of its vast proportions, an amount large enough to make rich every man in the parish.

According to legend, Andrea Fererra had sailed away to the southward with his chests of gold. He was gone for two years, and then, one day when the story of him had ceased to be the news of the village, he had come again, returning as a common passenger upon a coasting packet.

The rich pirate had at first landed with pomp and circumstance. He had come back again bowed, decrepit, penniless, and forlorn.

Finding his way back to the haunted house, he lived there until his death, five years later. Where there had formerly been servants and luxury in abundance, there followed penury and frugality.

The old man dwelt utterly alone, like his peasant sires, existing almost entirely on the product of the soil. On rare occasions, he would come into town to purchase necessities from the store of the fish company, always paying for the same with a coin of Spanish gold.

The good folk of the community had made up their minds that his treasure was buried at some inaccessible spot at the end of the seas, and were prepared to dismiss him as a primary interest, when suddenly the sight of his Spanish gold set the whole community agog.

From that time until his death he was never wanting in attention, but no word escaped him as to what he had done with his treasure.

His unworthy sons, who were all present at his deathbed, saw his lips sealed forever without the slightest hint as to where they could find an answer to that question which had become to them the be-all and end-all of existence.

After Andrea Fererra had been laid away in the hallowed ground under the shadow of Our Lady, the four sons sailed away, each going his own direction, each sworn by a great oath to let the others know if he should find a clew to the hidden treasure.

Three generations had come and gone since then. Three generations had squandered their lives trying to find the lost fortune.

Just when Arichat was beginning to think of them as mythical figures, there came that Spanish gold coin, brought in in exchange for supplies at the fisheries store.

And then, as though that gold coin itself had been a bugle call, there had come out of nowhere he who claimed to be the last heir of the Fererras.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LIGHT.

IN the old days, when "Domraney" was in its prime, a light used to appear in the cupola atop the roof of the great house.

In the splendid era this light did not arouse attention, since the house was always a mass of illumination after dark. But when the old pirate returned to his self-inflicted asceticism, the shutters were closed and barred everywhere, except aloft there in that eerie spot, companioned by the wheeling gulls.

Up there it was rumored that Fererra used to live with ghosts of bygone revelries.

Every night when the rest of the house was darkened, that light would appear with such regularity that fishermen beating in toward the outer channel took from it their bearing to guide them into harbor.

Why did Andrea Fererra, so parsimonious in all else, squander oil so freely for that night-long vigil? What was the purpose of enkindling that star at twilight and keeping it bright until the cry of day?

Some said that he still had money hoarded away, and that he spent his nights counting it over, finding his only joy in this miserly devotion. The appearance of a solitary gold doubloon from time to time at the fisheries store lent color to that tale.

Others, not wishing to impute iniquity, declared that he was troubled with remorse, and that he placed the light in the cupola as a guide for mariners beyond the Outer Head, doing this as a penance for the many noble ships which in earlier days he had lured to destruction by his false light on Desolation Island.

Whether for avarice or penance that lamp in the cupola burned on as long as his flickering life remained. On his deathbed he still sent his sons up to tend it. When at last he had gone to the churchyard, navigators of the outer channel in the nighttime had reason to bemoan him, as they looked in vain for his vanished star.

And now, after all these years, the old gleam was appearing again in the haunted tower of " Domraney."

Paul Gabereau, nephew of Captain Sprott, was the first to spy it. He had been out with a fishing boat on the middle ground, and late one evening burst in upon the loafers at the store, exclaiming:

" My God, they've lit the light again up there on top o' the haunted house."

" Go long," chided Baptiste. " Ye've been drinking whisky blanc, Paul. Ye've been seein' things, that's what. Lucky ye was inside early with a jag like that."

" All right, you can say I was drinkin'; I s'pose you was drinkin', too, the night you left your sledge outside the gate and beat it for your missus."

" No, sir. I wasn't drinkin' that night. I was sober as a judge."

" Well, you wasn't a bit more sober then than I am now, Baptiste; come out here an' I'll soon show you."

At this general invitation all hands trooped out of the store exclaiming:

" Yes, come along; might as well take a look."

" Ye'll soon find out he's drunk," grunted the doubter, who, to show his superiority, remained behind alone, smoking his pipe, and mumbling to himself, " Pack o' fools, runnin' after a crazy drunk."

But he was soon to learn the difference. A few moments later the crowd returned hushed and awed.

" What's up?" inquired Baptiste.

" It's there, all right," came back in chorus. " Ain't no mistake about it."

Still doubting, Baptiste went out to see for himself. What he saw prevented him from returning to the gossips round the friendly cracker barrel. Instead, he went straight up the street to the home of his friend Gabereau, who, as usual, was seated alone in the garden, waiting for closing time and Yvonne's return.

" Hullo, Baptiste; now what's on yer mind?"

" I come to tell ye, skipper, that the light's lit again up there in Fererra's cupola."

Sprott was not slow of comprehension. Without a word of explanation he entered the house and returned a few minutes later shoving a service revolver into his hip pocket.

" Just stay here, Baptiste, for a while, will ye?"

" But what d'ye want me to stay for, skipper?"

" So's there'll be some one with Yvonne, in case I don't get back till late."

" Wish that I was goin' with ye."

" Not this time, my friend. There'll be plenty o' chance yet. And tell Yvonne if she gets back before I do, that I had a business call and not to worry."

Gabereau set out directly for the haunted house. Probably he was the only man in all that highly superstitious community that did not give a pinch of snuff for the unknown horrors that had been imputed to this spot.

He now went to church every Sunday,

on Yvonne's account. But the old-timers used to smile to see him there, remembering how he used to declare in his sealing days, " I'm afraid of neither God, man, nor Saint Michael."

Ideas of a god of vengeful justice, of haunting spirits, and returning ghosts of the wicked, never bothered his bluff matter-of-fact existence.

In his earlier years, with blatant atheism, he had gloried in the chance to ridicule the superstitions of the simple folk of the town. Then something finer in his nature, awakened by the childlike faith of Yvonne, had taught him at least the outward show of reverence, but there was nothing but contempt in his heart for the haunted house legends that surrounded " Domraney."

Swinging along, he soon came in sight of the cupola, and there, sure enough, shining through the tree tops, was the light that had caused such terrific flutterings.

" The poor fools thinks that's a ghost, eh? Well, I know mighty well who that ghost is; what I want to know now, is just what the tricky snake is doin' up there. He'll be up to no good, that's sure."

Walking boldly past the stone gate posts, Gabereau entered the overgrown lawn in front, where he had to walk warily to keep from tripping amid the dwarf spruce and lichen.

At the front door he paused and listened. Not a sound, except the whispering pines and hemlocks. The house loomed before him like some mighty sepulchre, an emblem of death in the midst of a living forest.

With stealth, so as not to betray himself, he tried the great front door, but found it barred securely.

Coming around to the windows along the side, he grabbed a hold of a rotten shutter, which at the first strong pull came away and fell at his feet with a loud crash. At this undue disturbance, he crouched in the shadow and waited, unaware of what guard Dugas might have on duty. But there was no sight nor sound of any one, and reassured, he sprung up to the window, this time testing thoroughly before trusting to his grip.

Letting himself down inside the haunted house, he found the place full of the stifling odor of disuse. Crawling warily over the rotting floors there came the sound of giant rats scurrying in all directions. The rats were more real and startling to him in that moment than a regiment of ghosts, and when one of these ghoulish creatures ran across his shoulders, he had his first yearning for the clear, outer air.

There was thick darkness everywhere, and his progress at best was groping and uncertain. On hands and knees he worked his passage out into the hallway, where he waited for some time, listening attentively. Reassured by the absence of any movement, other than that of the rats, he lit a match as a guide toward the stairway.

The stairs were in such rickety condition that he did not dare to trust himself, without lighting a match to make sure at every step. Thus his progress upward was painfully slow.

Once, about midway up, the planking was so uncertain that he was prepared for an imminent plunge, but maneuvering as cautiously as though he were going aloft with frayed seizings on the ratlins, he came at last without mishap to the upper landing.

Above this was another narrower stairway, in better preservation, which brought him to the top story. Here, as his supply of matches was giving out, he began to feel his way again.

At the end of a long hallway, impeded with lumber and broken furniture, he found a ladder leading to the cupola. With relief he saw that the ladder was new and had been recently secured at top and bottom by pieces of stout marlin.

Before committing himself to the last assault, the canny Gabereau made sure of his avenue for retreat. He was too well aware of the nature of his foe to leave the rear line unexamined.

He found a window handy to the ladder, and after considerable pulling he succeeded in detaching the shutter, which he was hauling inside when the decayed wood crumbled in his hands, and away went the bulk of the heavy screen crashing down with an infinite clatter.

Almost instantaneously with the noise of the falling screen he heard some one stirring above.

"That fixed it," Gabereau muttered to himself as he crouched hastily behind a couple of old boxes.

There was a sudden lifting of the slide above, and as a yellow gleam appeared, he caught a glimpse of Dirk Dugas climbing stealthily down the ladder.

In the hiding place behind the boxes, Gabereau pulled out his gun and waited, but to his surprise, there was nothing suspicious in the movements of the fellow coming down the ladder; he descended slowly, with utmost unconcern, and once on the floor, stood dimly outlined by the gleam from above. Turning on a flash light, he made his way down the hall to some interior recess, where he disappeared.

Gabereau strained his ears to listen, and then, just when curiosity was about to get the better of him, Dugas reappeared with a heavy bag upon his shoulder; and although a powerful man, he strained under the load.

Arriving back at the foot of the ladder, he dropped the bag upon the ground, at which something happened that put even the cool and stolid Gabereau into a state of wild excitement.

As the bag dropped, there came the clink of coins. There was no mistaking that note. It sounded in the straining ears of Gabereau with overwhelming power.

In that moment, a blind, unreasoning lust seized hold of him. The same burning fever that had been started by the sight of that piece of Spanish gold returned to him with a fury that was increased a thousandfold. Avarice was rooted in the very soul of Sprott Gabereau, and now he knew what it was to lust after gold, just as some men lust after women.

Seizing his heavy service revolver, he covered the unsuspecting Dugas as he stood, an irresistible target, fair under the gleam from the garret landing.

In that burning moment all his being was consumed in blind passion. Trembling with an excitement that one never would have dreamed of imputing to his stolid nature, he gazed pantingly across the sight of his gun.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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POPPY-TIME

IT'S poppy-time across the way
In war-torn France of yesterday.

A countless crimson flowering
On guard o'er Flanders Field in spring.

O'er graves that have no mark to tell
The stranger where a soldier fell.

For ev'ry soul the war-god claimed,
In spring a poppy's born inflamed.

For ev'ry drop of heart's blood shed.
A rosy flower shakes its head

And whispers secrets to the breeze
To carry swiftly overseas

To mothers cheated of their sons;
To young wives widowed by the guns.

It's poppy-time, and breezes tell
The living loved ones all is well.

Pat Costello.

THE DROWNED CAPTAIN

IN blue-green deeps where writhing eels
And ghost-gray fishes turn and glide,
And crusty crabs dance awkward reels,
Balance and pass from side to side,

The old commander sits and stares
With eyes unseeing on the tribe
Of watery creatures, aye, nor cares
What deep-sea potions they imbibe;

For he is dead and drowned and still,
His ship is sunk and with it he
And all his men; they drink their fill
Of that which bore them once, the sea.

He chose it, loved it as a boy,
He sailed its surface many a year,
It was his mate, his life, his joy,
He dwelt with it, nor had a fear.

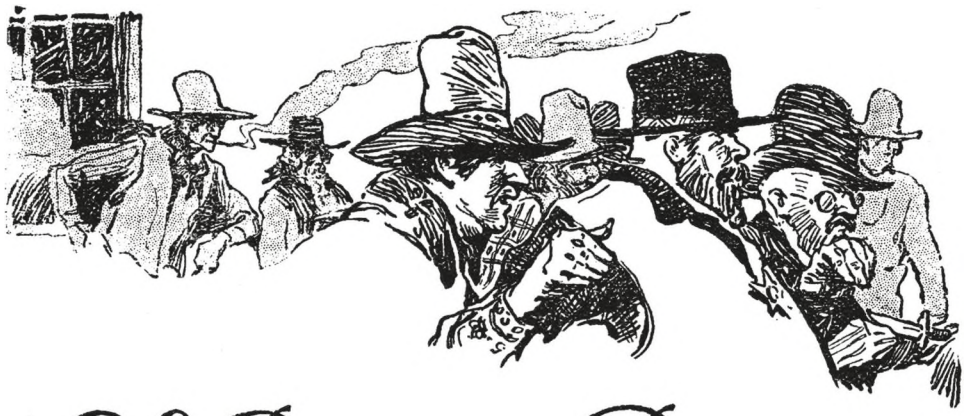
But now it overmasters him,
He lost one battle with its waves,
And in a place all still and dim,
He and his men have found their graves.

Above, the ripples ride and run,
The lingering furrow leaves its foam,
The surface glistens in the sun,
While far below he glooms, at home.

No more the tempest or the shock
Of thunderous billows troubles him,
For where he sits beside his rock
Not e'en the weeds move on its rim.

Yes, it is quiet there where they,
He and his men have come to bide,
Gray fish and slow crab are more gay
Than he they softly slip beside.

George Jay Smith.



El Perro's Report

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "Night Hawk's Gold," "The Mark of the Moccasin," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

I WANTED gold. There you have it. Not because of the feel or looks of it. I ain't a miser. But every mucker in the desert when he dreams of findin' a big lode, dreams of somethin' beyond: of idleness, and ice water, and mansions in Paris, and blooded race hosses, and servants.

I was sot on goin' to Paris as soon as I had enough. Didn't care about the mansions or the hosses. But I wanted idleness and plenty of the right kind of chow. I've lived three-fourths of a century on beans and flapjacks, and now and then when the goin' was good, on canned peas and such, as a luxury.

But a desert lobo travelin' light like me cain't very well tote along much canned stuff. So I said to myself when I got to Paris I'd live only on canned stuff—nothin' else. I'd have canned sardines for breakfast, and for dinner, and for supper. I'd have rows of cans in my room like a sutler's store. I'd sleep on canned sardines. I'd use 'em for blankets, and for my pillow. That's what I'd do in Paris.

No use for a mansion. No use for champagne. I'd find some cantina in Paris where I could git real gut-sizzlin' redeye; and I'd hire me a bunkroom on top of same—and just live there the rest of my life.

And when I remembered the desert where the water pockets was all turned to salines, and I had to live on mesquite beans and chuckawallas and sage rabbits, d'you know what I'd do? I'd open a can of sardines and order a mozo to bring me a bucket of ice water.

Now, this last crime I committed is the only one you gents need be interested in. No use tellin' of past crimes.

You see me—a ole, white-haired man, with bleary eyes—all faded out by the Sody Mesa sun, and hands that tremble like they had the palsy. In fack, it 'll interest you gents to know that I ain't been able to use a six-gun the way a man of my profession ought to use same—not for twenty year'.

Nine-tenths of a good shot is the sharp

eye—the other tenth is the steady hand, and I ain't got neither. That's why I ain't, rightly speakin', a road agent. I'm only the servant of one. They call me El Perro, which means The Dog. The Under-Dog would be more like it.

The hombre I worked for—you-all know by this time—is a p'isonous reptyle, if ever one crawled out of hell in human form.

When I say human I use a kind of license. Nature was in a bad mood when she created him. She was ugly and she wanted to git a grudge outen her system, same as a man 'll go out and beat his hoss when he's crazed with jimson weed. Nature went out and played a trick on the innocent world by creatin' this bandit. Which his real name was Tex Laco.

He helped me escape from a jail up in Oregon. I was in my prime, bein' fifty year old. He was only a kid. But he was a good head taller'n me, rangy and thin and hawk-nosed. And he had sharp gray eyes, like the bores of a double-barrel gun and a shaggy head of black hair, like a hoss's mane. Further and more he took to murderin' as easy as a man takes to shootin' a sage hen for breakfast.

It wasn't long afore he showed me that if I wanted to go on the road with him and git rich, I'd have to do the cookin' and the washin' of the pans and kettles, and a-feedin' of the broncs, and a-packin' of the sawbucks. After a few years' rustlin' and thievin' and killin' of lone prospectors I found out that we wasn't two pards, but just a maestro and a mozo. Which I was the last named.

Some of you gents know me. You've seen me snoopin' around the honky-tonks and outfittin' posts and desert posadas. You-all just thought I was a daft ole mucker b'ilin' away my life down thar in the desert huntin' for surface float.

Me hunt for surface float? Not much! Treasure is what I want. Big stuff. Easy to git. No pickax and gold pan for me. I take the dirt after some one else has sweated for it and pounded rocks. Only rocks I ever pounded was in the pen up in Oregon.

You seen me hangin' around drinkin' redeye and buyin' canned food for to feast on when our business was good. But you never suspected I had anythin' to do with the raids and murders down Sody Mesa way, or up in the ranches of Mule City, or

on the Wells Fargo trail betwixt Neutral Saddle and Cuevo.

No, sir. You figured I was pretty harmless, bein' I never even had a shootin' iron on me or in my hand, or my pack or anywheres near me.

You seen me ridin' out on the desert trails on my calf-kneed, moth-eaten ole pinto. Never suspected I was tellin' my maestro—I mean the varmint, Tex Laco—where they was some innocent victim to kill and rob. No? I thought not. Kind of surprised you, didn't I?

And this here Tex Laco surprised you likewise. You-all have known him, too, thinkin' him straight. They's times when he comes out of the sierra, broad as daylight, grinnin' with his dry, speckled lips and showin' a couple nippers like a hoss laffin'. It's when he's planted his crime on some one else and after a posse has trailed and caught same.

I've been there when Tex rides onto 'em, as calm as a cucumber and asks: "What-all's this ruckus about, gents?" and they tell him they're lynchin' a man for such and such a murder. And Tex, knowin', of course, that it's the murder which he hisself committed, looks up at the poor coot dryin' in the wind, and smiles.

At times like that when I seen his face it sent a shudder through me which I'll never forgit.

It's our first job in Arizony for some years. But we know the trails in the Sody Mesa country as well as the mule deer knows same. In fack, we started a lot of new trails, which the ole adage that all trails was begun by rustlers ain't such a myth after all.

The other day my maestro hears of a little outfit of prospectors comin' up from their diggin's down south of Seven Mesas. At a Mex posada we hear tell as how they was most like totin' all the pay dirt which they'd worked outen their claim down there.

It's a long journey from Sody Mesa to the nearest town, and dangerous, and bein' the head of the outfit had a little gal, why he just stayed there with two old mozos till he'd cleaned out the whole gallifalutin' lode.

"Easy pickin's," says my maestro when we retired to a booth in the posada. "Three ole men," he says with a gleam in his narrow-set eyes. "And nary a one of 'em with a steady enough hand to shoot a six-gun. And one of the ole muckers with a gal in tow—his daughter. Cut out to order for me and you."

"Sheriff Klepp, from Neutral Saddle—he's cruisin' around down by Seven Mesas with a posse—" I said, humblelike. "Which they've just lynched a man."

"All the better for us," says my maestro, tossin' off a swig like he was drinkin' a toast. "The muckers won't be so scairt. I reckon that's why they was so foolish as to start, knowin' the sheriff is down in the desert."

So we saddled our broncs, and got a light pack of grub and water and headed up north for the outfittin' post at Four Flush Pass, which was the next stop the little outfit would make on their way outside.

Just as the maestro had figured, we got there late in the day, right on their heels, which they was goin' to spend the night there themselfs. It was one of them ole-time frontier posts which in bonanza days had a fort for to protect theirselfs from Apaches; and they had a smithy, and a tannery, a distillery, and a general store.

But nowadays they waren't nothin' left of the place exceptin' a bunch of empty shacks and one main dance hall, which was the store and hotel combined. A fat, pop-eyed hombre, half Mex, by the name of Juan Higgins, kept the place, and he was the entire population.

We horsed in, and announced to the sutler: "Mr. Higgins, we'd admire to spend the night here, and rest up our broncs and bump ourselfs ag'in' a few slugs of redeye."

He was agreeable, thinkin', of course, we was just two wore-out muckers from Sody Mesa way.

"They's a little outfit of pocket hunters come here just afore you did," he said. "Three ole gents and a gal. Headin' for Neutral Saddle."

The four of them were settin' at a table at their chow when we come in. The three men was windswept, desert-scarred hombres with pale eyes that all those old muckers get who live in Sody Mesa Desert very long.

One of them was a tall gent with a mane of snow-white hair.

Next to him was a gal with a freckled face, blue eyes and black hair, which had a tinge of copper into it, bein' the sunset was shinin' through a window.

The men all had guns and holsters on 'em, which same struck us as peculiar, bein' anybody in them desert outposts who went in to chow 'most always hung their holsters on a peg on the wall.

After their chuck of beef two of the men went up to the room which Juan Higgins, the sutler, showed to 'em, and we noticed that they was totin' along a couple duffel bags which had been kept at their side during the meal. Didn't take much high-falutin' detective work to figure out that there was somethin' very interestin' in them duffel bags.

We didn't suggest a drink or cards or the likes of that, knowin' that it was best to lie low and leave them make the overtures. But they didn't make no overtures. They just watched us outen the corner of their eyes.

"It don't look so good," I said to the maestro. "We're goin' to be watched like we was hawks from now on. Every move we make will be suspiciouslike."

The maestro scratched his long nose, then said: "I ain't so sure but you're right. But I know a way to remedy same."

It was the maestro's custom whenever he was forced into a honky-tonk or desert posada always to leave his gun outside. In fact, most always we leave our guns in our packs. This is what we done this time.

So what does the maestro do but go up to the sutler and say to him in a kind of loud voice: "Mr. Higgins, we're two prospectors from the desert and we ain't got any firearms. Bein' we got held up by a bunch of Papago Indians back there a couple weeks ago."

Now the maestro knew well enough this here sutler, Higgins, never sold firearms, bein' the sheriff had said that he didn't want no desert sutlers selling the renegade Indians deadly weapons.

So the sutler says: "I'm sorry, gents, but you-all will have to go up to Neutral Saddle afore you can get firearms or ammunition." And he explained the sheriff's view of the matter.

Having accomplished this stroke of genius, my maestro ordered a tamale and some redeye and we had a meal. Which I'd admire to say the best tamale you can find in the desert is that made by Juan Higgins, even though the chicken is only sage rabbit.

Well, after chow we started to play cards —I mean, my maestro and me.

The other bunch sat around or walked about on the sawdust-covered floor restlessly, kind of as if they was waitin' for somethin' to happen. The big, white-haired hombre was always bellyin' the bar and orderin' slugs of redeye. The other two would go to a window or a door, look out, roll a cigareet, go to the door again, then come back and talk to the gal in low tones.

It was plain to be seen that they was all goin' to spend a powerful uncomfortable night. The maestro didn't notice them. He kept his buzzard eyes glued to the cards as if they wasn't nobody else in the room. As for me myself I was powerful interested in that gal.

As you know, I'm a very old man and a pretty hard, dried-up desert lobo, and they ain't much in this Sody Mesa country that will appeal to my eye. They ain't any poetry in my soul.

As a kid whenever I seen an ocotillo blossom on the top of a cactus prong I generally always took out my six-gun to see if my eye was seein' straight. But they was somethin' about this gal that took my fancy.

I don't mean her good looks. I reckon any young man would have sworn she was the loveliest thing north of the Rio Grande or south for that matter. But it was her helplessness. She was like a little child.

She wasn't scairt. She seemed to enjoy the whole business, and there she was with a couple old rapacious desert wolves ready to spring on her, and she had nothin' to protect her but three old men who was already tremblin' with fear.

They call me El Perro, which, as I said, means the dog. But there are ways about the dog which are peculiar.

A dog will always fight—provided he fights another male. I reckon that same instinct was workin' inside of me. I was goin' to tell the maestro that I didn't like the looks of this here ruckus. But just then two of the old prospectors made the announcement that they couldn't keep their eyes open any longer and that they had to get some sleep.

They was funny, worthless lookin' ole coots, one of 'em with a patch over his eye —a little runt with hairy hands, which they hung to his knees. The other a unshaved hombre with red eyes and a beef-red face, which was crossed every which way with deep wrinkles like rabbit trails in a sage plain.

They didn't own the claim they'd been workin'. The white-haired, lanky prospector had hired 'em. I could see that if they was any fightin', these two mozos wouldn't offer much resistance. In fack, I found out later that the ole prospector considered 'em much worse'n nothin' in his present extremity.

Well, they beat it up to the gallery to their bunk room and left their boss and his daughter to do the worryin' for the rest of the night.

"I'm settin' pretty," the maestro said to me like as if he was referrin' to his cards.

I was goin' to say that it wasn't worth while buttin' into the game at all, bein' there was a woman in it. Which we had always made a kind of agreement betwixt ourselves that whenever they was a woman concerned we'd lay off and go somewheres else.

But this time the maestro said the pickin's was too easy. And I myself had a powerful hunger to get my hands on that gold. I was still thinkin' of Paris and a life of ease and sardines.

Still and all I couldn't take my eyes off that gal. She was eager for a little life. The whole business—the bar, the old dance hall, the desert, and maybe us two ragged-looking hombres settin' off in the corner playin' at cards—must of appealed to her sense of romance. She wanted to play, I reckon.

They was an old mechanical piano in one corner of the dance hall which it didn't have no more music to it than a ore-crusher, but the gal set it to workin' just the same, pumpin' at it with her feet. Then she asked the sutler to pump it a while, and what did she do but dance a sort of Mexican guaracha on the floor.

Her father told her to go to bed and get some sleep. But she said she was too excited, and wanted to stay up and talk to some one.

"The less we talk the better," said her old dad.

But the sutler, Juan Higgins, gettin' into the spirit of the business, asked us all for to have a drink on the house.

"We're sure settin' pretty," says the maestro to me. Then we shags up to the bar and takes a drink with the white maned old giant.

But he wouldn't talk. He was too nervous. He kept going to the door—same as his two old pards had done—and kept rolling cigareets and spittin', and fittin' his fingers into each other.

I had a talk with the gal, and when she asked me what my business was I sort of stammered. Which same I'd never done when asked that by deputy, or sheriff, or U. S. marshal. I told her I was a old mucker who had my diggin's down south of Sody Mesa, and she told me about herself.

That she didn't want to go out of the desert with her dad and his two old pards. She wanted to stay there the rest of her life with a couple burros and a Indian pony—and a little xacalli to live in. I noticed plain enough that she didn't make any mention of the fact that they had just left their diggin's, and she didn't make no mention about their bein' afraid of a raid—or about their havin' anything valuable in their packs.

Nor was I fool enough to ask any personal questions about same.

It was gettin' late and I was tryin' to figure how the maestro was goin' about this work, when what should happen but that some one else comes gallumpin' along out of the desert and stops for to spend the night at Juan Higgins's place.

It's a funny thing, as I look back on it now, that I can swear I was waitin' for just

that kind of a hombre to show up. I was thinkin' all along of the gal. And I was tryin' to figure what kind of a man would be lucky enough to get her.

"A prospector," I says to myself. "That's the kind she wants. She wants to live in the desert. It's in her blood. She'll never get it out. She wants a young man—a tall one—a man maybe with the eyes my maestro has, but with a different kind of mouth. And a different kind of soul."

These here kind of sentimental thoughts were goin' through my ole tuckered out brain, and then like a miracle, as if I had imagined it all myself, and it was comin' true—the very hombre that I was picturin' in my mind, shags in, goes up to the bar and orders a drink.

He was as fine a specimen of young hombre that I ever did see. He had the muscles, and the spring to his step of a puma lion I once seen springing on a steer. His eyes had a sheen to them, which I saw same once in a puma which was facin' our camp fire.

Well, now, this stranger takes a couple drinks, and announces that he's powerful thirsty, bein' all the water-pockets down his way has changed to salines. He orders drinks for the whole house, and he says he wants the piany to play some more.

And Juan Higgins, the sutler, kowtows to him, bein' he was a dangerous lookin' youngster in his raw-boned range-fed way. Nary a one of us could figger whether he was a bona fide prospector, a rustler, a fugitive, or what not.

And all the while the gal was settin' at a table on the other side of the dance floor with eyes as hungry as any eyes I ever did see.

The stranger confabbed with her old dad for a while about water-holes and lodes and trails. Then what does he do but go over and ax the gal for a dance.

They dance for a while, and I could see by the gal's eyes that she was gettin' all the romance that had ever been bred in that part of the desert.

And while they was dancin' around the old deep-grooved floor, I turned to the maestro and seen a kind of smile curlin' up his lip. He seen that the stranger had a big shootin' iron on his hip.

"It don't look so good," I says to the maestro.

The maestro smiled still more, his upper lip tightenin' and a couple fangs showin'.

"I reckon I'll have to kill three men to-night," he says under his breath.

"You ain't goin' to kill that thar hombre," I says. "He'll blow us both to smithereens."

"No, I ain't goin' to kill him. But he's just the man I want to plant the killin' on."

II.

THE stranger and the gal went to a booth and got some coffee. What they talked about I don't know. But I could guess. You could tell by the looks of their eyes.

It was one of these here cases that you might find in any country, but in particular in a hot, brain-twistin', nerve-rackin' place like the Bad Lands, where everything is exaggerated, not excluding hate, or this thing they call love.

As I watched, I bein' an old man and having lived my life, I watched like a man at a theayter or horse opery watchin' a love scene. Every man imagines himself in the place of the lover, no matter if the heroine is a princess or a Papago Indian. There's always a kick to it when you see it—even if you're an old man like me and are all wore out, burned by the sun and without no taste except a taste for redeye and canned sardines.

The gal's father and the sutler were at the bar in confab about something or other. While me and my maestro were at another table, plotting what was to happen to everybody in the house. Before we got through talkin' we had it pretty well doped out, or I should say the maestro had it doped out.

To him they was all just plain characters in a horse opery, the same as they was to me. Except he took a different slant on the business. I was just audience—an onlooker.

He was the author or the dramatist, or whatever you calls the man which writes the play. He was Fate. He was the devil playing around with poor, helpless lost souls.

The fack is, he had it doped out just

which one was to live, which one was to be hanged, which one was to be shot that night, and which one was to go free.

The sutler, Juan Higgins, bein' more or less friendly to renegades and prospectors—well, the maestro didn't consider him worth bumpin' off. But the three prospectors—I mean the old ones in the gal's outfit—they was all slated to be finished. They had one more night, that's all.

The young stranger was to be the goat, as I said. He was to hang. The chances were he would get the hemp the next day, bein' the sheriff was in them parts cruisin' around, ready and anxious to hang anybody. That left one more whose fate the author of this here horse opery hadn't as yet announced.

"What about that gal?" I asked.

He scratched his hawk nose, and his narrow-set eyes began to burn.

"I ain't quite decided," he said. "I'm just watchin' and thinkin'."

This kind of sent a shudder through me, but I didn't have time to think. The maestro was beginnin' to tell me his plans.

"That there young stranger," he said, "come in from the desert, and I note that he didn't bring his duffel bags in like the others done."

"Which I surmise he ain't got nothin' worth searchin' them for," I said, hopin' he wouldn't get us into no gun fight with any such human puma.

"On the contrary, El Perro," the maestro said to me, "he's got something in his pack that's very much worth while searchin' for, which I'd admire to explain to you.

"You go out and see if there's something in his pack which can be worn—like, for instance, jackboots or a shirt or a bandanna. And likewise find out if he's got some more weapons—any weapon will do. A short-handled ax, maybe, like you cut wood for a camp fire with, or a bowie knife. Then come back and don't ask no questions."

"I've got a feeling that if you come Injun on that thar hombre," I said, "you'd better get his shootin' irons off his hip first."

"Which reminds me," the maestro said, as he begun to roll a cigareet, "after you have done what I just told you I'd admire for you to go and get the sheriff."

"Get the sheriff?" I gasped.

"Tell him that they's been some murders committed down at Juan Higgins's place. The quicker this youngster gets the hemp, the better for us."

I kind of started up from the table. But all I could do was to stare at him and catch my breath and choke without saying nary a word, while he blew a jet of smoke through his two front nippers.

III.

WELL, I done just what the maestro said. I didn't dast do otherwise.

The picture of that gal findin' a man outen the desert—a man which maybe she had been waitin' for all her life—was still in my mind. And whatever I did left a bad taste in my mouth same as if I'd been drinkin' jimson-weed.

It was, I might say, the first time in my life that I ever regretted bein' in the kind of business which I was in.

It was an easy enough trick to go through the pack which the man had left same out in a shed near the corral. I found a vest there—a Hopi vest with a beaded design onto it—which you might call it the "corn and flower" design common to some of these here desert tribes. It was a vest which any one would recognize on second sight.

And that's why I chose it as a sort of distinctive mark for the maestro to wear. I knew right well what he wanted it for—just for a mark, so as he could be mistook for the stranger who had come that night.

And likewise I found a weapon—just the thing that he would need, a bowie knife. He could do his murderin' with anythin'—a rawhide romal, a ax; in fack, I once seen him murder a man with the victim's own wooden leg. A very humorous gent, this Tex Laco is when he's got a mind to be.

I saw the maestro, and he said what I done was done right. Then I went after the sheriff.

It took me all night, bein' I had to ride south toward Seven Mesas and stop at a

couple muckers' diggin's for to ask if they'd seen the sheriff and his posse.

I found him down at a sheep ranch on the desert's edge. He had about ten men with him—a posse of hard-ridin', hard-fightin' hombres, which every rustler or renegade in the desert shakes all over whenever he hears the name of any of 'em.

In fack, this posse of Sheriff Klepp has the reputation of hangin' a man afore he has a chance of even so much as declarin' hisself guilty. It don't do much good to declare hisself innocent; he gets hanged anyway.

Sheriff Klepp has hanged as many innocent men as guilty, if I know anythin'. He's given the hemp to three men already for crimes that was committed by my maestro.

They was all mounted on fast hosses and all was pretty fresh, bein' they'd rested up at the sheep ranch and et the sheepherder out of his house and home. As I've said before, they was on the trail of a rustler, and had lynched same.

Whether he was guilty or innocent, I don't know. The matter's usually dropped after the victim's Adam's apple's punched in.

At any rate, the posse was kind of het up for another hangin'—like as if they'd got the habit—and it's a hard habit to break, this takin' a man's life. I'll say so for myself and for my maestro, too.

"Some murderin' at Juan Higgins's place!" the sheriff cried kind of triumphantly, as he fingered a knot under his chin—I mean the knot which he tied his gray beard into. "Looks like another party, men."

"I bet it's Juan Higgins himself," one of the deputies—a long, lanky man with a mop of red hair—said.

"He ought to be hanged, anyway," said Sheriff Klepp. "He's in cahoots with these Mexes and rustlers."

It was a long ride back, and we didn't get to Juan Higgins's place till sunrise. By that time the deeds had been done.

IV.

As we rode up to the group of shacks, two different emotions was scrappin' inside my breast like a couple prairie dogs over a dead chicken. I was thinkin' of the gold and the share of it which I'd get. That was one emotion.

The other concerned the gal. What was goin' to happen to her? I knew pretty well what was goin' to happen to the man she had found the night before. There wa'n't much doubt about that.

We rode up and, as I expected, we found my maestro at the bar drinkin' redeye like he was celebratin' his birthday. Juan Higgins had come out to meet us, his fat carcass tremblin' like jellyfish, his eyes wild, his lips gray, trembling.

I didn't see the gal and the young stranger; I reckon they was upstairs at that particular time, with the bodies.

The maestro turned around and I tried to read his face. But that ain't possible. I knew it wasn't possible.

I had known him for many years. He has a poker face and you can't get the blink of an eye—no matter what's inside of his brain. He can shoot a man and smile. He can kick a hoss and smile. He can kick a sick dog and yes, sir, he'll smile then, too. And right now he was smilin'.

But this wa'n't no answer to the question that was in my mind. He had done some killin' all righto, but had he got the gold? Had he pinned the crime on the young stranger from the desert?

Nary the blink of an eye answered me.

But it wasn't long before I knew that the raid hadn't been a all-fired, gallumpin' success. While the posse was thumpin' in through the front door and was surroundin' the maestro and the fat tremblin' sutler, I seen the gaunt, white-maned giant of a man comin' down the stairs from the gallery of the dance hall.

It was the gal's father! The gal herself was behind him and her hand in his. And she sure did look scairt.

It's an easy thing maybe for a gal to take a romantic view of a desert cabin, a gunfight and a couple bandits. But when a murder actually takes place it changes her.

Inside my heart I sure did cuss at the maestro and his ways. Of course when I saw the old white-haired man I knew that

somethin' had gone wrong. The maestro had blundered somewhere or maybe it was me that blundered. In which case I sure would get mine.

I mean in plain terms it would mean torture—as bad a torture as ever a Papago squaw worked on the prisoners her warriors brought home to her.

It waren't long before we all had the whole story. By that I don't mean we all had it straight. But I got it as straight as any one.

The ole man—the father—went into a tantrum. He told everything. He told much more than he should of, I reckon. But he was so excited what with the murder of his pards—that he didn't use common sense.

"Who-all's been murdered?" the sheriff asked in the first place.

"Two of my outfit," the old prospector said. "Rupell and Jones is their names. They been workin' in my outfit for the last year down Seven Mesa way."

"What-all was the circumstances?" the sheriff asked next.

"I'll tell you everything," the old prospector says. "You represent the law and it's up to you to get me out of this fix. Like as not I'll be the next one. And my daughter here—"

"Go on with the story," says Sheriff Klepp.

"They was after our gold," the prospector blurts out. "Maybe you think I'm daft totin' gold through this here country. And I reckon I was. But I ain't daft no more. The gold ain't here now. It's somewhere else. I've got it safe. I went out in the dead of night. I went out I reckon just in time.

"I knew well enough that sooner or later some one would get the hunch that we had our year's pay dirt with us. And when I stopped at this here joint I had a pretty good feelin' it was goin' to happen last night. I didn't like the looks of this sutler, Juan Higgins. I didn't like the looks of these two hombres here—" and he points to me and the maestro. "And I didn't like the looks of this young prospector here who says he's from Sody Mesa way himself. And which my young gal here shined up to him the first thing. They all looked like bad hombres to me—and one of 'em, I reckon and maybe more, are bad hombres."

"And one of 'em and maybe more is goin' to get the hemp right to-day," the sheriff puts in. "But first we must hear more about the circumstances."

"Well, when we first come here," the old prospector went on, "the sutler he give my gal a room upstairs and give me another one with three bunks into it which I was to sleep in same with my two pards. Every one in the house here—the sutler and these two hombres and that thar hombre knew that me and my two pards was goin' to sleep in one room and my gal in another. But I began figgerin'.

"They all seen us take our duffel bags up to that room. And I says to myself during the night they's liable to be some fireworks and I better stay awake. Then I said to my pards I'd stay on watch.

"I sat up for awhile in the bunkroom, then I walked up and down the hall, kind of keepin' my eye on the door where the gal was, although I didn't have no fear about her. I knew well enough that it was the gold that was goin' to draw the gunfight. Then later on I went out on the gallery and watched the corrals for awhile, thinkin' perhaps I'd catch sight of some one snoopin' around.

"Well, whoever it was was wise enough not to get out there in the moonlight. He just crept along the dark hall and went into the room where I was supposed to be at—I and my two pards.

"Well, I'd taken one of the duffel bags—the one in which the pay dirt was in it—and carried same out with me, never leavin' it go out of my hands. Because I knew I was the only one who was awake of our outfit.

"I was down in one end of the hall in the dark when I seen some one coming from the room where my two pards was sleepin'. Of course, I thought it was one of them comin' to find me and I was just about to call out when I seen his silhouette in the open door at the end of the hall. The moonlight made a background against the mesa cliffs beyond them.

" He was too tall to be either of my old pards."

" How tall?" Sheriff Klepp asked.

" About as tall as this here young hombre." And right then the old prospector pointed a finger at the young stranger which we had planted the crime on him.

The sheriff took a squint at the boy, then scratched his beard, and narrowing his eyes says: " Go on, tell the rest."

" When the hombre passed in the hall I seen that he was masked," the gaunt old man went on. " But a beam of moonlight comin' down the hall give me a chance to see that he had a beaded vest which there was a corn and flower design onto it like the vest the Papagos and Navahos sell to tourists."

" We'll find somebody who wears just that kind of vest," said the sheriff. And he might have said likewise: " And we'll hang him as soon as we find him, bein' it's all the proof we want."

" They's lots of vests of that there nature," says the young prospector, his face lookin' kind of queer.

He knew that by a strange coincidence, he had just that kind of vest hisself, and that he would have to explain same to the sheriff. Which Sheriff Klepp never took much stock in coincidence. Coincidence was proof as strong as Holy Writ to that old blood-thirsty minion of the law.

The sheriff turns upon the young prospector and scratches his knotted beard again and smiles kind of knowing like: " I seen vests like that before. They ain't uncommon. But we'll see just who-all in this posada can show us just that particular kind of a vest."

The gal's father then finished giving his testimony which all that it amounted to from then on was that he went into the room where his pards had been snorin' peaceful like, thinkin' that they was safely guarded. And he described how he found 'em both dead with a knife wound.

It was done so skillful like that they must of kicked off without so much as a groan. Bein' neither one was aroused by the murmur of the other and bein' the old man out in the hall and the gal in the next room didn't hear nary a sound.

" The first thing I done was to go and see if my gal was safe," goes on the old father. " Which I went into her room even before I give the alarm about the death of my two pards. She was all right, but I dassent leave her there any longer. I told her to follow me—and not to say a word concernin' what had happened. The two of us went out into the dark, I takin' the gold from the duffel bag. And we crawled through the mesquite and into the gulch of the ravine out thar, stayin' in the shadow all the time.

" And when we got to a certain place which I ain't advertisin' now to nobody, why we hid our gold. Then we come back and give the alarm, and woke up the sutler here. And he called the other hombres—and that's the whole story."

The sheriff started in right away trailin' down his victim.

" I don't reckon the hell-bender's left," he announced to his gang of deputies. " Bein' he was after the gold and didn't get same, and most like didn't figger he was seen enterin' that room at all. So the natural way to figger is that he would just stay here and make another try."

" He would have rode away when he found out that I knew about the murders," the old prospector put in.

" That may be true enough," says the sheriff, " but a murderin' reptyle who would go about the business like he did last night wouldn't be bluffed out so quick. He would figger it might look suspicious to get on his hoss and light out for the desert. So it's just my honest opinion that he stayed here preferrin' to bluff it out."

" That thar's very plausible, chief," my maestro remarks.

Sheriff Klepp looked at him and then said: " 'Pears to me like I've seen you before somewheres."

" You have seen me," my maestro says. " I'm a hard workin' mucker from down Sody Mesa way. This here old gent is my pard—" He points to me.

" Ain't your name Tex Laco?" the sheriff says to the maestro.

" It is, chief."

" And you helped me run down a rustler once before a couple years back?"

"I sure did. And it was me that sent this old pard of mine for you when the murders was discovered."

"That's true," the proprietor says. "They're pards and they come in last night lookin' all wore out from the Sody Mesa trail. I reckon he sent this little gent after you. I know I didn't anyways."

"Nor did I," adds the gal's father.

That was a point in our favor, and never once from then on did the sheriff have any particular interest in me or my maestro.

The next man he cross-questioned was the sutler, after which he turned to the gal's dad and asked: "Was the man anything like this here hombre in size or shape?"

"Not by a long shot," says the white-haired old giant. "He was taller than this here Juan Higgins and thinner."

"Then that leaves only one other hombre—which it's you," the sheriff says to the young prospector.

"What a silly, idiotic idee!" the gal bust out.

"Do you know this hombre?" the sheriff asked her.

"Yes," she answers. "I know him as if I had known him all my life." Which I reckon was the result of their love-making of the night before.

"Just how long have you known him?" Klepp says.

"Since last evenin'," the father puts in. "He was shinin' up to her all the time and I didn't like him. I told the gal so but she wouldn't listen to me. It's my opinion, chief, that he was workin' her over kind of findin' out things."

Klepp nods his square, bulldog's head. His red eyes lighted up and he turned with a grin to his deputies.

They grinned back. It was a bad moment for the young prospector. The time he had spent with the gal was being turned against him. Because it was just what a fine, prepossessing young bandit might have done under the circumstances.

"Where's your hosses and your belongin's?" the sheriff asked.

"My horse is out in the corral—a pinto. And I have a couple mouse colored burros out there likewise."

"And your pack?" the sheriff went on with a grin.

The young prospector looked at him like as if he was a big, lean hound challenging a bulldog. He looked keen and square.

But Sheriff Klepp had seen men look thataway when they was tellin' a lie. Men don't stammer and turn red when they lie. They look at you without battin' their eyes.

You see all this while the young prospector figgered that he was goin' to have some trouble concernin' that beaded vest. And I ought to explain right here that my maestro was standin' with one elbow on the bar and smokin' a cigareet as calm as a cucumber.

He had put that vest back into the pack where it belonged and likewise he had put something else back there—the mask and the bowie knife.

"Stranger, I'd admire to know your name and your business," Sheriff Klepp says.

The young prospector answered quickly enough. "Ted Walling. I've been huntin' surface float down Sody Mesa way."

Then the sheriff says: "I'd admire to see your gun."

"What for?" Ted Walling asks, his face changing color.

"The sheriff is askin' for to see your gun," one of the deputies repeated. It was a little man with spectacles and a bald head and unshaven face covered with white bristles like salt. He was the hoss-doctor.

Ted Walling must have done some powerful hard thinkin'. Was it worth while to start in fightin' here ag'in' a sheriff and his posse, thereby makin' a outlaw of hisself, when he knew perfectly well that he was blameless? And all because he happened to have a vest in his outfit which it would need explainin'?

I reckon no cool-headed man would of invited trouble so quick. They was nothing to do but ack friendly-like, because every contrary move would make that business about the vest all the harder to explain.

So Ted Walling calmly give the sheriff his six-gun.

"Go and search this hombre's effecks," the sheriff says to a couple deputies.

The answer came quick enough. The

sheriff stood there with a grim smile onto his face, stickin' his thick fingers in his gray beard and tightenin' the knot which held it together under his chin.

The deputies stood around, some at the bar swiggin', others loafing around the benches, others confabbin' with the white-haired old prospector.

My maestro still stood where he was at, puffing easy-like on his cigareet, watching the smoke and grinning.

I was watching something else—the gal.

She had gone up to young Ted Walling and without regardin' her dad or any one else in the room, she thrust her little hand into Walling's and looked up at him, her eyes scairt, her mouth kind of tremblin'. It wasn't a picture that ole El Perro, meanin' myself, enjoyed overly much.

I'll never forget it. I've seen men shot down in front of me; I've seen men tortured by that devil, Tex Laco, my maestro; and I've seen men beggin' for their lives. And never did I so much as wink.

But they was somethin' about the scene of this here gal—a gal who had been dancin' around and singin' like a happy little child the night before, and who had turned into a woman with all the troubles in the world about to be heaped on her slim young shoulders—there was somethin' about this scene which got me wabbly in the knees.

You see I knew that there was much more comin' than the gal yet dreamed of. This young prospector from the desert was goin' to be proved pretty conclusive to be a murderin' road-agent right before her eyes. And it would take about all the faith any woman in this little old world ever had to believe he warn't guilty.

In fact, the girl's dad already believed Ted Walling guilty. And when he seen the gal standin' there holdin' onto his hand, why the ole giant come at her like he was goin' to tear her to pieces, and he yanked her away from her lover and snapped at her, orderin' her not to go near him again if she didn't want him to be shot down before her very eyes.

It didn't take long for the deputies which Sheriff Klepp had sent them out to search Ted Walling's pack, to come back with their news.

"We found the knife," one of them said —"a knife which, bein' the victims was killed by that there species of weapon, we thought that we would bring same to you."

The sheriff took the knife and said: "Is this here your knife, hombre?"

The young prospector, not yet realizin' that he was bein' led like a lamb to the slaughter, admits it without no palaver. The sheriff examined it careful-like, but not bein' able to find any incriminatin' marks, he give it over to his chief deputy—the little hoss-doctor with the spectacles.

You see my maestro was wise enough not to leave that there knife in the pack without wipin' off the blood from same because it would of looked too much like a plant. But he had left just enough of the stain so that after the little vet took it to the sun and put some kind of salt onto it, and wet it with his spittle, he comes back and says they was blood on the heft of that there knife—and blood which hadn't hardly had time enough to dry.

Ted Walling gasped and the gal turned white.

"He's innocent. Some one's sagebrushed him. I tell you he's innocent!" the gal cried.

"It kind of looks that-a-way," the sheriff shoots back sarcastic like. And right then another deputy holds up the vest with its corn and flower design of the Papagoes.

This clinched everything, and it didn't look like they was anything left for the sheriff and his deputies to do in the way of legal formalities, except to give the poor coot the hemp.

"All right, Beefy," he calls to one of his men. "Get that same lass-rope we used yesterday and we'll tote our prisoner down to the gulch where the dead pine is at."

The gal threw a fit at this, and while her dad was holdin' her she cried out that the posse was a bunch of murderin' reptyles; and that the bandit who had come in the dead of night and planted this crime on a innocent man wasn't no worse than they were—murderin' in the name of the law.

It kind of sent a thrill through me to see this woman stickin' up for a man who seemed proved beyond any doubt as the

thievin' hellbender—a man she had known for only a few hours.

I was turnin' over in my mind just how we could save her lover for her, but I seen that it was too late. To confess would of meant that me and my maestro would hang. And I wasn't ready for no such party as that. So I just shut up and watched.

The sheriff got worked up by the gal's cries and started to swear and snort about and say that he never yet had a lynchin' without some woman tried to side with the prisoner just through plain, fool female sentiment. She would have to stay out of it, he swore.

"I won't stay out of it," the gal cried franticlike. "I'll follow you down there! I'll cling to him so's you'll have to hang both of us. I'll fight to the last ditch—" at this she takes her father's six-gun away from him and points it at the sheriff's star. Which the sheriff gits first white in the face, and then red, seein' himself stuck up afore all his henchmen and by a gal at that.

He put up his hands when he seen the blaze in the gal's eyes and nary a one of us there doubted but that she was goin' to pot him. The only one that wasn't scairt was the old father.

He stepped up calmlike to her, thrustin' his own lanky carcass in between her gun and the chunky carcass of the sheriff. Then he took hold of his daughter's wrist and wrenched the gun from her.

Well, that was all that Sheriff Klepp wanted with a gal on the scene.

"I'll be caterwopously damned if I'll stand for any fool game like this! Lock up that little skirt somewheres and leave us git along with our business."

Her own dad shoved the poor, distracted little sage-hen into a room and locked the door.

"That's more like it," says Sheriff Klepp.

"They's a window to that room," says the sutler humbly.

Then the sheriff he asked, was there any man who would stay at the window and see that she'd keep out of the game? A lynch party in the desert ain't exactly the kind of game them deputies generally let any one set in on. But on the other hand all the deputies wanted to be in on the hangin'. So nary a one of 'em would offer to stay behind with such a fool business as keepin' a gal locked up in a room.

Of course, the old dad could of stayed, but the sheriff he wanted him to be a witness at the hangin', bein' it was his two pards as was murdered.

So for a minute no one spoke. But then the sutler Juan Higgins he seen clear enough that he was elected to the job.

"I'll stay, chief," he says quiet and humble. "I've seen enough hangin's down this way."

This satisfied the sheriff, and he said: "The rest of you birds come down and witness this tight-rope ack."

But just then some one else spoke up, and who should it be but my maestro:

"Me and my old pard," he said, referring to me, "have seen enough of sufferin' and misery down there in Sody Mesa Desert. And comin' again to civilization we ain't sot on witnessin' a execution the first thing. We want rest and we want peace," he added in a weary tone.

Now I had a sort of meachin' in my brains that disaster was headin' our way. The maestro should of let well enough alone, I said to myself, bein' we had got along this far without no one suspectin' us.

But right then he busts into the game instead of keepin' still, and Ted Walling the prisoner shouted out that my maestro was most likely the man who had planted all this on him.

But the sheriff wouldn't listen to no such fool augurin'. He knew my maestro, Tex Laco.

"Tex has helped me round up a prisoner once before this," he said. "And I know he's safe."

The fack is Tex had helped him run down a man once which by the way was a innocent man and was bein' accused for a crime that Tex himself had committed. This was only the old story all over again.

And here was Tex beknown to the sheriff and his posse. And here was a desert stranger with all the marks of guilt pinned onto him. Well, needless to say the sheriff waren't goin' to waste much time to choose betwixt them two men as to which was guilty and which waren't.

"Put the hemp on his neck, saddle his horse, and we'll all ride down to the gulch," he announced calmly.

Ted Walling begged for time. He wanted a trial—just a small one, no regular judge or jury, no city court room or anything the likes of that—just a little trial for to give him a chance to explain. But what could he explain? Nary a word could he say that didn't get him deeper in trouble

The little gal having fallen in love with him—well, that didn't weigh overly much with Klepp and his deputies. It was a woman's business. And that woman was the only person who would raise a word in his defense.

While he was still begging for time and for a last word to the gal they dragged him out to the corral. There they hoisted him up to the saddle—three or four of 'em by main force, and every time he tried to resist, why, they tightened the little old noose about his Adam's apple till he choked.

It wasn't a very agreeable spectacle, I'll tell you. Especially from my way of lookin', me bein' an old man and knowin' all along that the kid was as innocent as a new-born lamb.

V.

ALL this time the gal was cryin' and poundin' on the door. Her dad was goin' to her to calm her, but the sheriff said he would admire to have him come along.

"Those two desert muckers, Laco and his pard, they'll see that she don't get out," he said.

So the posse mounts without another word, and I watched 'em all clattering off down the rock trail toward the gulch.

I was hopin' for somethin' to happen—which I never hoped that-a-way before in all my days. I was hopin' that a band of Papagoes would come swoopin' down out of a sierra cañon and break up that lynch party. I was yearnin' that lightnin' would come down out'n the sky and strike 'em all daid—all except Ted Walling and the gal who was left in the outfittin' post.

And above all I sure did hope that some power out'n heaven would send down a thunderbolt or something and crack Tex Laco's rotten old skull into bits.

But nothin' happened that could in any way be called, as they say, divine intervenin'. The intervenin' that did come, came because of human weaknesses and wishes.

They was gold hid somewheres near that there outfittin' post, as I told you-all. The gal and her father, you remember, snuck out at dead of night after discoverin' the murders, and buried it somewheres.

Well, when the posse was gone and Tex Laco, the crawlin' reptyle was left alone in the honkytonk with me and the gal—she bein' locked up in that room—why, he begun thinkin' fast.

He wanted that gold. He knew I wanted it. The gal who was our prisoner, why, she knew where it was at.

"I want to talk privatelike to that there gal," he says. "You go out to the window where Juan Higgins is watchin' and tell him you want a drink. I'll come along and say I'll stand guard while he tends bar. A little money for drinks will seem a powerful lot more important to him than keepin' a poor moanin', weepin' woman locked up in a room. If she did get away, it wouldn't be much of a loss anyways."

So we worked it along them lines. I asked for a drink, and Juan he says O. K. he'd tend bar. And the maestro says he'd set at the window. And Juan says he would bring drinks out to us. And we would all three put down a few good slugs for to quiet our nerves, bein' the events of the last night weren't any too joyful like.

So he beat it inside to the bar—and there we were—my maestro and me out in the corral just below the window where the gal was at.

She was just climbin' out, and I reckon it was a sort of feelin' in her bones like you call intuition, which they say many women have, that made her stop when she seen us.

She stared at the maestro like she seen a snake, and let out a scream which they weren't no voice to it. Just a sort of gasp.

"What do you want?" she cried, looking daftlike first at the maestro, then at me.

"We want to help you," said the maestro, showing his two nippers in a grin.

She looked like she was goin' to leap from the window onto the maestro's throat,

like she was a Mex lioness ready for to spring from a bowlder on her victim. But I reckon she had only one desire first and foremost in her mind and that was to save her lover.

"I'm not the one who needs help," she said. "It's that innocent man who they're takin' down there to lynch."

"He's the one we're goin' to help," says the maestro, grinnin' again.

This stumped her. At least it kep' her from springin' down at us—and after she had stared at us like some one wakened up from a nightmare, she cries:

"*You're* the man!"

"Wait now," the maestro said calm enough. "Just wait and leave us work this out amicable like. I can save your man for you. There's ways. I'm a good shot. And so's this here old coot, my mozo. And they's a couple Papago Indians snoopin' around down there in the gulch awaitin' my beck and call."

This was a lie in a couple different ways. They weren't no Papagoes. Further and more I can't hit the side of a shake-barn. I couldn't quite see what-all the maestro was headin' for, but I kep' my mouth shut and listened.

"Your man's innocent. I believe that," he said, his voice shakin' with a kind of false feelin'.

This got the gal over to his side, and she showed she was goin' to listen to reason. She leaned down over the sill of the window and said, shakin' all over—her lips, her hands, her shoulders: "Go on, tell me what your game is! And for the love of Heaven hurry! There's not a moment to lose!"

So he told her. He would do some miraculous sharp-shootin', which I'll say he could have done if he had had a mind to. And he said we would hold the posse up as they was ridin' along in the bed of the gulch toward the pine tree.

He said if the gal rode in just in the nick of time while we and the two Papago Injuns was holdin' the posse up, and, if she stuck a six-gun into her lover's hands and told him to ride hell-bent for the desert clutch at any straw. There waren't no time to lose—even if we took a steep short-cut and rode like bats out'n hell—if we wanted to git to the pine tree afore the posse got there.

"Then if you have any pity in your fiendish souls for a innocent man, get to your hosses quick," she said. "And I'll follow you and do whatever you want."

So help me I believe she would have shot down every man of the posse if it had been the way to save that kid from the noose. And you should have seen her jump. Like a little deer that springs from the top of a crag she lit like a feather on the corral ground. She flew toward her hoss, and swung a saddle on same quicker'n either of us knew what had happened.

"Now not so fast, my *señorita,*" said the maestro, swingin' along toward her, hitchin' his belt and grinnin' and spittin'. "They's somethin' else that's got to be settled first."

She stopped just as she had her foot in the stirrup, and turned and looked up at him.

He was a tall, rangy man, and not very prepossessing to womenfolk. And I seen a shudder go through her as their eyes met.

If she had had any doubts about who had knifed them two old muckers up in that bunkroom of the cantina she didn't have nary a doubt now.

"You are the murderer." That's what she said.

He grinned. "All right. Bein' we ain't got much time to augur I better admit it right off'n the bat. I killed your two old mozos."

Her eyes flashed and her slim purty shoulders give a kind of shudder. Then her lips, curlin' back in the whitest scorn I ever did see on a human face, she cried:

"Go on and tell me what you want me to do to right this terrible wrong!"

"I want a powerful lot," he said. "And my old henchman here wants a powerful lot likewise. If we show our hands to that posse there won't be much left for us in this here life except to ride hell-bent for days through a burnin' desert, and acrost

food and a few comforts, to make up for the trouble we been through—the trouble for rightin' this here wrong, as you say."

"I'll give you anything," she cried, "if you'll only get our horses and come on."

"That's talkin'," says the maestro. But he rolled a cigareet, and they waren't a tremor to his long, brown, spidery fingers. "I knew right well you'd listen to reason. You've got a lot of savvy. I seen right away that you were the only one in the whole honkytonk—this whole outfittin' post—that knew what was what. That young hombre is as innocent of a wrong as a child. Them old coots ridin' along with Sheriff Klepp should of known that. Just to look at him *you* knew it."

He was sure leadin' up well to what he was goin' to say.

She gasped out hysterical: "Tell me what you want. I'll give you everything in the world that I can get my hands on."

So the maestro announced without battin' an eye:

"*That there gold dust your dad was totin'.*"

"I can't!"

"You can, and you will."

"It's his!" she cried. "His work for years. He's worn his hands and his heart out gettin' that gold—and now he's goin' outside to live in peace."

"That's where we're goin'," said the maestro, puffin' easy at his cigareet. "Not your dad, but *us*. We're goin' to live."

She wrung her hands and moaned and begged them not to ask her for that, but it waren't no good. The maestro just puffed and smiled and said:

"Time's gittin' short, what with this here palaverin'."

"He mustn't hang—he mustn't!" she cried in misery. Then of a sudden "It's yours—all of it! Come on!"

"The gold first," said the maestro.

"No!" she cried out.

But just then the sutler comes waddlin' out with a bottle of redeye and three glasses. He had most like took a swig or two of his own first, bein' his fat face was all lit up with sweat.

The sight of the gal gettin' aboard a bronc didn't seem to faze him. I reckon he didn't think she would stop the hangin' anyways, bein' the sheriff was so sot on goin' through with it. And besides that, he waren't goin' to mix in with no woman's business. A bottle of redeye for to forget that terrible night—that's all he cared about.

But when the gal seen him she figured that he would try and glom onto her and keep her from savin' her lover. So she cried out all of a sudden:

"I'll give you the gold. I'll show you where we hid it. Come on, I beg you."

"No more palaverin'. The gold first." The maestro made it clear.

"Yes, first," she said, swinging her horse up toward the cliffs of the mesa. She knew right well that time was gettin' powerful precious.

So the maestro took a swig of redeye, wiped his mouth with his sleeve, thanked the sutler, and swung aboard his mount. I followed.

The sutler sure did gape and wonder what in tarnation had happened. He stood there with the bottle in one hand and the glass in the other, and the last I seen of him he was pouring himself a drink, which he certainly needed same.

VI.

THE gal set the pace. It was all we could do to keep up with her little bronc as she climbed them steep mule-deer trails up into a high box cañon. Looking back into the bottomlands where the morning light had worked itself 'way down and filled the dry river bed with blue mirages, we seen the posse.

They was crawling along like ants, slow and deliberate, which was the method picked by custom to ride to a lynchin'. While we was gallopin' our little mounts like we was goin' to a fire, they was walkin' theirs like to a funeral.

But the time was gettin' precious just the same, and it was mighty important that we shag down there to the pine a good space ahead of the lynchers and get our positions so's we could make a clean holdup.

Well, things turned out different than either me or the gal expected. We never

held up that posse. I ain't so sure we would of succeeded anyways. At night it might of been done; but not now.

The gal took us straight to where the gold had been hid. No more arguin' from her. There wasn't time. She had put all her faith in the maestro's word—which was sure a fool thing to do.

But what other chance did she have to save her lover? Nary a one. Trust in the word of a poisonous rattler of a gunman—that was the only course open to her, and she took same.

They had buried the gold in a thick clump of mesquite which it would have took a good long while to find it if we didn't know just where to look for it. The mesquite is like a sort of tent of thick branches intertwining with theirselfs and the alkali-covered leaves.

In betwixt this matting of leaves and branches and the acre of ground which it covered there was an open space about a couple feet high. Which a man could crawl into it and work his way along any direction he wanted, bein' completely covered by the mesquite matting.

The gal knew just which way to crawl, and we followed her. About the center of the acre of this brush we come upon a newly packed hole which the gold had been buried in it at a depth, I might say, of scarcely more'n a couple feet.

We scraped out the loose earth with our hands, and there, sure enough, was eight little rawhide bags like wallets. Which the maestro opened one and seen it was full of gold dust.

"It's the stuff all right," I said, trembling all over.

Already I begun to think of Paris and the rest of my days in luxury. No more thirst; no more hunger; no more trailin' through the Bad Lands, with a posse comin', with your Adam's apple itching with fear of the hemp, and your tongue cleavin' to the roof of your mouth from gyp water, and your stomach squirmin' with hunger.

Canned sardines! Blooey! Redeye from the time I awakes to the time I goes dead asleep with the effecks thereof! French mozos to fall at my feet when I clap my hands and order a canned supper.

My mouth watered. My little old chest begun to heave. I swore. I cried out.

Then I stopped all of a sudden, because I seen the gal gripping my maestro by the shoulders. They was both down low underneath the mesquite same as I was. And I tell you it was a queer-lookin' trio—insects crawlin' under a rug, fightin', burnin' up with gold lust or fear or victory, as the case might be, each one of us havin' a different idee in our half crazed brains.

Well, right then I happened to think. We would have one more terrible gun fight. We would have one more trip through the guts of them Bad Lands, which was the guts of hell.

Many days hounded by a mad posse. Thirst, hunger, dread, no sleep, torture, sunstroke—and all the time totin' along with us a lot of bags of gold.

The gal was screamin' out loud and tearin' at the maestro, tellin' him to hurry, if he was human. Her lover would be at the pine tree right now. Maybe it was too late!

"Come on, Tex," I said as the maestro was stuffin' the bags into his shirt, his teeth showin', his lips tremblin', his throat makin' a funny sound like he was laughin' from the effecks of jimson-weed. "The gal's kep' her part of the bargain. We got to keep ourn."

We all stood up, breaking through the mesquite so that we was out in the glaring sun waist high in the brush and our eyes blinkin'.

"For the love of Heaven, get to your mounts!" The gal was nigh to tearin' her throat with her hysterics.

But the maestro just stood there blinkin', with a gold bag in each hand and the rest tucked away. The sun kind of blinded him. And when he looked at the gal it seems like he didn't see where she was at.

Then he says, like he hadn't heard a word from her all this time: "What's that you been sayin', child?"

"The holdup and fight! My man is being hanged! We've got to fight!"

The maestro's face broke up—like it was dry red adobe—and was crumblin' to pieces. It broke up, I say, into a terrible smile.

"Why, how funny you talk, child!" Them was the words that he spewed out from his mouth.

VII.

THE gal turned ashen pale and reeled back like she'd been cut in the chest with a knife. It shore was terrible to see that look when she first realized that she had been sagebrushed.

I don't reckon I had any too calm a look on my face either. Although it was just like that varmint Tex Laco to go back on his word thisaway, it was beyond my dreams that he could of pulled such a Injun trick as this. And on a helpless little gal who was fightin' to the last ditch for to save her man.

"You mean you lied!" she kind of gasped so I couldn't hardly hear her. "You've gone back on your word—you've gypped me like this—you—"

But she didn't wait to hear any more of his excuses or see him smile taunting at her. Tex Laco and his ornery crawlin' trickery was outen her mind in the bat of an eye.

I was outen her mind. We didn't no longer exist. They was but one thing she was sot on—that was to save her man.

Without another word to us, she pirouetted around and started tearin' her way through the mesquite for the barren sand beyond. Never did I see any human or animal fightin' so madly.

She was like a fly tryin' without no success to buzz itself free from a strong web. In fack, that's just what a big mesquite patch is like—a web. And unless you leap over it by a lot of consec'tive bounds, or else crawl underneath it, why, you're just plain caught.

The mesquite thorn tore her skirt and her woolen shirt, and it tore the leather cuffs from her hands, and it tore her skin.

And afore we knew what-all she was tryin' to do, we seen that she had headed for her little cuitan which was standin' where we-all had left our mounts at the edge of the patch.

"She'll ride down thar to the gulch and tell the posse what-all's happened!" the maestro cried all of a suddint.

And he sure did speak a mouthful of good savvy when he uttered them words.

"Go after her and rope her!" he said to me.

I just stood thar, my jaw hangin', and my eyes poppin' out as I watched her.

"What-all's the matter?" he snarled at me. "Are you deef?"

I was deef all righto. No doubt about that—deef as a post to any more rotten, snivelin' orders from that coyote.

He just give me one look, and might be he figured I was dazed at the sight of that gold we'd found, or dazed with the heat of the desert mornin', or drunk, or what not. Anyway he didn't stop to ax me questions.

Somethin' was wrong with me—he knew that well enough, bein' it was about the first time I ever disobeyed his orders. So what does he do but take a couple long leaps over the mesquite brush, and then a couple more, and land with a wallop right up alongside the tuckered-out gal.

She sank to her knees—all her breath gone with the crazed way she's been beatin' ag'in' that mesquite thorn. Never has eye seen such a pitiable spectacle as that thar child. All hope gone. Her lover most like gettin' the hemp dabbed onto him at that very moment.

Her father's gold gone. And what was worse than everythin' put together, the fack that she had been pounced onto by this here reptyle who'd busted up her whole life.

Not that he was rough with her. He didn't have to be. She was all petered out. She could only gasp for breath like she'd been drownded and picked outen the water. And I reckon her mind was kind of in the same fix. She was stunned.

I come up closer to 'em, and I seen her eyes. I said it was like she'd been cut in the chest. But no—it was more like some one had give her a good wallop with the heft of an ax, and knocked her out. She waren't even standin' up. *He* was holdin' her.

We were near a kind of pathway in the mesquite, and he was able to tote her along, packin' her in his arms, and settin' her in her saddle. Of course he had to rope her

arms. She would of fallen off, I reckon. He walked his own hoss alongside hers, and they started for a south trail.

But afore he left he seen me standin' thar, starin', my ole wrinkled jaw still dropped, my eyes red as fire like I'd been travelin' in black alkali, and my tongue hangin' out.

Don't know what I looked like. It must of been powerful funny—bein' he laughed when he seen me. I was like a steer which has been chawin' at loco-weed most like—because their eyes go red and their tongues hang out.

Well, for the first time in his life, the varmint sized up what I was a-thinkin', and sized it up wrong. He figured I was worryin' about that thar gold.

We was always supposed to divvy up our swag—he gettin' the lion's share naturally enough, bein' it was him always done the killin'. He knew well enough that the thought of gold always worked over me like a powerful hot drink and got me sort of hysterical at times. But this time it was somethin' else makin' me like that.

"You'll git your part of the swag, pard," he said softly and friendly. "I ain't double crossin' you. Oh, no. I know enough not to do that. You'd ha'nt me to my dyin' day. You kin come along to Mexico with me and my gal."

I still stood deef and gapin'.

"You understand me, pard? You're comin' along. We got gold enough to live on the rest of our days. You won't eat no more puvulu or mesquite beans or chuckawallas. You eat canned stuff from now on!"

I nodded my head, like I was dodderin'. Then I found myself sayin' in a queer voice:

"You won't never git to Mexico. You won't—and that gal won't."

He didn't quite git the drift of my remarks. Because he thought I was worryin' about the posse trailin' us. And most sure they'd of got us, bein' we was without water or a food pack.

And if we lit out across the big plain which stretched out just below them mesas where we was at, why, they'd be able to see us miles away—like we was black dots on a white sheet of paper.

So he says: "I'm headin' up to the Big Mesas for to hide till nightfall. I'll take the gal with me. You go to Juan Higgins's place, git a food and water pack, and give him a good snootful of this gold dust for to keep his mouth shut. Meet me with your packs at the xacalli up on Puma Mesa. And mind you don't come till its dark, betwixt sunset and moonrise."

I stood dodderin' and drivelin' at the mouth, which he took it to mean that I was still the old mozo El Perro, the Dog, for to be kicked about and give orders to, and git food packs, and feed the hosses and cover the tracks so to speak, and do the scoutin'.

Not even then did the maestro realize that I had changed a whit. You see, he was goin' on the fairly reasonable idee that I'd stick by him and do what he said and follow him, bein' he still had that gold.

He poured out a little of it for me to buy the pack with and to bribe Juan Higgins, and then without my sayin' nary a word, and without his suspectin' what was in my mind, why, he swung up alongside of the gal, stirrup to stirrup with her, and a strong holt onto her arm. And I seen them trailin' down to the mouth of the gully, then up a steep barranca, where he disappeared betwixt the rock walls, then out agin high above, headin' toward a dee-vide.

And what did I do?

Now I've got somethin' for to tell you. Which it'll warm the cockles of your heart if they's any man's blood in your veins.

Not that I was much of a hero. Oh, no. Don't know of any raid or fight, or escape or capture which I've been in durin' my long life of adventure that I ever showed up as much of a hoss opery hero. As I've said, I left all the gun work to my pard.

Washin' dishes in sand was the most heroic thing I ever done, which I done a lot of it in my seventy years. Mashin' mesquite beans to flour, diggin' tule roots for to make mush, feeding our broncs, and wunst in a great while curryin' 'em—that thar's the romance of my life.

But here, leave me remark, I done somethin' which I'd admire to have some one

write a cowboy song about it. I'd admire to hear it sung in frontier bars. I'd admire to have some Papago weave a blanket picturin' it with his red and yaller zigzags and symbols.

I rode down to the gulch—hellbent I rode—tearin' down the slope of the cañon, gallumpin' across bowlder washes, racin' madly across the bottoms, then up to the next divide, and down agin so's my hoss slid on his haunches down somethin' which you most likely call a sheer cliff—if you'd seen what I looked like when I was through.

My old carcass, torn by jagged rocks, my knees mashed by bowlders, my shirt ripped from my back by mesquite and cactus.

And I got there—

I got there just as they was haulin' at the lass-rope.

I got there—lookin' far down on the posse, a bunch of little black dots—like ants gathered about a wounded butterfly.

And I lifted my six-gun and fired all shots into the air and yelled like seven devils was tearin' my innards out.

And all the while I sent my ole cuitan a-gallumpin' and slidin' and crashin' down the landslide of rocks and sticks and sand.

I cain't quite recollect at any time in my life offerin' anythin' which you'd call it a prayer. But I sure did do somethin' powerful lot like prayin' as I come hurtlin' down that thar cliff.

Maybe it was only swearin', but I changed the words around a little so's it would sound like a prayer—in case they was any Power up above which could hear me.

Anyways, the posse down there heard them shots, and they turned up to look. They seen I was worth watchin'—leastwise for a minute or two, till they could find out just what sort of a circus ack I was offerin' for their entertainment.

The tight rope ack which they was makin' Ted Walling do for 'em down there in the bottoms of the cañon, why, it wasn't a drop in the bucket compared to what I was doin'.

All as I need to say, to make my point clear, was that they left off a-pullin' at that lass-rope.

They decided to leave their prisoner have another gasp or two of life, until they could satisfy theirselfs what in tarnation was comin' down to join their party.

VIII.

And that much of my job waren't the hardest, either. I had a good long row ahead of me yet.

When I got down to the bowlder wash where the posse was at, I fell off'n my hoss and tried to git my breath, while a couple men kneeled down beside me and axed me questions, the general drift of which was, "How come?"

My first words I'd been rehearsin' to myself I managed to git 'em out—after I'd spit out the sand and mesquite sticks that was chokin' me.

"Ted Walling—he ain't your man!"

This didn't seem to impress nobody in particular. Maybe because they'd all made up their mind that Walling *was* their man, and that any statement contrariwise was like heresy; which no matter how much proof you have to argufy with, you won't be believed anyway if you're tryin' to bust up a man's religion.

It was generally a religion with this here posse that the man they was hangin' was guilty.

But I figured maybe no one had heard just exactly what I'd said, so I said it agin:

"Walling didn't kill them hombres back at the posada. He's innocent. It was my pard—a hell-bendin', murderous reptyle, if ever there was one in human shape!"

I looked at Walling right then, and I seen he'd sunk to his knees, bein' they'd already given him a yank which all but busted his neck. He turned his beet-red face toward me and tried to call out, but nary a sound could he make—not as yet.

"Where-all did you drop from?" the sheriff roared at me. "And what-all's happened since we left you two muckers up thar at Juan Higgins's?"

"They's a whole lot happened, chief!" I said, regainin' my breath by this time. The men come troopin' over to me and gathered around, and for a few minutes only a couple of 'em stood by the prisoner

—with their hands still on the lass-rope. "And I'll tell you all what's happened when you leave that innocent young hombre there go free."

"I don't generally leave any one bust into my hangin's this-away," Sheriff Klepp snorted. It was plain to be seen he was all het up and mad enough, and sot on goin' through with the business.

"Not even if you're hangin' a innocent man?" I shot back.

"He was proved as guilty as any man I ever run down!" Klepp cried. "And if you think you're goin' to come Injun on us this-away and save that hombre by any tricks, I'll string you up alongside of him—"

"Leave him have his say, chief."

It was the white-haired ole giant—the gal's dad—that said this. He'd been the first to suspect Ted Walling, but he wasn't quite so sot on hangin'—not until everythin' was cleared up legal-like.

"You say he was proved guilty," I went on fast and excited. "Sure he was. And who proved him guilty? Me! That's who! Me and my pard—that reptyle Tex Laco—"

"Tex Laco—" the sheriff began.

And I knew what he was goin' to say. He was goin' to say that Laco helped him run down another hombre wunst. So I told him:

"Tex pulled this same game on you once before, chief. He helped you find a victim, which Tex had already planted a crime on him. And you hanged him, and never suspected Tex from that day to this. And he done it again last night. He made me go out to the calf-shed for to rummage around Ted Walling's effects, and steal a beaded vest and a bowie knife—which he used same when stealin' in on those two ole muckers in their bunk room last night. There's the whole story, chief!"

This had got most of the posse over, and I seen that the chief was beginnin' to look worried. Could it be possible he'd made a mistake? That was the look on his face.

And you'd say it couldn't—he was that sot whenever his jaw was fixed.

"If this here is a trick," he said, his lips pressed almost shut, and his jaw whitenin' at the corners and his head lowered stiff in my direction like he was a bull—

"It ain't a trick, chief. Ain't I confessin'? How come a man would confess somethin' that means the hemp for his own neck? What do I gain? I want to see that young kid git free—and go save his gal. That's what I gain—"

By this time the prisoner had struggled up to his feet. And when he heard me say that about his gal, why he come staggerin' toward me. And likewise the ole white-headed prospector, he come rushin' to me likewise, and grabbin' holt of my shoulders and liftin' me up.

"What-all's happened to the gal!" Both of 'em shouted in one voice.

Then I told 'em. "Tex Laco—he's rustled her off—off to Mexico."

This sure did wake the posse up for fair. Nary a thought was given from then on to the prisoner. A gal bein' abducted, no matter by what sort of a man, sent shivers runnin' down the back of every mother's son of 'em.

"Let's get at the truth of this quick, chief!" the little ole deputy cries out as he was wipin' the sweat from his glasses.

"Now, wait!" the sheriff commanded, still taut all over, and his neck muscles bulgin' as he faced me.

It sure did come hard for him to give up his faith in hisself. He'd been within the ace of hangin' the wrong man, and the idee didn't set well on his stomach.

"I been gypped out of my prisoners afore this," he said. "Specially when I'm down here in the desert. How do I know you ain't tryin' to git him off? How do I know you ain't fixin' him so's he kin fight us?"

This seemed like a fool idee—except for the fack that every man thar could see Ted Walling was a powerful dangerous-lookin' fighter. And I knew well enough the sheriff wouldn't of give him back his gun—no matter if he did free him.

So I answered: "If I say you could hang me, would you believe I'm tellin' the truth?"

The posse come out with a lot of oaths, sayin' yes, they'd hang me and believe me,

but first they wanted to know what trail to take for to get the gal.

"Leave off this palaver about lynchin' till I find out what-all's happened to my gal!" the frantic ole father cried.

"That thar's a right sensible remark, chief," the hoss-doctor said. "Come on to your hosses, men."

"For hell's sake!" Sheriff Klepp shouted. "You shut up, doc, and leave me handle this." Then he turns to me and says: "Where's the gal at—and this man you say is the real murderer—where is he?"

"I kin take you there," I said, feelin' the first bit of relief. You see I knew all of a suddint that they couldn't possibly hang me till I told 'em where the gal was at.

Sheriff Klepp he sure was up ag'in' a stump. Never had a lynchin' party of his been balled up so complete and effectual.

There he was with his prisoner Ted Walling ready to hang, and another ole coot—meanin' myself—comes in and confesses to everything. And at the same time a gal is in distress and the posse is all worked up about where she's at. And the only one to lead the way was myself. The sheriff couldn't hang Walling and he couldn't hang me.

So the chunky little bulldog, he swears and spits, and then tyin' his beard tight under his chin so's to pull his jowls down snug ag'in' his jaws, he turns to his men:

"Come on, boys. We'll ride. These two men, Walling and this little desert rat, are our prisoners till we find out just what the trick is."

They was all—every man Jack of 'em—in their saddle afore he'd finished speakin'. The lass-rope was unhitched from Walling's neck, and my six-gun was appropriated by his nibs the sheriff.

I swung aboard my poor tuckered out ole fuzztail and ridin' stirrup to stirrup with the sheriff I led the way up the cañon side over the Hog's-Back to the next cañon and then up toward the Big Mesas.

IX.

WALLING he rode along with us right at our heels—alongside of the gal's father. both of 'em all worked up somethin' awful, and Walling prayin' aloud that it would fall to his lot to meet the reptyle face to face—bare-handed or any ways. Didn't make no difference, said he.

The rest of the posse trooped along behind us, and in that order we trailed for miles higher and higher into the Big Mesas.

By sundown we got into a region of deep cañon and granite gorges which it was all even a mule deer could do to trail along them rock ledges without slippin'. My maestro, Tex Laco, you understand, had been coverin' the same ground all durin' that day. I don't reckon he arrived at the designated hidin' place much afore we did.

The best part of it all was this: the gorges was so deep and the country so broke up with divides and gulches that Tex, ridin' along with his prisoner, didn't get nary sign of the posse trailin' him. And the earth bein' so rocky we didn't kick up any dust. It was in plain terms a paradise for fugitives.

And if I hadn't knowed just exactly where Tex was goin' to be at, we couldn't any more of found him than we could of found a needle in a haystack.

We got within a half mile of the gorge where the miner's shack was, where Tex was goin' to hide and wait for me. It was a gulch which they called it the Devil's Pocket, on account of its bein' a deep, oblong-shaped hole in the earth which you'd think the bottom of it reached down to the nether regions themselves.

I knew the place well. We'd hid there afore this many a time, and nary a wanderin' Papago or renegade breed ever went down into them depths for fear of the Bad Mind as the Injuns call it, keepin' 'em there imprisoned.

Once, many years afore this, a miner had found a lode down there, built his little shack and ore-crusher and worked at it a couple years. This shack was down in the bottom where it was cool and where the sun scarcely ever reached it.

Well, when I announced to the posse that we'd come to the end of our trail, they all got excited, like hounds knowin' they've cornered their quarry. Ted Walling he was all feverish with the hope that he could get even on that hellbender, Laco, for the

measly crawlin' trick he'd played on him—and likewise that he could get him afore any harm should come to the gal. The ole dad was half crazy what with worryin' about the gal—and so for that matter was every man on the posse.

And I said: "That's just it. We got to think of the gal first and foremost. If we go bustin' down there into that gorge, why we'll be seen by the hellbender, and he kin pick us off one by one—because you have to climb down there slow. You cain't ride. You have to drop from one bowlder to the next and stay out in the open. He could keep a tribe of Yaquis off—just singlehanded. Meanwhile he'd shield hisself behind the gal."

This calmed down a good bunch of the posse, and they said the only thing was a siege. But the father wouldn't hear of it. She must be saved right pronto—and no palaverin' would hold him from goin' down.

Ted Walling he voiced the same identical sentiments. But bein' he had no gun, he didn't sound too overly important.

Then I said to 'em all: "If you want to besiege that thar critter, you'll have a hard time, bein' they's water down there. And it would take a week to break him and starve him out. Meanwhile the gal would be starvin' same as him."

So it began to look like a powerful tricky problem. But I had my plan all worked out, and I was just waitin' for the posse to bump themselves up ag'in' a stone wall, as you might say, and find out that they was no other way to do this business except my way.

Darkness came in a jiffy—turnin' from blood-red light to a pitch dark afore you knew it. Sheriff Klepp, he took my advice and kep' his men from goin' within a furlong of the gulch, so's they waren't no chanct of the hellbender down there in the miner's shack to find out that he was actually surrounded.

By surrounded I mean just what I say. Afore we were to make any attack whatsomever, the sheriff was to string his men in a big circle all around the rim of the gulch—makin' 'em all stay, as I've remarked, a furlong from the cliff edge.

All this took a little time—especially since they was a lot of confusion. The gal's father had to be kep' back by main force until he was shown clear and straight that if he went down the whole game was up.

Ted Walling would of shagged down there bare-handed to fight the hellbender except that he had some sense and knew we had to do this thing cautiouslike. One mistake might mean disaster. I warned 'em that Laco wouldn't hesitate to kill the gal if he gained his ends thereby.

Well, as soon as it was pitch dark I said: "The time has come."

And I explained to them that I knew the way down there. It was a right tricky bit of trail, and if any one tried to git down without he knew the way, he'd dash his carcass ag'in' a bowlder wash a couple hundred feet below.

"I'll lead the way," I said. "But the posse cain't follow—"

"So ho," says Sheriff Klepp. "You've confessed yourself an ornery cutthroat of a bandit, and want us to let you get away?"

I asked how could I git away if he strung a circle of men around the rim of the gulch.

He allowed I'd gained that point, and said: "Tell us the rest of your game?"

"I want one man—one only—to go down with me," I said.

Ted Walling and the gal's father spoke up quick.

"I said only one!" was my answer.

"I'm armed," says the ole father. "And I'll sure shoot straight."

"Laco sure shoots straight," I says, "and he shoots powerful quick when he finds hisself cornered. You're too old," I told him without no hedgin'. "I'm a old man myself, and I dassent go up ag'in' him with a six-gun. What we need is a young man."

Sheriff Klepp, he peers around at his deputies for to see if any one would dast go down into that gorge and meet Laco. But the night air, the darkness, the dead silence of them Bad Lands had worked 'em over a bit, and climbin' down thar into the center of the earth didn't exactly look invitin' to the men.

"We should of done this in daylight, chief," one of 'em grumbles from behind the shoulders of a couple others.

" Me with my spectacles," says the little hoss doctor, " ain't a very good combination."

" Three or four of us should orter go down," says another.

" One man only," says I, " or the game's sure to be rooked."

" Give me a six-gun and leave me go," Ted Walling begged of the sheriff.

Now you kin plainly see that the sheriff had no reason in the world not to let Walling go. Even if it was some sort of trick what would be lost by Walling's havin' a gat and climbin' down into that gorge?

He couldn't escape thataway. He was just puttin' hisself into a trap. On the other hand, everything pointed to the fack that what I'd confessed was bona fide.

" Leave him go, chief," the gal's dad said. " He'll do the job up better'n any of your own men—who've showed themselfs yaller. He'll bump off that hellbender at one shot if I know anythin' by the looks of a man's eye."

The rest of the posse was glad enough to shove this job onto Walling. Leastwise, there wasn't a one of 'em dast go down—with no other companion but me—a confessed bandit.

So the sheriff sticks a six-gun into Walling's hand. It was the six-gun which he'd frisked me of it earlier that day.

I didn't see the kid's face when his hand closed on that thar gat, but I heard a powerful keen ring to his voice when he next spoke. And it sure did send a thrill through my tired ole bones.

" You'll have a tricky job on your hands," I warned him. " My maestro, when you meet up with him, will draw as quick as any gunfanner you ever did see. It's like a snake's tongue stickin' out for a fly. You sure you got nerve enough for this job, kid?"

" I'll bump the damned reptyle into hell where he belongs," he answered, " and one shot's all I need."

" One shot's all you'll have time for," I told him.

X.

We crawled to the edge of the cliff, bein' careful not to leave our bodies show ag'in' the sky—which, even though it was nigh to pitch dark, still had a faint glow.

Then we dropped down to a ledge below and, takin' the kid's hand, I led the way along a narrow path which, if you missed it by a couple inches, you'd mash yourself to a pulp in the gorge bed far below.

Then we come to the end of this ledge, and dropped down on top of a big bowlder. Lookin' over you couldn't see nothin' but a yawnin' depth of jet black, and I told him to leap after I leaped.

We landed on a kind of alluvial fan—or landslide you might call it, of sand and stones. We waited till the shower of rocks and stones we'd started had quieted down, then we slid as easy as we could, fetchin' up in a lot of thorn chaparral.

Crawlin' through this I found another ledge, and we zigzagged down the steep gorge side, from bowlder to bowlder, through mesquite patches, and along the edge of a sheer precipice, gropin' our way. Then along the bowlder wash in a darkness that was like black velvet. You might of been in the bottom of a mine.

Then all of a sudden we heard voices.

" The shack's twenty feet away," I whispered.

Ted Walling got worried about the racket we'd made slidin' down them sandbanks, and bumpin' through the chaparral. But I said: " It's all jake. He expects me."

That was our little trump card. *The maestro expected me!* Most like he'd heard us—he's got ears like a jack rabbit, and he kin hear unusual sounds in his bones, bein' he's lived like a wild animal in the desert for so long.

Well, we crept up toward the shack and the maestro's voice come across to us clear, bein' they was no panes in the windows of the shack, and the walls wasn't much more'n a fence of shrunken, warped boards.

" Mexico City's where we'll spend most of the time," the voice was sayin'. " You don't like the looks of it now—do you? But wait. I'll turn into a gentleman when I'm dressed up. Think I'm a desert rat—do you? Oh, no. But if you don't show me a little affection, I might show a little rat blood."

We heard the moanin' of a gal's voice,

and I felt Ted Walling's arm turn stiff and taut, like it was bein' stretched to the point of tremblin'.

"Come here!" the voice says. "Might I'd better take that strap off'n your arms. If you'll promise not to scratch and bite. Think I'm a rat—ay? Yes, b' God I *am* a rat, if a woman don't kowtow to me. Lord and master—that's what I want to be called. El Perro—he calls me maestro! That's what you'll call me! Instead of that you kick and scratch and spit like a cat! Think I'll take that—oh, no! Not after I've promised you Mexico City and servants and carriages and bull fights! Me a rat! Damn you, I'll show you!"

He stopped kind of suddint, and they was a dead stillness. Not a breeze ever got down there. Not a twig of mesquite could you hear stirrin'. Not a gopher in its hole. Not a stone slippin' down the cliffside.

We found ourselfs like we was in the center of the earth with nary a light or a sound or a motion or anything to pin ourselfs to the world or to life as you might say.

You see, the maestro had caught somethin' in the air—tellin' him that he and the gal waren't the only ones down in that gorge bed.

Most like Ted Walling—listenin' to his spewin' oaths and his threats and jeers and love-makin' to the gal, had been careless about crawlin' toward the shack, and had made some sort of a rustle. Which I'll admit I didn't hear same myself, but that maestro was uncanny in the way he could sense danger.

"Hulloa—" the maestro's voice says quietlike, "I reckon El Perro is here."

Right then I jumped up, and walked straight and steady and heavy on my feet across the sand toward the shack.

"El Perro?" the maestro calls.

"El Perro," I shoots back in as calm a voice as I could find in my tight ole throat.

"You got the food and water pack?"

"I got everything you said, maestro."

"And you bribed Juan Higgins to hold his tongue?"

"I give him all the gold which was left, maestro."

"*Bueno*," he says. "And the hosses?"

"I left my hoss in the secret gully where you hid yourn," I answered.

"And did you meet up with any one?"

"Nary a Injun or desert wanderer did I see—nor a coyote nor sage hen," I said. "The desert's empty of all life. You kin light a light, maestro, and we will go out."

"First we will celebrate!" I heard him say.

"Come in here and light a light, El Perro. I brought our little jack lantern. There's no danger—and this gal is givin' too much trouble. Light a light. We eat and get drunk and then we go out."

I went up to the door. But I'd already warned Ted Walling not to come too close.

So when I opened the door I had the feelin' that Walling was already on his belly, crouchin' behind a bowlder for to fire as soon as he seen a light.

I fumbled around for a match and struck same and seen the jack-lantern and lit it.

The gal was there—starin' at me like a animal half torn to pieces and cornered in a hole. Never did I see such big eyes—and such fear.

Never did I see such a wretched-lookin' bein'—nary a human nor a wild thing—without a ray of hope from the dark sky above—without a crack in the black earth to crawl to and hide in.

I seen that her hands was bound in front of her and bleedin' at the wrists. She'd crept to a corner of the shack, and it was plain to be seen that if either me or the maestro approached we'd have somethin' to claw and bite our throats worse'n any puma.

The maestro was at the opposite corner of the room and betwixt them was a broken ole table and a barrel.

Well, the reptyle turned on me when I lit the light, and he said:

"Your hand is tremblin'."

"It is always tremblin', maestro."

"You're afraid."

"I'm afraid of the woman, maestro."

"Your voice—it's shakin'."

"I'm out of breath, maestro—climbin' down the cliff yonder."

I met his eyes and flinched.

"What lie have you told me, El Perro?"

"No lie, maestro. I never lie to you."

"Did you bring the pack—did you fix Juan Higgins? Are we bein' trailed?"

I fell to my knees, bein' I couldn't face them gimlet eyes of his any more. You cain't believe—you'd never believe—no man could believe—the fear-sway that thar reptyle had on this ole worn out desert lobo, meanin' myself.

I was a dog—and he was the master. And I cringed, and my muscles drew together, and my elbows pressed my sides, and my knees doubled up. I was kneelin' before him beggin' for my life.

Then with one bound he leaped toward me, as if meanin' to tear me to pieces, like a wolf springin' on a daid steer for to rend it. And a daid steer is shore what this ole man felt like.

But then what-all do you think happened?

The maestro stopped short as if frozen. As if some hand out'n Heaven had paralyzed him in the very act of pouncin' on a pore helpless ole coot who'd been his servant for many a long year.

His face turned gray, and his little gun-bore eyes bulged and showed the yaller whites all around. And his long lantern jaw dropped just a bit, and got stiff.

I knew what had happened. Ted Walling hadn't took the advice I give him. He didn't want to shoot from behind no rock. He wanted to stand up and face this killer, and leave him see who it was that was bumpin' him into hell.

Out'n the corner of my eyes I seen Walling—right there at the door!

Everything, of course, happened in the blink of an eye. But in that one blink—I seen the gal's face. It was as quick you might say as the blink of a camera—but it left a picture which nothin' will ever wash out—and which no sun will ever fade!

She had turned from a hopeless, miserable tattered wretch, like a broken doll cast off in the corner of a storeroom—into a picture some artist might paint of victory springin' up in the form of a beautiful woman—cryin' in glory, raisin' her arms, her eyes blazin' out all the triumph of all the fighters and armies in the world.

Two guns barked out like they was one. And it seemed to rend that quiet, silent little shack into a thousand bits, and it seemed to bring down the granite walls of the gulch in a avalanche of roarin' bowlders and crashin' echoes.

The maestro stiffens and his face makes a grimace, like he was laughin' at the idee that he could lose—like he was tryin' to bluff out God that he'd been plugged in the heart.

His knees sag—the first time I ever did see them thataway, and he reaches out like he wanted to grab some unseen bein' by the throat. But he misses gettin' holt of whatever it was he was grabbin' for, and sinks down. There he lay, flopped and shapeless—he was the broken doll now.

And in comes Ted Walling, his gun smokin', the smell of the powder like nectar to my ole wore-out nose.

And the gal ran to his arms, and sank there. Which it was a grander sight—a ragged gal in a little ole broken down shack in a gulch—a grander sight I say, than a victorious army marchin' home with its banners flyin' and bugles blowin' and drums beatin'!

There's my whole story, gents. But it ain't a plea of Not Guilty. No, siree, not by a long shot.

I've killed men in my day. And I'm ready to pay for it. But bein' this is Mule City, and this here jail is run along civilized lines, why, I expect you'll leave me order my last meal accordin' to my personal likes. Which I'd admire to have you go over to the chow stand next to Pedro's Bar and git me some canned sardines.

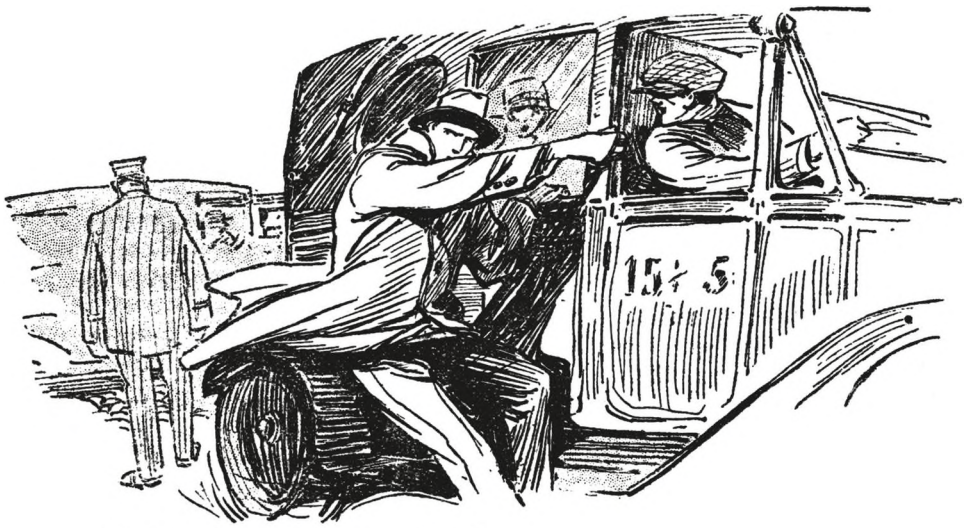
And when I eat same I'll say to myself: "Well, I'm eatin' sardines the rest of my life anyways."

Which I ain't so sure it's just as well eatin' one meal as twenty years or so at three meals a day. I might of worked it that-away, if I'd followed the maestro down to Mexico.

But I didn't. And I'll be satisfied with one meal. And that one meal will set better'n a couple thousand.

In particular when I think of that gal!

THE END



The Mysterious Stranger

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE SEAL OF SATAN" AND "THE GREAT COMMANDER"

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

A GENIAL stranger appears on the Boston Post Road, and forces Chester Moore to take him to New York, buy him new clothes, and even introduce him to the girl Chester likes the best, Eleanor Folsom. The stranger gives his name as "Montague Capulet." Other people can tell from associating with him that he has nice manners, and has evidently had a good education; but no one realizes that he is suffering from amnesia, complete loss of personal memory. Though he remembers lots of general information, the mysterious stranger does not know his own name, address, or profession. During the first night he leaves Chester's home, and takes several laboring jobs, finally securing work one morning posing as model for a "life class" in an art school. Eleanor Folsom is taking art lessons with this life class. When she and Montague see each other, they both flee from the studio in confusion. Eleanor leaves for home; Montague leaves for the dressing room, jumps into his clothes, and makes for his furnished room. As Part I ended, he was lying on his bed in his back hall bedroom, penniless, abashed, disgraced in his own eyes—in the depths of despair.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LORD, NO LESS.

AT the end of ten days he had made no progress whatever in deciphering the cryptogram which was his past, and he was in despair of his future. He had read the newspapers every day in hope of finding something which might set him on the right path, but despite the daily list of disappearances he found none which seemed to fit himself.

Longing for a confidant, he had made no friends, no acquaintances save Miss Levison, who would have nothing more to do with him, no doubt, because of his outra-

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geous behavior at the studio, which would reflect severely upon her as his sponsor.

He didn't like the young lady much—she had a way of eying him which made him uncomfortable—so the loss of her friendship would not irk him; he was much more concerned with the opinion which Eleanor must have of him, although he never expected to set eyes on her again.

Almost he was minded to go to the police, tell his tale, and turn over to them his problem, for, under medical care, he might speedily recall his past, while it seemed unlikely that his present course would ever bring the desired result.

But if they had no record of his disappearance, if his friends had not appealed to them, he would be a public charge, to be bundled off to some city institution, where he might remain for years before he was discharged, perhaps to be the subject of experiment by doctors whom he feared might take advantage of his helplessness.

And another consideration occurred to him. In his past life he might not have been a reputable citizen; if he were a wanted criminal, a murderer or a cracksman, how they would jeer at his tale of loss of memory, how they would railroad him to prison! While he felt confident he had never done anything wrong, he had no real reason for such confidence beyond his present unwillingness to perform a dishonest act despite his extreme need of money.

The morning after his disastrous début as an artist's model, he wandered into the public library, having conceived the idea that there might be books upon amnesia which would contain information regarding the treatment for which he dared not ask a physician.

There proved to be very little published on the subject, and this consisted of papers read by physicians to audiences of physicians, and couched in the usual perplexing verbiage of doctors.

It appeared that a great many physicians scoffed at the disease and denied its existence, while others confined themselves to particular cases which had come under their observation.

They made very dull reading and did not help him much, for in nearly every instance the physician depended entirely upon statements made by the patient, and Montague felt that some of these patients were deceiving credulous doctors, and alleging loss of memory to cover actions for which they were liable to get into trouble.

He found what seemed to be authentic instances of persons who received a blow on the head which caused loss of memory, but most of these cases lost memory of everything, and were like new-born babes with minds a blank page.

One or two of these recovered by another blow on the head, several submitted to operations, which were usually unsuccessful, or if they did succeed the patient died, and in other instances the recovery of memory was gradual, stimulated by the recognition of a single person or event of their past lives.

Montague was quite certain he did not wish his head opened by an inquiring doctor, nor could he risk receiving blows on the cranium which were just as apt to do him injury as to restore his suspended brain function.

In almost every instance the victim of amnesia was a married man, a circumstance which was suspicious. One case was a defaulting bank cashier, another a bigamist, a third a burglar. Did not respectable persons ever get amnesia, and did it mean that he was probably a wrong-doer of some sort?

With an aching head he finally left the library, and drifted out upon Fifth Avenue in a frame of mind in which he would have considered being run over by a taxi as a dispensation of Providence.

Instead of a taxi, however, it was a large blue automobile of a very expensive make which almost ran over him; for the driver, upon sight of the big young man, suddenly swerved toward him, and as he leaped for the sidewalk stopped the car by the curve.

"Mr. Jackson," exclaimed this reckless motorist, a middle-aged man. "Wait a minute. I want to see you."

"You are mistaken," he said in dismay. An acquaintance! His name must be Jackson, but he could not acknowledge it; for this man was a stranger to Montague Capulet, and his failure to identify the fellow would betray his condition.

The motorist, however, was getting out. He gazed at Montague, who returned his scrutiny steadily, and then his certainty left him. "I beg your pardon," the man said. "A striking resemblance. I would have sworn—"

An angry traffic officer interrupted him. "Hey, you," roared the cop. "Don't you know any better than to stop here? Get that car out of this or I'll hand you a ticket."

"I'm sorry, officer," the motorist said. "I thought I saw a man I wanted to meet. I'll move right along."

"You better," growled the slightly mollified cop.

"See here," the motorist said earnestly to Montague. "Will you ride with me a little way. I'll make it worth your while."

"I'm busy," lied Montague.

"I'll make it very well worth your while. You don't look affluent."

He was pushing Montague into the car as he spoke, and the big man yielded on impulse.

The stranger resumed his seat at the wheel, and the car moved out of the danger spot.

"The reason that I spoke to you was that I thought you were Herbert Jackson, and I particularly need to meet him."

"My name is Montague Capulet."

"Ah, an actor! Out of work?"

"How did you guess it?"

"That name is out of Romeo and Juliet. As I said, you don't look prosperous. So I just put two and two together."

"Well, you guessed right; only I haven't done any acting recently."

"You could pass as Herbert Jackson," mused the stranger. "Your expression is different, and I think your eyes are a deeper shade of blue. You seem to have a little more breadth than he, and—how tall are you?"

"I really—" Montague wasn't sure, but he could hardly admit it.

"'Bout the same size. Want a job?"

"I certainly need one."

"I've got something you could do. Very easily, too. No hard work. Good pay. How would you like to make a hundred dollars?"

"Very much, but I don't know what you want me to work at."

As they chatted the car had worked down to Thirty-Fourth Street, and was now stalled with the traffic.

"Very light work. In my office."

"I don't know that I am qualified for office work," demurred Montague.

"I'll worry about that, not you. What do you say?"

"Well, I might try it."

The traffic signals changed, and they moved forward. At Madison Square the driver turned east and presently drove into a garage where he stopped the car, got out, and motioned to his passenger to alight.

"It's just a few steps from here," he explained. "We can talk when we get to my office."

Very dubiously Montague accompanied him. It might be a trap. This fellow had lured him into the car, undoubtedly had recognized him, and proposed to turn him over to whomever was hunting him—that is, if there was anybody in search of the man he used to be.

The job, whatever it was, was based upon his resemblance to this Jackson, Herbert Jackson; but the name touched no chord of remembrance in Montague. Supposing he was this Jackson, what kind of mess was he getting himself into?

It was too late to beat a retreat, for if he turned tail this fellow might cry "Stop thief!" and set a crowd on his heels. Much better try to brazen things out.

They turned into an office building on Fourth Avenue, a building which seemed largely devoted to garment manufacturing, but upon the fourth floor they alighted from the elevator and entered an office directly opposite upon the door of which was the name:

HENRY R. WILTON
Attorney at Law

"Are you Mr. Wilton?" he asked when his guide laid his hand on the doorknob.

"Henry R. Wilton, at your service, Mr. Montague Capulet," smiled the man. "Say, that name of yours is so utterly utter. What's your real name?"

"Brown, if you must know. Er—Peter Brown."

"That's better. I don't give a dam if it's an alias, but I couldn't introduce you as Mr. Capulet."

"It's O. K. in the show business," grinned Montague.

"So's Gwendoline Vere de Vere, but this is a business office. Come in."

Mr. Wilton's office consisted of a single room with a small cubbyhole partitioned off in a corner. Behind a rail in the outer office a chubby little blond stenographer was reading a magazine devoted to the motion-picture world, which she tried to hide upon the entrance of her employer. With a curt nod to the girl, he led Montague into the inner office, and motioned to him to take one of the two chairs.

He opened his rolltop and from a pigeonhole drew a photograph, which he regarded, and then looked at Montague through half-closed eyes. The young man shivered. What was coming?

"Take a look at this," commanded Mr. Wilton.

Montague looked, and saw a picture of a boy of eighteen or nineteen—a thin, tall youth with broad shoulders; he might have looked a little like that when he was eighteen, but he didn't think he resembled it very much now.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"Herbert Jackson. You are looking at the present Earl of Monmoor, Mr. Peter Brown; family name, Graile; father came to America and changed it to Jackson. His older brother died a year ago, and I am commissioned to find the heir."

"Wish you luck. Do you mean to say you thought you had found him when you spied me outside the library?"

"Well, you look a lot like him—nearest I've come yet. Look here, Brown, got any principles?"

"A few."

"How would you like to be the Earl of Monmoor? Castle in Cornwall, town house in London, seat in the House of Lords."

"Are you kidding?"

"No, I'm in earnest."

Montague regarded the man with more care than before. He saw a pair of gray eyes that were close together, a predatory nose, mouth like a steel trap, a pugilist's chin, the face of a person not too particular, a bad man to have against one.

"Count me out," he said tersely. "I may be broke, but I'm no crook."

"You misunderstand me," replied Wilton. "Excuse me a moment."

Rising, he squeezed behind Montague, and stepped into the outer office.

"Miss Gould," he called, "please come in here a moment."

The stenographer parked her gum under her chair, then waddled into the tiny room with annoyed eyes; she had been interrupted while reading the plot of a picture.

"Miss Gould," said Wilton coldly, "I called you in as a witness. I think I have been robbed."

"Oh, my Lawd!" exclaimed Miss Gould.

With a swift motion he thrust his right hand into Montague's right coat pocket, and pulled out a billfold, which he opened and proceeded to count the contents.

"Here!" exclaimed Montague. "What is the idea? Do you mean to—"

"I felt him take it while driving down," explained the lawyer to Miss Gould. "I waited for a witness to recover my property. You may go now, Miss Gould."

"What," observed Miss Gould, regarding Montague with horrified eyes, "do you know about that?"

"You might as well go out to lunch."

"And leave you with him?"

"Do as I say."

"Want me to call a cop?"

"Later, perhaps. Go to lunch."

"Oh, all right."

"That," declared Montague when the girl had fled, "was a plant."

"Sure," grinned Wilton. "But you're in a fix. Broken-down actor out of work picks pocket of man who befriended him. See where you stand?"

Montague saw—saw more than his captor dreamed. If he were arrested, charged with this crime, the police would question him. If they questioned him, they would want to know about his past, and he could not tell them a thing.

They would either assume he was a crim-

inal concealing his crime, or turn him over to an alienist as a man out of his wits; most likely they would give him a stretch for picking Wilton's pocket, in any event.

"What do you want?" he said, burning with anger inwardly.

"I want your help, and I took this way to make sure of getting it. I propose to pass you off as Herbert Jackson."

"You can't get away with it; the real Jackson will turn up."

"It won't do him any good, because I have all the proofs."

"Mr. Wilton," said Montague, "the filthy trick you have just played on me would stamp you as a crook if you had not followed it up with this disreputable proposition."

"Bah! Hard words break no bones. I am in a hell of a hole; you can pull me out, and I am justified in taking any means at hand to force you to help me.

"If you have nothing to conceal, you can deny my charge that you picked my pocket, perhaps beat me in court; but if you have any reason for not wishing to attract the attention of the police, you'll have to do what I tell you."

"Hum. Suppose you give me more information regarding this imposture."

"Here's the situation. Herbert Jackson has been lost for seven years, and one week from to-day he will be officially dead. If he is dead, the earldom of Monmoor passes into the hands of a fourth cousin, a German who fought against England in the war.

"Naturally the English authorities do not want that to happen. The investigation in this country is in the hands of Morris & Milton, who engaged me to carry on the work for them, as I specialize in such matters.

"If I produce Herbert Jackson within a week, my share of the fee to be paid to Morris & Milton will amount to fifty thousand dollars. If he turns up in eight days I won't get a cent, and neither will he. That explains my anxiety."

"But you can't get away with it," expostulated Montague. "There must be lots of people who know Jackson, his relatives, his friends, his business associates. They would spot me as an impostor in a minute."

"I tell you I can prove you are Jackson beyond a shadow of a doubt. It's a cinch, Brown. Take my word for it."

"Then people who know me will give the game away."

"That's the danger. Are you married? Are you well known in New York?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE TALE OF A MISSING HEIR.

"YOU see, it can't be done!" exclaimed Montague, much relieved.

"You can avoid everybody you know, deny your identity if you should meet your former friends. You have no wife?"

"No-o," admitted Montague, none too assuredly.

"We'll have to chance anything else. You go through with this, and you step into an income of five thousand pounds a year; by a private agreement, you pay me fifty per cent, meantime I advance you a thousand dollars with which to carry on. What do you say?"

"I think I prefer to be arrested. However, if you want to go into details, I am willing to listen."

Wilton drew some papers from the top drawer of his desk, put on a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, and glanced through the first page.

"Thirty years ago Herbert Graile, second son of the Earl of Monmoor, was caught cheating at cards in his father's house. The thing was hushed up, but he was ordered to leave England, and paid a small yearly salary to stay away."

"A remittance man."

"Exactly; this country is full of them. After wandering around for a couple of years he landed in a small town in Kansas, was impressed to aid in haying; you know how they do out there when they are short of men—round up all the bums, and all persons who can't give a good account of themselves, and force them to work on farms.

"Well, Graile was taken to a big wheat

farm, fell in love with the farmer's daughter, and eloped with her. Her father forgave her, and brought the young people back to the farm, where you were born and grew up."

"News to me!"

"Your father had changed his name to Jackson; your name is Herbert Jackson." You attended the village school, lived the life of a Kansas farm boy until you were nineteen years old; then you ran away from home. You are supposed to have gone to Canada, joined a Canadian regiment, and gone to the war."

"Really? What happened to me?"

"You fought through the war, and were discharged from a German prison in January, 1919; were sent back to America, and returned to Antietam, Kansas. You lived with your father and mother and grandfather for a few weeks, and then you said good-by, intending to go to New York."

"But everybody in Antietam must know Herbert Jackson; that's only seven years ago."

"Antietam is a small village, and all the people were Methodists. On the Sunday following your departure the townsfolks were assembled in the Methodist Church when a cyclone destroyed it, and killed eighty people who were attending service, including all your relatives and friends."

Montague received this sorrowful news with a burst of laughter. "How opportune!" he exclaimed.

"See? Everybody who might identify you positively is dead."

"But that was seven years ago. What happened since?"

"My boy, the receipt of the news of this horrible disaster affected your brain; you lost your memory; you had amnesia."

Montague's throat made a gurgling sound, his eyes popped like a frog's, his color faded until his cheeks were as pale as parchment; but Mr. Wilton was refreshing his memory from the papers, apparently unaware of the manner in which Peter Brown had taken this announcement.

"For this reason you paid no attention to the advertisements for Herbert Jackson, with which my principals flooded the country. They didn't mean anything to you, for you did not know that you were Herbert Jackson; you thought you were Peter Brown, a struggling young actor.

"Everybody you have met in the last seven years knew you as Peter Brown—or what do you call yourself, Capulet Montague? It remained for me to address you by your right name, and when I did so a flood of recollection came over you. You remembered everything. Anything you can't remember, I shall supply.

"Now, it happens that I have a former resident of Antietam living in New York, who knew you, and who has positively identified you. He used to go swimming with you, and he remembers certain moles and birthmarks on your body. Have you any moles or birthmarks?"

"Yes," admitted Montague. "I have a big brown mole on my right shoulder, and a red birthmark about as big as a dollar on the back of my neck below the collar."

"Good. He will remember them."

"Your witness; he is not exactly honest, is he?"

"He is a very reasonable man, and he needs money."

"I get you," smiled Montague. "What made you think of this amnesia business?"

"It covers a multitude of sins; the doctors recognize it; and who can prove it didn't happen? Now you see, you are absolutely covered."

"But my army record? My fellow soldiers will know me."

"Your amnesia will cover that. You just don't remember them."

"What regiment did I serve with, may I ask?"

"The Canadian Black Watch."

"Ladies from Hell," murmured Montague, thoroughly startled.

"Sure. That's what the Germans called the Scotch troops. You are all fixed up to the time of the cyclone. For the last seven years you had amnesia, but you remember everything now.

"And you bet the British won't fuss about your identity. You fought to save the Empire, now you come to claim your earldom, and if you are turned down they have to give it to a German. It's a cinch, boy; I'm telling you."

"I get a thousand dollars down?"

"Right in your lily-white hand. Then you come to my house to live, and you bet your life I don't give you a chance to slip away."

"I want to think it over," pleaded Montague.

"You sit right here in this office and think. I'll go into the other room until you call me. For Heaven's sake, don't be a fool. If you are exposed, I get exposed with you, and I have a lot at stake. You may be sure I am taking no chances."

He left the tiny office. Montague put his feet upon the desk, and devoted himself to thought. The thing tempted him, tempted him sorely, and his situation was such that it appealed to him from angles never dreamed of by the crafty lawyer.

Montague's past was a blank, and his mental condition was apt to be discovered at any moment with dire consequences. He was down and out, and a thousand dollars would lift him up and in.

In time he would recover his memory, but in the meantime a ready-made past was offered to him, an identity established, an income assured; Wilton's dishonest proposition would clothe his mental nakedness.

It was a most astounding thing that the lawyer should have suggested amnesia as an explanation of his behavior during the past seven years to a man who was a victim of that disease or brain condition. The devil suggested to him that he might accept Wilton's offer with a clean conscience, since he did not know that he was not Herbert Jackson—in fact, he did not know who he was.

Why could not he be the missing nobleman? He first suffered amnesia seven years ago upon hearing of the horrible death of all his relatives; perhaps he was already suffering from shell shock due to his experiences in the army.

For seven years he had lived a new life, and ten or twelve days ago he had suffered a new attack of amnesia which had wiped out all recollection of that seven years without restoring his memory of the first existence.

It was very curious that he looked so much like the photograph of the young Herbert Jackson; ten or twelve years would account for the slight change in his appearance.

And then he had an inspiration. He could admit that he had just been stricken with a second attack of amnesia, which had obliterated his memory of what had taken place since the first illness, but restored his memory of everything up to the time he had heard of the destruction of his family.

All along he had had some vague sense of participation in the war, and he had assured Chester Moore in the course of his bombastic chatter that he had served with the Ladies from Hell, but that he was not a Scotchman. Herbert Jackson had gone over with the Canadian Black Watch, a kilted regiment which included many who were neither Scotch nor of Scottish descent. Wasn't that more than a coincidence?

Having no information regarding his past, was he not justified in accepting an identity so plausibly presented? The devil said certainly, but something else warned Montague.

Wilton was dishonest. The scheme was to obtain money and a title under false representations; there was a witness willing to swear that his own body marks were identical with those of Herbert Jackson as soon as he knew what marks Montague Capulet bore on his person—a perjurer.

Well, admitting that, here was an estate awaiting a claimant. In default of Herbert Jackson, some undesired German would inherit a British earldom, most likely the British government would refuse the German claim, and confiscate the estate.

If Herbert Jackson and all his American relatives were dead, no harm was being done in that direction, and if he were alive and turned up after he was officially dead he could not claim it anyway.

What a wonderful joke upon Wilton it would be if Montague got his memory back, and discovered he really had been Herbert Jackson all the time.

However, Montague was pretty certain he was not, nor ever had been Herbert Jackson; while he couldn't remember anything, he had felt that this young man and himself had never been the same person.

Suppose he did take over the estate, instituted a search for Jackson, found him, and then substituted him for himself with no one the wiser; in that way he would be just a locum tenens.

There would be a nasty time with Wilton if he refused, for the man was so confident of his acceptance that he had revealed the whole plot, and Montague was in no position to quarrel with anybody. Even the charge of picking a pocket was something he could not afford to face.

Well, in default of any other information he would have to accept the identity thrust upon him and risk the possible blow-up in the future to avoid immediate trouble. In his situation there didn't seem anything else that he could do.

" Mr. Wilton," he called.

Wilton bustled in a confident smile upon his hard face.

" Don't tell me," he said. " I know you have decided to play the game, and I congratulate your lordship. Now you and I shall go out and purchase the sort of clothing that becomes your station, and then I'll take you home with me."

" Wait a minute," he demanded. " I am accepting your proposition because I do not know that I am not Herbert Jackson. In fact, I do not know who I am. About ten days ago I lost my memory, and my past is a blank."

" No," denied Wilton. " You got amnesia seven years ago, not ten days ago. Get this story straight."

" Ten days ago. I made up the name of Montague Capulet, because I didn't remember my own name, or anything about myself. For all I know I am Jackson."

" You," reproved Wilton, " are a liar. One attack of amnesia may pass, but not two. You let me run this show, and keep your oar in the boat. You're not even an artistic liar."

Montague grinned. " I did't expect you to believe me," he admitted. " Only file that statement away for future reference."

" Sure. It's your alibi, but it won't save you if things go wrong. You go into this with your eyes open, just as I do."

" What would happen if Herbert Jackson turned up in the flesh?"

" He must be dead. Probably killed, or in jail under an assumed name. My principals have been hunting for him for years, and he will be legally dead, anyway, in a week. Don't worry. He won't show."

" Well," smiled Montague. " I could use some decent clothes. I am very short of linen."

CHAPTER X.

A SNUG HARBOR.

AN hour later Mr. Wilton, in his big car, was steering the presumptive Herbert Jackson up Fifth Avenue, while a bulging suitcase contained the new wardrobe of the late Montague Capulet.

" Mr. Wilton," he observed, " if this preposterous claim of mine is shown to be dishonest, are you not likely to suffer? How can you escape suspicion of collusion?"

Wilton untangled himself from a traffic jam before he answered.

" It would ruin me, my friend," he admitted. " Therefore you will not be exposed."

" You seem to be a man of substance. Why do you take such a frightful chance?"

" Because I need the money, Jackson," he said rather bitterly. " I don't like crookedness any more than the next man, but to live in this city and to keep up appearances, if you happen to be married, requires an awful lot of money.

" Although my office is small, I have a lot of confidential business which usually brings me in a large income, but recently I have been speculating, and got stung good and plenty.

" I was pretty near the end of my rope when I spotted you outside the library and recognized your resemblance to the photograph, and realized that your coloring was according to specifications.

" There was fifty thousand in it for me to find Jackson, and for a second I thought I had found him. I had given up all hope of locating him, and I was wondering how I would meet some notes the first of the month, when you sailed into my life."

" Then you had not considered setting up an impostor before?"

"Well, yes, I had considered it, but I hadn't run across anybody who could play the part. You'll do with coaching."

"An impostor is rather better for you than the real person, because you could not force Herbert Jackson to divide his income with you."

"Nevertheless, I would prefer the original instead of an imitation. Having no choice, I propose to benefit from the scheme in every possible way."

"I see. You have lots of dope concerning my alleged parents, and my life on the farm, and in the army."

"With the information in my possession I could play the part myself if I resembled the description. How much acting did you do?"

"None, so far as I know."

"What do you mean, so far as you know? Of course you know what you have been doing."

"I told you my memory is a blank from ten days back."

"And I told you that you were a liar!" retorted Wilton testily.

Montague shrugged his shoulders, and the conversation languished until they arrived at a Park Avenue apartment house in the upper Eighties, one of those gigantic buildings which house hundreds of families, whose lower floor bristles with gold-braided employees, and whose apartment rents are higher than the yearly earnings of many a first class physician, or a college professor with a dozen capital letters after his name.

Wilton turned his car over to a house chauffeur, then led Montague through a gorgeous lobby, the possession of which would be the pride and joy of an average American city, but which was not remarkable in New York—hundreds of hotels and apartment houses have larger and finer ones—and stepped into one of half a dozen elevators.

Montague, who observed all his sensations, noted that the place did not astonish him; in his previous incarnation he must have been accustomed to such grandeur.

At the eighth floor they alighted, proceeded down the corridor to the front of the house, and stopped before a double door, which the lawyer opened with his latch key. A maid hastened forward to take their hats and Wilton's coat. Montague had none; then his host conducted him into a drawing-room, which contained four windows on Park Avenue, and two looking upon a side street, a very stunning room, at least thirty feet long by twenty feet wide, and furnished in refined elegance.

There was a grand piano, an automatic player, the trade-mark of which was that of the most expensive firm of piano makers. Montague recognized that fact, and marveled that his memory should be so accurate in such unimportant matters, and fail him utterly in the most important of its functions.

"Pretty smooth, don't you think?" asked Wilton complacently.

"A charming apartment."

"Costs me ten thousand dollars a year unfurnished," the lawyer informed him. "I shall introduce you to my wife as Herbert Jackson; and don't you make any slip in front of her. She has an eye like a lynx."

"Hello, deary," called a woman from an inner room. "Got some one with you?"

"Yes, Marie. I want to introduce a friend."

"Just a wee little minute, deary."

The lady's voice was rather a foggy contralto, thought Montague, who wondered what its owner would be like, and was not long in learning; for Mrs. Wilton did not keep them waiting.

She proved to be what might be termed an opulent blonde, a woman of thirty or a year or two more who must have been a dazzling beauty when she was younger and thinner. She was only an inch or two above five feet, and in the days when masculine taste was more coarse she still would have been described as a stunner.

Her hair was very light yellow, ash-blond, and it was bobbed to display two very pretty little ears. Her complexion was milk-white, cold cream and powder, save at the cheekbones, where there was a dab of pink; and her lips were full and scarlet.

Her eyes were rather small and a very pale blue, her teeth were good, and her smile a pleasant one. The figure was ill-confined in the pink silk gown which bulged unfashionably at bust and hips, and

stopped at the knees to reveal a pair of corn-fed legs with rather thick ankles; but her feet were small, and shod in pretty black patent leathers with preposterously high heels.

"I want to present Mr. Herbert Jackson, Marie," said her husband.

Mrs. Wilton paused in her approach to gaze with incredulity at the visitor.

"Hank, not the real one?" she exclaimed.

"The Earl of Monmoor, my dear," he said without a smile.

"For the Lord's sake," she whispered. "Say, what a piece of luck! How on earth did you find him?"

"You leave it to me to deliver the goods," retorted Wilton loftily.

"Excuse me, Mr.—er—my lord," Mrs. Wilton began, addressing Montague. "Sounds as though we were talking about a bale of merchandise or a case of Scotch, but Henry had given up hope of finding you, and it certainly is a big thing for us."

"And for me from all accounts," replied Montague politely.

Mrs. Wilton moved more rapidly than might have been expected to draw out a big, overstuffed chair. "Won't you sit down? This is an honor, lord, earl—say, Hank, how the deuce do you address a real earl?"

"Call me Mr. Jackson, please," Montague suggested. "I'm not the earl yet."

"Can we throw a party for him?" demanded Mrs. Wilton. "Hank, I'd like to see Sally Lannigan's eyes when I introduce her to His Highness the Earl of Monmoor."

"No parties," declared Wilton, helping himself to a cigarette, and dropping into a chair. "Mr. Jackson will be our guest for a few days, and nothing is to be said about his title until I've put the deal through. Get that, Marie?"

"To think that you're a lord," worshiped Mrs. Wilton. "I never thought I'd have an English nobleman sitting in my front room. Henry, this means you get the big fee, don't it?"

"I suppose so," he admitted.

"Well, we can give a party just as soon as the thing is settled. I know a lot of women I want to show off to."

"Marie, don't make a fool of yourself," growled her husband. "You keep your mouth shut and don't run to the telephone to blab. Mr. Jackson is incognito, if you know what I mean, and probably he'd like to go to his room now and get settled."

"We can give him our room, and take the guest room ourselves."

"Please don't do anything of the kind," pleaded Montague very much embarrassed, because the sincerity of the woman was obvious. If her husband was a crook, it was plain that his wife was deceived.

Wilton snorted in indignation. He had no intention of being turned out of his quarters for a person whom he considered not much better than a tramp, but under the circumstances he had to be politic.

"Jackson won't mind the guest room. I'm sure he'll find it comfortable."

"Of course I shall."

"Well," she sighed. "It's not bad. I've always told my husband we ought to have a bigger apartment, but you know how rents are in New York. You come and look at it, your lordship, and if you don't think it will do, you can have our room no matter what Henry says."

The bedrooms, it appeared, were up a flight of stairs; the Wilton's inhabited a duplex apartment, and consisted of two large and very beautiful rooms as admirably furnished as the drawing-room below.

There were two small rooms for servants on the opposite side of the corridor, which presumably looked out upon an airshaft, for the master's bedrooms fronted upon Park Avenue, and the side street.

Montague found his bag had already been placed in the room, and he regarded his new quarters with deep satisfaction. Evidently he loved luxury, though he had had none since his present existence had begun. Really a few days in such a delightful place were almost worth the consequences they were going to entail.

Mrs. Wilton fussed around, then hesitated; in truth, she did not know the etiquette of withdrawal from the chamber of a lord, but after a moment of fluttering she managed to back out and hasten downstairs to quiz her husband regarding the amazing development which brought a peer

of the realm into her humble ten-thousand-dollars-a-year apartment.

Montague, who knew he had been housed here to prevent his disappearance, could not refrain from amusement at his reception. He wondered what she would say when she learned the truth, for he did not flatter himself that he would succeed very long in the imposture if indeed he consented to continue it.

He began to be sorry for Wilton, a common sort of man, dry, cold, probably simple in his tastes, perhaps a good lawyer in his curious line, who was providing this ten-thousand-a-year love nest for the fat, stupid blond woman who was so impressed by an earl.

Mrs. Wilton, at the age of twenty, must have been one of those lovely doll babies—flaxen hair, delicious complexion, blue eyes, white teeth—whose sweetness made up for their absence of intelligence.

A beautiful dumb-bell of twenty has appeal for all men, but those who marry such are doomed to live with dumb-bells of thirty, and forty, and fifty years, their bloom of youth faded, their brains atrophied, their bodies distorted by piggish indulgence.

Here was Wilton, housing a plump idiot, and permitting her to establish them at a scale of thirty-five or forty thousand dollars a year, in order to obtain which he was compelled to resort to criminal practices.

Could he love the woman? He did not act as if he were still infatuated with her; yet why submit to her exactions? And already she was complaining because they did not live in a finer apartment.

The man was as big an idiot as his wife, no doubt about it. Yet, his mind suddenly veering, if they were idiots, what was he? At least, they knew their own names, while the superior person who despised them was Wilton's accomplice in a crime because he could not recall his own identity.

They say that insane persons only suffer in their lucid moments. Montague suffered all the time, because he could reason perfectly until he struck the blank wall.

That lovely little Eleanor Folsom, if he had only met her before he met his disaster, for now he would have forgotten her, though it did not seem as though he could ever forget Eleanor—the look on her face when she recognized him as the male model in the art school would remain graven on his memory until his dying day, would remain to shame him!

Montague felt himself blushing now as he recalled that horrible moment, and he clenched his fists until the nails bit into his palms.

Perhaps it was just as well that he had engaged in an enterprise which might eventually land him in jail, for, if his memory returned and he found himself in the clear, he might be urged to present himself to Eleanor, who would obliterate him with a single glance.

Opening his bag he began to hang up his new clothes, then he stripped to the skin and sought the bathroom; not since the night he had forced himself upon Chester Moore had he been able to indulge in a comfortable bath.

As he lay on his back in the long, broad, gleaming white tub and luxuriated in the feeling of the clean, warm water upon his body, imperceptibly he improved in spirit, and began to consider what advantages were to be gained from his present enterprise.

His form of amnesia differed from all the cases he had read in the library that morning by his ability to recall everything except personalities, which indicated that it was not complete amnesia, at any rate, a mild form of it which might yield readily to treatment.

With the money he would receive from Wilton he could afford to visit the best specialist in New York, and lay a supposititional case before him, pay for an opinion without attracting personal suspicion.

A friend in San Francisco had written asking him to secure the information; would the doctor kindly be very specific so that he could write his friend fully and informatively?

If he found the physician the sort of man he could trust he might then admit his own condition, and ask for treatment. If he found himself suddenly cured, he could return the money to Wilton, and re-

sume his own place in society, whatever it was and wherever it was.

Then—in some way—there must be a method of explaining to Eleanor which would induce her to forgive him.

CHAPTER XI.

"MAN PROPOSES—"

"BUT Eleanor, I thought—you always acted—why won't you marry me?"

Eleanor Folsom gazed down upon Chester Moore with the kindness and sympathy that a man who is making a spectacle of himself for her sweet sake always awakens in a woman.

She had to look down because Chester was on his knees beside the divan upon which she sat, an attitude of entreaty rarely used by the modern generation of men when making a declaration, and the more thoroughly appreciated by a girl for that reason.

"Please, Chester, be sensible," she urged. "I don't love you that way, though you are an awfully nice boy, and I like you lots. I think your proposal was just beautiful."

"Thanks for nothing," he grumbled as he climbed upon his feet. "I think I am entitled to an explanation. You encouraged me, and now I've made a fool of myself."

"If you call proposing to me so beautifully making a fool of yourself, I'm glad I refused you," she retorted. "And I certainly never encouraged you by thought, word, or deed."

"You let me take you places."

"A girl has to have an escort."

"You let me kiss you once."

"Kisses are nothing any more. I just don't love you, Chester."

"But why?" he protested. "Why don't you love me? What's the matter with me?"

Eleanor wrinkled her white brow, and proceeded to consider.

"I suppose you are all right," she admitted. "You are a gentleman, and not bad-looking, and you are good-natured and sweet. Maybe that's the trouble, Chester. You're not forceful enough. You don't carry a girl off her feet; there is no sense of danger in your presence.

"You're not thrilling."

"I suppose you want a man to grab you by the nape of the neck," he said satirically.

"No-o, I'm not looking for a cave man. But I would like a fellow to be big, you're not very tall, you know, and blond—I love blond men—and dashing, and very witty, somebody whose presence in the room sort of peps a girl up; a man who could be terrible, but whose love for you makes him meek as a lamb. A broad-shouldered man—"

"You don't know anybody like that."

"Yes, I do. At least I thought he was like that."

"Say, do I know him?"

She pursed her lips, then nodded slowly. "Huh-huh."

"Big, and blond, and broad-shouldered, and flashy. Say, don't tell me you mean—"

"Yes. Mr. Montague Capulet."

"What?" he bellowed. "You mean you fell for that big stiff? That four-flusher, that bounder—"

"He isn't either!" she shrilled.

Chester burst into loud but unmirthful laughter.

"So that's your style. You throw me over for a big pandhandler like him."

"How dare you call your friend a panhandler."

"That is exactly what he is," declared Chester savagely. "A bum, a grafter, a noisy, obstreperous hobo, a good-for-nothing—"

"A friend of yours! That's how you talk about your friends!"

"He certainly was no friend of mine."

"Oh, Chester Moore! You introduced him. You brought him here yourself."

"I certainly did not. He forced his way in."

"But you said—do you mean to tell me you didn't know him?"

"Practically. See here, Eleanor; do you remember the tale he told us that you thought was so funny about the man who took possession of another man, and wouldn't be shaken off. Well, that was Montague Capulet. If you knew your Shakespeare you would have recognized it was a fake name. The fellow was a common bum."

"Oh!" exclaimed Eleanor. "Oh, oh, oh!"

"He practically held me up on the road, he made me buy him clothes, he camped in my apartment—"

"Oh," said Eleanor, her eyes flashing dangerously, "then *you* were the victim of this brazen individual!"

Chester reddened under her gaze. "Well, yes. That's about it."

Eleanor suddenly began to laugh. Her laughter was not mirthful, either, but it was more musical than Chester's.

"So you were the poor, spineless boob," she said scornfully. "You were the weak-willed sap who submitted to the imposition."

"I tell you I couldn't help it. You don't have to call me such names. They are not ladylike."

"Poor Chester," she said in contrition. "You wanted me to tell you why I didn't love you. Don't you see? How could I love a man with so little force of character as you have just admitted? How could I forgive a man who allowed a stranger to force himself upon the girl you profess to love?

"You permitted it because you were afraid of him, and even your love for me was not so strong as your fear. Mr. Capulet behaved outrageously, and I shall never speak to him again; but he is a better man than you are by your own admissions."

"I don't have to stand for this, and I won't," declared Chester. "I asked you to marry, and you insult me. I'm going."

"I'm sorry," called Eleanor as he passed out of the doorway. "If you see Mr. Capulet, tell him I expect an apology."

"Bah," retorted the angry swain

Eleanor stood in the middle of the room for half a minute after his departure, then she darted like a bird to the bookcase, and drew from a shelf a volume of Shakespeare marked, "Romeo and Juliet."

Putting on a reading lamp at the end of the divan she settled herself in its depths, and began to read about the Montagues and the Capulets. Presently she turned the book over on her lap, and gazed into space.

"So," she was thinking, "that's why he was posing at the Art School. The poor fellow hasn't got any money. It must be terrible not to have any money. Probably he attached himself to Chester that night because he had nowhere to go.

"I wonder where he is, and what he is doing. I wonder if he realizes how shocked I was that day at the Art School. That fool of a Chester Moore! I must be nice to Chester, though. Maybe he has Mr. Capulet's address."

The young girl was lying there thinking about Montague Capulet at about the same moment that Montague was lying in the bathtub wondering how he could explain to Eleanor if he ever happened to meet her again.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

HENRY WILTON, "Hank" to his wife, had escaped from the bombardment of questions regarding the method of discovering the missing peer, and entered a small room off the dining room which he called his "den," but which was furnished more like a business office, for it contained a flat-topped desk, a small steel safe, and two big bookcases filled with heavy volumes on torts and other legal quirks, and two straight-backed wooden chairs.

Having locked the door, he took a telephone receiver from its hook and gave a number softly into the transmitter.

"Hello, I want to speak to Mr. Frothingham," he said when he received his number. "Is that you Tony? I'd like to have you drop everything, and come right over to my house. I don't care what you are doing, this is most important.

"Well, I've had an amazing piece of luck. I can't go into details over the telephone, but we can put over a deal—you jump into a taxi, and break all speed records."

Hanging up the receiver, he took from his desk a big envelope from which he drew a score of sheets of engraved paper which resembled stock certificates, which he proceeded to inspect with an air of satisfaction.

Finally he returned them to their envelope, which he restored to its place, and then drew from the same drawer a photograph which he rested against the telephone on his desk and regarded intently for several minutes.

Still eying the photograph he lighted a cigarette, and began to hum a little tune. The photograph was that of a young man between twenty-five and thirty who looked exactly like Montague Capulet; compared to this the picture of Herbert Jackson at the age of eighteen or nineteen did not resemble Montague at all.

" What a piece of luck!" mused Mr. Wilton. " There is nothing like keeping one's eyes open."

When the cigarette was smoked to the cork tip he lit a second, and burned this one in like economical fashion, the while regarding the photograph.

Presently there came a tap on the door. " Come in," he called, laying upon its face the photograph, then rising to greet Mr. Tony Frothingham who stood in the doorway escorted by Mrs Wilton, whose eyes were burning with curiosity.

" Hello, Tony!" he said. " You made good time. Marie, you'll have to excuse us for a little while. Business. Go up and see if the earl doesn't need some attention."

" Earl?" demanded Tony. " What earl?"

" The Earl of Monmoor," replied Wilton.

" Never met him," remarked Mr. Frothingham. Mr. Wilton's eyes were on the retreating back of Mrs Wilton. As soon as she was out of earshot, he said surprisingly: " Neither have I."

" Mrs. Wilton told me you had a long-lost nobleman in the house," Tony stated as he drew up one of the chairs, and seated himself. " Is that who you mean?"

" I told her to keep her mouth shut, and she babbles to the first person she meets. Marie is a great help to me in my business!" her husband declared.

" What's the notion in being home so early in the afternoon, and why did you drag me up here in such a hurry? I got a date at five o'clock."

" You'll be glad you came. Tony, I suppose you're one of the best-dressed men in New York."

Tony looked pleased.

" And the worst-looking."

Although it was rude of Mr Wilton to make such a statement, he had considerable justification. Tony Frothingham was a man of forty, somewhat overweight, rather short of hair, sleek, well-groomed, dressed in a cutaway coat which fitted him without a wrinkle, wearing striped trousers, and white spats upon long, narrow patent-leather shoes.

His necktie was rather vivid, he wore a high-winged collar which must have been uncomfortable upon his rather fat neck, in one hand he carried a pair of fawn-colored kid gloves, he tapped his shoes with a slender cane, and his face—did you ever see the bird called the turkey-buzzard?

A big nose, a pair of piercing, cruel, black eyes, an overhanging brow, a small, black mustache, and a big mouth with loose, thick lips, and huge, white teeth. Mr. Frothingham looked as if he ate raw meat, and had a high blood pressure; also as though he pounced upon what appealed to him regardless of the rights of others.

It was a repelling face; yet certain foolish women considered him interesting, though his hearty manner would deceive no person of discrimination. This was a bird of prey, and an unclean bird.

" You go to hell," he said gruffly. " What's up?"

Wilton lifted the photograph, and set it against the telephone.

" Who is that?" he demanded.

" Ellery Jackson, of course. I'm all out of breath, and he asks me riddles."

" If Ellery Jackson were willing to do what we asked him, would it be a good thing for you and me?"

" Fat chance."

Wilton leaned forward and lowered his voice. " Listen, Tony? I've got Ellery Jackson here in the apartment, and he don't know who he is."

" What? You're crazy."

" No, he is."

" Cut loose," commanded Tony. " What on earth do you mean? You're a wise old bird, Wilton, but he's wiser. If Jackson is in this apartment pretending to be crazy, he's spoofing you."

"Listen, will you? This morning I was driving down Fifth Avenue when I spied Jackson standing on the curbstone. He saw me at the same moment, so, making the best of it, I ran up to the curb and called to him. He didn't know his own name.

"I jumped out and took one look at him, and saw he didn't know me from Adam, and like a flash I thought up a game. I invited him to get in with me, and the fellow looked as though he wanted to run away."

"If he knew you he would have landed on your jaw."

"But he didn't know me."

"Then it wasn't Ellery Jackon."

"I tell you it was. He looked down and out, sort of helpless, and I asked him on impulse if he wanted a job. He said he did. What do you think of that?"

"Kidding you."

"Don't be a fool. I told him I thought he was a Mr. Herbert Jackson, and apologized for my error. What do you think he said his name was?"

Frothingham shrugged his shoulders.

"Montague Capulet! Said he was an actor out of a job. I took him down to the office, trying to think of a way to hold him. Well, I happened to have a picture of Ellery at the age of eighteen, and I showed it to him. Not a flicker of interest!

"Then I made him a proposition to impersonate Herbert Jackson, whom I said was the missing heir to an earldom. You remember I was looking for him last year.

"He demurred, but I had planted my billfold in his pocket, called in my stenographer, frisked him, and threatened to turn him over to the police. He wilted, scared to death of the police, and then I gave him a long yarn about the Earl of Monmoor.

"Told him I stood to make fifty thousand dollars if I located the heir within a week, bullied him into agreeing to impersonate Herbert Jackson, and he agreed—what do you think of that?"

"I'm frightened."

"I doped it out by this time that Ellery was a trifle off his base so, to test him, I explained that Jackson had amnesia for seven years, which explained his failure to see the advertisements for him. What do you suppose I got out of Ellery?"

"Search me."

"He said he might be Herbert Jackson. That he couldn't remember anything which happened more than ten days ago; that he had made up the name Montague Capulet because he didn't know his own name."

"Yeh?"

"You ought to see the way I abused him; called him a liar to his face, and he stood for it. Bought him an outfit of clothes, and dragged him home with me.

"I explained to Marie that he was the heir to the earldom. She heard me talking about that a long time ago, and she swallowed the yarn whole. You ought to see her kowtowing to him, and calling him your lordship." He laughed in great amusement at the recollection.

"This fellow isn't Ellery Jackson," declared Tony. "That's a bird that wouldn't lose his memory or anything else, and wouldn't go into your apartment any more than he'd go to jail. This is some bum you dug up."

"Would you know Ellery Jackson?"

"You couldn't fool me, fellow."

"You're going to see him in a few minutes. Now the way I diagnose it is this: Ellery has been in some accident, and got a crack on the bean which knocked him silly. He's got amnesia. He doesn't remember anything.

"He didn't know me, and he won't know you. Aside from not recalling who he is, there doesn't seem to be anything the matter with him, and he really thinks he is impersonating Herbert Jackson. In fact, he half believes that's who he is."

"Of course," began Tony thoughtfully, "you know the medical game and all about diseases. If it really is Ellery, and he has forgotten everything he ever knew, if he doesn't remember you and me, it's the biggest kind of a break to get him in our hands. Why, we can make him do anything."

"Now you're beginning to get me. For example, if Ellery Jackson is seen lunching with us in a certain place to-morrow—"

"You bet you. But suppose some of his

friends come over, and he doesn't know them?"

"We'll keep people away from him; leave that to me."

"We might walk him into his private office, and operate the Jackson Manufacturing Company through him. How about his signature?"

"I haven't tried it yet. I'll tell him the full name of Herbert Jackson is E. H. Jackson, and get him to write it a few times."

"Wilton," declared his friend, "you have a brain; I always said so. You never needed to be a crook; you could have made a fortune honestly."

"I never had a real chance," apologized Mr. Wilton. "I'll ask the earl to come down and meet you, because you are supposed to be a former resident of Antietam, Kansas, who knew him when he was a boy. You recognize him, of course."

"Yeh, but if he recognizes me—well, both of us may be able to handle him, but we'll bust up your apartment. Ellery always was a fighting fool."

Wilton put away the photograph and locked the drawer which contained it, after which he took a bottle from the bottom drawer of the desk, rummaged around for glasses, then poured two stiff drinks of whisky.

"Here is to Amnesia," he proposed.

"Here's hoping there is such a thing, and Ellery's got it."

They drank. After which Wilton led the way into the drawing-room, where they found Marie trying to read a magazine.

"Sweetheart," requested Wilton, "would you mind asking Mr. Jackson if he will come downstairs for a few minutes. A matter of business."

Marie rose with such alacrity that Tony grinned maliciously.

"You better look out, or your wife will lose her heart to the British nobleman," he said when the lady had left the room.

"Marie knows she's too fat for love affairs. She used to lead me a dance, but I guess she's settled down."

"The older they get the more foolish they are," observed his friend. "She's not such a bad looker now. If she wasn't your wife—"

"She'd have to be a bigger fool than she is to fall for your face. She has your number, Tony, my boy."

Further conversation was stemmed by the entrance of Marie followed by Montague Capulet, alias Herbert Jackson, whom the two scoundrels supposed to be Ellery Jackson.

Tony gave him one look, and uttered an exclamation under his breath. "I'll be damned!"

"Am I right?" demanded Wilton in triumph.

"I'll say you are."

CHAPTER XIII.

A FRIEND OF HIS BOYHOOD.

MONTAGUE, much refreshed by his bath, comfortable in clean linen, satisfied by the fit of his new clothes, in good spirits considering his circumstances, had descended rather hopefully, for he thought he might be able to convince lawyer Wilton that the preposterous impersonation should be abandoned before they both got into trouble.

A sight of Tony Frothingham acted immediately as a depressant; although he had never seen the man before there was something about the fellow that revolted him. To be in the same room with the brute was sickening.

"Well, well, well," exclaimed Tony, who rushed forward, grabbed the reluctant hand of Montague, and pressed it in a he-man's grip, "if it ain't old Herbert Jackson himself; gee, boy, but I'm glad to see you after all these years."

Montague managed to release his hand. "I'm afraid I don't know you," he began.

"Of course you know Tony Frothingham. Why, boy, we grew up together in old An—An—"

"Antietam," supplied Wilton hastily.

"You haven't changed much, but I've grown a mustache, and got much heavier," continued the old friend.

"You are certain this is Herbert Jackson?" asked Wilton significantly.

"I'd know him among a thousand. Why we used to go swimming together, and we

smoked our first cigarettes out behind his father's barn the same day. Got sick together."

"I feel like that now," said Herbert with distaste.

"That's great," exclaimed Wilton. "It clinches our case. In a very short time, Tony, your old friend will be the Earl of Monmoor."

"I'll swear to his identity in any court in the land," affirmed Tony.

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," muttered Montague.

"Just take off your coat and shirt," instructed Wilton, "so Tony can see your birthmarks. He remembers them from your swimming-hole days."

"I'm sure that isn't necessary," Montague replied with meaning. "My old friend Tony has identified me already."

"I'll leave the room," tittered Mrs. Wilton.

"I assure you I have no intention of disrobing," Montague informed her.

"It's all right with me," said Tony genially. "Any time will do. Count on me, my lord."

Monty turned his back on the fellow. "I'd like a little chat with you privately, Mr. Wilton," he requested.

"Just let me have a few words with Tony in my den. He has an engagement and has to go along."

Taking Montague's boyhood chum by the arm, Wilton led him into the den, while the impostor took a chair by the drawing-room window and picked up a magazine.

"Is Mr. Frothingham a great friend of your husband's?" he asked Mrs. Wilton, who still hovered about.

"They have had some business together. Don't you think he is handsome?"

"He looks like the villain in the melodrama," the young man retorted. "However, the heroine usually fell for the villain until the last act; so I suppose you might consider him handsome."

"He is very popular with the ladies, but he is always a gentleman," she said with a sigh. "I've got to go now and see about dinner. It's wonderful to have a real live lord to dinner."

In the den a conference was occurring. "What do you think now?" demanded Wilton.

"It's Ellery, but what the devil has happened to him? I'll swear he didn't recognize me; his brain has slipped a cog all right. Most mysterious thing I ever saw."

"Pretty smooth work on my part to pick him up, wasn't it?"

"Yeh. You've picked up a stick of dynamite. Safe enough if it don't go off. Ellery ain't cuckoo by a jugful, even if he's lost his memory, and, if he didn't remember who I was, he hated me on sight. Did you see the way he treated me?"

"That's because he thinks you're a crook, a perjurer, ready to swear to the identity of a man you never saw."

"Well, he thinks you're a crook, and he knows he is, or he wouldn't be playing that game. Good Lord, there are a thousand men in New York that know Ellery Jackson. Imagine him thinking he could pose as a fake nobleman from Kansas!"

"It's because he's lost his memory. He's got amnesia, I told you. He wouldn't know his most intimate friends any more than he knew us. And we'll take care they don't get a chance to recognize him, except from afar."

Dinner that night was a curious experience for Montague Capulet, who sat between Mr. and Mrs. Wilton, and studied them covertly. The woman pleased him more than the man, because she at least was honest, even if her common origin and stupidity were evident in every word she uttered and every gesture she made.

He decided that Wilton must have found her in a chorus of a musical comedy; most likely, in her day, she had been worthy of the front row. She was a chicken which had grown up to be a hen.

Wilton now impressed him more disagreeably with every minute of their acquaintance, a cold-blooded, keen, crafty, and utterly unprincipled person, the sort of man who would take few chances, but would fight savagely when he did adventure, and who would sacrifice his accomplices and probably his wife to save his own skin.

Montague did not believe that Tony Frothingham was a former resident of Kansas, for he exuded an aroma of city by-

ways. Only New York could have produced a wolf of his type.

Therefore he could not understand how a lawyer as shrewd as Wilton expected such a man to obtain credence as a witness in such an important matter as the identification of the claimant to the earldom of Monmoor.

It is a well-known fact that the loss of one of the senses causes the others to increase their efficiency; therefore a blind man hears better, distinguishes by touch and smell more effectively than ever in the days of his eyesight; and in the case of Montague, whom his captor believed to be Ellery Jackson, lacking his memory, instinct was very alert.

The conversation on the part of Wilton was guarded; Mrs. Wilton prattled senselessly. But Montague was on guard at every point, and the conviction grew on him that the missing heir story was a cloak for something else; that the lawyer had some deeper purpose in taking him into his home, dressing him, and promising him a thousand dollars in cash.

He decided to question the man more closely in private, to see if he would betray himself. Opportunity came after they had drunk their coffee.

"I wonder if we could have a private talk, Mr. Wilton?" he asked suavely. "There are certain things I'd like to get clear in my mind."

"Oh, sure, come right into my den. We're partners, in a sense, and we've got to go over a lot of things. Marie will excuse us."

"Don't be too long," warned Mrs. Wilton. "I get lonesome with nobody to talk to."

Wilton took the young man by the arm familiarly as he led the way to the little office, and Montague noted that his flesh crept at the touch of the man, which, however, might have been from what he already knew of the fellow's character rather than from a sense of further perfidy.

"Shoot, Jackson," invited the lawyer. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Well," began Montague, seating himself so that he could see the man's face clearly, "what's the penalty for this crime we are committing, supposing we are found out?"

"Why—er—we're not going to be found out. It's a cinch, I told you."

"Yes, but it's a penal offense, isn't it? What is the punishment?"

"Oh, nothing much. I've fixed it so you disappear, and I pretend to have been deceived."

Montague made a note that the fellow had not troubled to look up the penalty for the offense; curious conduct in a lawyer.

"This Mr. Frothingham doesn't look like a country boy come to the city."

"He's been here long enough to rub off the hayseed."

"How long has he been in New York?"

"Oh, er—a long time—ten years."

"What does he do for a living?"

"He's a broker. Say, let me manage this, will you?"

"If you want me to continue in this rôle, you've got to give me all the facts, Mr. Wilton."

"You'll do as I say or take the consequences," stormed the lawyer.

"If by the consequences you mean planting your billfold in my pocket, you've condoned the offense. You don't take a pickpocket into your home and introduce him to your wife."

"You're pretty smart, ain't you?" sneered the lawyer. "You do as I say, or you'll discover I know other tricks."

"I'm not afraid," laughed Montague. "When do we visit your principals to establish our claim?"

"In a couple of days. Maybe tomorrow."

"Have you got a certificate of my birth, and other evidence necessary?"

"Certainly, but not here; at my office."

"After I have been established as the Earl of Monmoor, how do you know that I will turn over to you fifty per cent of my income?"

"You're going to sign agreements to that effect."

"And if I fail to deliver, how can you expose me without showing those agreements?"

"You're not cross-examining a witness

now!" roared Wilton; then choked off the rest of the sentence, but he was too late.

"And I've handled craftier witnesses than you," declared Montague, who suddenly put his hand to his forehead, hesitated, then beat his fist against his head dispairingly. Why had he said that? What did he mean? Handled witnesses—had he been a lawyer before he lost his memory?

"Now, now," said Wilton soothingly. "Let's not lose our tempers. We're both in the same boat. We stand to make a bunch of money together; you come in for a title and a great position. I'm not afraid you'll double cross me, and if I don't worry, why should you?"

"All right," agreed Montague, still puzzling over his strange statement. Best not let this shyster know how much he distrusted him, better pretend to be deceived. "I just want to be sure that I am not going into something that will get me into trouble. When are we going to prepare our case?"

"You and I will meet some people at lunch to-morrow and discuss it. You won't be questioned. Later I'll supply you with everything you need to know."

"Very well," he said mildly. "Do you mind if I go to my room? I'm very tired."

"Sure. Get a good night's sleep," replied Wilton, greatly relieved. He rose and they returned to the drawing-room, where Montague said good night to Mrs. Wilton, who was obviously disappointed, and then ascended to his chamber.

As soon as he was alone he threw himself on the bed, an excellent bed, very different from his griddle at the lodging house, and tried piteously to penetrate the designs of his host and jailer.

In their interview he had gleaned several important facts. One was that Wilton had known him before his accident, and respected him; that exasperated outburst, "You are not cross-examining a witness now," had betrayed the fact. Montague had been a lawyer, and a good one; and Wilton had been afraid of him.

Now he tried to muster up what he knew about courts and legal procedure, and he found that he knew considerable. He suddenly began to remember bits of famous cases, scraps of testimony, law quotations, found himself repeating phrases that he knew were from Blackstone, and, suddenly, out of the past came the details of a celebrated attempt by an American claimant to secure a vacant British dukedom.

It was a thirty-year-old case, and he remembered names and dates. The claimant came from Nebraska, had fought a good fight, and was defeated in the highest court in England. Montague remembered the whole story now, and he understood why the tale of lawyer Wilton had such a familiar ring.

Wilton had quoted this case almost verbatim, bringing it up to date by including the World War. The Wyngate claimant was supposed to be the nephew of the defunct earl whose parents and neighbors had been killed in a church while attending services by a cyclone, just as Herbert Jackson's relatives had been wiped out.

The Wyngate cyclone had been authentic enough; it happened that the real heir had been killed with his parents, and a ne'er-do-well of the village had taken his name and attempted to win his inheritance.

Montague laughed, really amused. Wilton had not had ingenuity enough to concoct an original lie, but had repeated the old story, counting upon his victim, in his condition, not to remember it.

This meant that Wilton knew who he was, and needed him in his business; there was some other plot behind the absurd impersonation scheme which the crafty lawyer did not have the slightest intention of carrying on. He wanted Montague in his hands. Why?

The man must have realized instantly that he was not himself, and had been shrewd enough to attempt to turn Montague's condition to his advantage. Frothingham had been brought to the house to inspect him, not to identify him as Herbert Jackson.

The young man now put his keen mind to the job. Jackson must be his name, because Wilton had called him by that name when he saw him on the sidewalk before he had a chance to discover that the befuddled individual did not recognize him.

Jackson—Jackson—Jackson. It didn't mean a thing.

These two crooks had some use for him, most likely he would not have anything to do with them if he were compos mentis; so it was up to him to defeat their purpose, whatever it might be, and make use of them to regain his identity. Wilton knew it, and he could choke it out of him if no other way presented itself.

Strange that he could recall the forgotten law case. If he set himself other tasks he might get his brain to working again. He rose, found paper and pen in a desk near the window, and began to write down a list of the Presidents of the United States, the kings of England, and then the names of prominent attorneys in New York. All these tasks he accomplished easily.

He found that he knew the names of thirty persons whom he assumed were New York attorneys. In the morning he would test the accuracy of the list by checking them up in the telephone book. He wondered if his own name was in the book.

Time passed rapidly, but not having a watch he did not know the hour. However, he judged it was bedtime, and, having nothing better to do, he undressed and crawled between the blankets, after extinguishing the lights.

Half an hour passed, his brain, now alert, continuing to supply him with names and dates of important events in history until he heard a key softly turning in the lock in his door. Mr. Wilton had evidently decided to lock him in.

Montague laughed softly, for he felt a sense of exhilaration; things were coming back to him, and pretty soon he would touch the key which would open the floodgates of his memory. Then Mr. Wilton and the reptilian Mr. Frothingham would have to look out for themselves.

He was already a different man from the poor beaten creature who had awakened in the lodging house that morning, different even from the hysterical individual who had planted himself upon the unfortunate Chester Moore.

As Tony Frothingham had warned Wilton, Ellery Jackson, even out of his wits, was a stick of dynamite which might go off in the hands of the cunning Henry Wilton, who had dropped off to sleep after locking in his victim with a smile of profound satisfaction.

Outside on Park Avenue an occasional taxicab honked its horn, or came to a shrilling stop when the transit signal changed to red, and from an apartment above came dimly the sound of a victrola playing the latest jazz record, while a muffled shuffling over Montague's head told him that carefree young people were dancing.

He lay awake for hours jabbing at the blank wall, but the baffling mystery of his personal identity was still a mystery when he finally lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XIV.

BIG BUSINESS.

THE New York offices of the Jackson Manufacturing Company occupy two floors of a building on lower Nassau Street, which towers nearly three hundred feet above the sidewalk, bears the name of Calvin Jackson, founder of the great business, and contains more than fifteen hundred offices, exclusive of the space taken up by the manufacturing company.

Some thirty years ago Calvin Jackson, then a mechanic working for four dollars a day, invented a small contraption to be applied to the gasoline engine, at the time regarded dubiously by engineers, and working very disconcertingly in the early attempts at automobile building.

Before old Cal Jackson turned up with something held between his thumb and forefinger, the really great engineers were predicting that self-propelling vehicles would replace horses and wagons some day, but the motive power would be steam and not gas.

Thus the automobile industry almost owed its existence to the ingenuity of this overalled workman, and, as he was shrewd enough to engage a good lawyer, he was able to protect his invention, and to take toll of every gas engine built in the country for a long term of years.

Being a consistent inventor, Jackson continued to turn out thingamajigs that were necessary to the development of automobiles, in the manufacture of textile machinery, and along about 1914 absolutely essential to big guns; and the fortune that he piled up made the trust magnates against whom Roosevelt railed in the early days of the century appear like pikers.

The Jackson Works in a certain smoky town in New Jersey occupied a dozen city blocks, and employed about twenty thousand men, and when old Calvin passed away a couple of years before this story began, he left a fortune that paid inheritance taxes on a hundred million dollars.

Calvin Jackson had been an uneducated man, and had been so busy all his life making money that he had no time to devote to book learning. They used to say that he never got beyond the multiplication table in school, and his English was certainly no example for the young, particularly as it was larded with old Anglo-Saxon expressions that are considered in refined circles as vulgar and profane.

But the early experiences with his gas engine improvement had inculcated in him a profound admiration for education, and he was thoroughly convinced that he never would have made a cent out of his ideas if it had not been for the legal knowledge of Gus Weinborg, a young Hebrew attorney who had guided him through the pitfalls set by unscrupulous competitors.

"You can get good men to run your business," he was wont to say, "but if the head of the business doesn't know the law, he will be swindled as sure as fate. I happened to find an honest lawyer, but my son may not have my luck; so I guess he better study law."

That is how it happened that the present head of the Jackson business who had enlisted as a boy in a regiment of Canadian Scottish, seen some service, and been discharged through his father's influence after which he resumed his college course, had graduated from Harvard Law School, and practiced with the great corporation law firm of Weinborg, Murphy, and Giovanetti for several years after leaving college.

Acting upon his father's suggestion, he had then taken a whirl at criminal law, and had served a term as assistant Federal district attorney.

The plan was for him to enter his father's office after a complete law experience, but old Calvin overestimated his length of life, and died while Ellery was still holding a Federal job which paid him four thousand, five hundred dollars per year.

When Ellery Jackson was notified that he had been elected president of the Jackson Manufacturing Company to succeed his revered parent, he resigned from the district attorney's office, and entered upon the management of a gigantic industry of which he knew little or nothing.

For two years he had been trying to learn the business from the top down, and it says much for his intelligence and the efficiency of the various lieutenants of the late Calvin Jackson that the corporation continued upon its prosperous course.

Even the absence of the president from his desk for a period of two weeks had not stopped the progress of the Jackson Corporation; however it was beginning to slip a cog here and there, and the various vice presidents were growing very eager for his return.

Every business must have a head, a man who will say "Do this," or "Don't"; and while there were three or four very high-salaried officials who could have taken hold and run things even better than Ellery if they had the authority, none of them dared assume the leadership, and such was their mutual jealousy that none would have been permitted to act for the president by the others.

Ellery had been working like a Trojan for months, had plugged along without a vacation all summer, and had been persuaded to take a couple of weeks off because he was suffering from headaches, and lately insomnia, due to too close an application to business.

Although it was November, he had elected to take a cruise in a smart motor-yacht which he had purchased a year before, and which he never had had time to enjoy, and he had departed without guests, accompanied only by the skipper and crew of

three men. He had not been heard from since.

Grant Madden, first vice president, held a two-week's power of attorney to decide important matters for Ellery Jackson, a document which he hesitated to use because of the open antagonism of old Tom Sweeney, second vice president, who took violent issue with him on the important question of the Moulton Motors License now demanding settlement.

Madden had authority to grant the license, but if results proved that he had made a grave error, there was Sweeney to point it out to the president, with consequent loss of credit to the first vice president, which made it desirable to pass the buck, and let Ellery make the decision. And now the two weeks were up, Ellery was due back, and he had neither put in an appearance nor sent any word.

Ike Weinborg, son of Gus who had helped found and profit hugely in the Jackson prosperity, was eager to see Ellery, had already phoned half a dozen times, and there was a very pretty young woman waiting in the outer office who demanded an interview upon a personal matter, and had declared she would not go until she saw the young president.

The morning waxed and waned without the entrance of the president, and it was twelve thirty by the clock in Madden's office when he was startled by the violent entrance of Tom Sweeney, fat, grizzled, his walrus mustache gyrating with emotion, his round, blue eyes glittering with anger.

"Ellery's back!" he exclaimed. "Gus Weinborg's boy just telephoned that he met him in the lobby of the Manufacturers' Club, and Ellery cut him dead, looked right through him, and passed him without a word."

"I don't like Weinborg myself," replied Madden. "Gus was all right, but young Isaac is too brash."

"He's been a close friend of Ellery's," retorted Sweeney. "Wait till you hear the rest. With him was that shyster lawyer Wilton, a dirty hanger-on of August Moulton named Tony Frothingham, and old Moulton himself. Wilton introduced him to Moulton, and the quartet went upstairs to a private dining room. What in hell is Ellery doing with that gang?"

CHAPTER XV.

A PEEK AT THE PLOT.

AS the writer has no desire to mystify or deceive his readers, he might as well declare what they already believe, that Montague Capulet was Ellery Jackson, president of the Jackson Manfacturing Company, who could write a check for a million dollars, and get it cashed without as much difficulty as it would take the above-mentioned author to negotiate a check for twenty dollars; able lawyer, efficient executive who was rapidly making a name for himself among the younger captains of American industry.

If he had presented himself to any of half a dozen brain specialists in New York, the chances are that they would have called him by name; if he had fallen into the hands of the police they would have identified him immediately. Had he not been an assistant Federal district attorney?

If he had encountered any prosperous business man on the Boston Post Road, instead of Chester Moore who lived uptown on a fair income, he might have been recognized at once.

Chance had wafted him into waters where Ellery Jackson was nothing but a name, and was responsible for the predicament into which he had fallen.

Two weeks before he had sailed down Long Island Sound in his new motor-yacht, had driven out into the ocean, touched at Block Island, almost uninhabited, in November, and at Nantucket, populated, to be sure, but bleak and drear. He had cruised westward again, and on his fourth night out of New York ran into a thick fog somewhere off New Haven.

The yachtsman had turned in that night with perfect serenity, for he had confidence in his skipper, and had slept peacefully despite the mournful wailing of fog horns for five or six hours, until he was hurled violently from his berth, and brought up on

the floor of his cabin with a sickening crash.

Struggling to his feet he found the floor of the room tilted to a degree which made standing almost impossible. Instinctively he grasped for his clothing, and laid hands on a bathing suit which hung on a hook within reach.

That his vessel had been in collision with some big craft seemed to him obvious, and in that case she was probably sinking; without a doubt the bathing suit was his proper garment.

He donned it, grasped a pair of sneakers from beneath the couch against which he had been thrown; then, with great difficulty, dragged open the stateroom door, and staggered toward the companionway, his legs already up to the ankles in water.

Ellery barely reached the deck when the light craft seemed to have been pulled from under him, no lights, no sight of other humans, no view of the vessel which had run down the speedy boat, dense, inpenetrable fog enshrouded everything, and the water closed over him with an icy embrace which seemed deadly.

Although he was not a seaman, he knew that whatever craft had collided with his yacht would stand by; therefore, when he came to the surface, he shouted and peered about for a rescuing light. Nothing.

There was a nasty chop on the Sound, little waves were striking him in the face, and stinging like whiplashes; the chill of the sea was gradually numbing him, and he struck out strongly lest lack of exertion would permit it to overpower him.

Ellery Jackson was a very powerful man, an excellent swimmer, but he had never taken a sea bath in temperature of forty-five degrees before, and it came over him that he would surely drown unless he were rescued quickly; yet self-preservation forced him to swim, and he struggled along, aware he might be swimming away from the vessel which had sunk the speedboat, and probably had lowered a skiff to search for survivers.

He moved through the water with a steady overhand stroke which gradually heated his body enough, so that the low temperature of the Sound did not bite into his marrow any longer. He gradually slowed up—no use to exhaust himself, most likely he was swimming in a great circle, since the fog obscured all sea and landmarks.

Long Island Sound in November is well-traveled, but passing craft were as much a menace as a source of salvation; invisible as he was, they might run him down without being aware of it. He assumed the yacht had been a few miles off the Connecticut shore, but, for all he knew, he might be headed for Long Island many miles away.

Time passed; hours, weeks, years, it seemed at last, as though he had been swimming forever; his motions became entirely automatic, but his head remained above the surface, his heart and lungs were strong.

Eventually he saw a light coming directly toward him, and he shouted, shouted, and screamed when he realized that he was directly in the path of an oncoming steamer, the beating of whose propeller he could distinctly hear.

Then he crashed into something, and he knew no more. His next conscious moment was when he awoke in a field near the Boston Post Road, his eyes open to the stars, and no recollection whatever of how he came there or who he was.

Ellery never learned where he acquired the overalls. Perhaps he found them on the beach when he crawled cut of the sea, abandoned by some clam digger or waterman, after which he had walked blindly until he dropped exhausted miles from the shore.

The great brain specialist, whom he later consulted, declared that his condition was the result of a severe shock, and as Ellery remembered everything until he saw the steamer's light bearing down upon him, assumed that he was struck a glancing blow on the head by the side of the vessel, or perhaps a boat towing behind which had dazed him, but did not prevent him from struggling on.

The subconscious mind, from that time in control, steered him shoreward, persuaded him to don the discarded overalls, and drove him onward across the country

until physical exhaustion caused him to drop in the field where he slept for hours. When he awoke he was in full possession of all his faculties save that of personal memory.

Of course Ellery did not consult the brain specialist for a long time after the events now being related, in fact, until his mind was fully restored and he had no need of a specialist.

When he awoke the morning after his meeting with Henry Wilton and Tony Frothingham, he was still in his mental predicament, but thoroughly alert to the situation in which he had placed himself by his foolish agreement with the lawyer.

He was awakened at nine o'clock by Mrs. Wilton, who informed him through the locked door that her husband was awaiting him at the breakfast table.

"Tell him I'll be with him in fifteen minutes," Ellery—we shall not call him Montague any longer—responded not too cheerfully.

During his ablutions, he turned over and over his problem without arriving at a solution, and he finally decided to let things take their course until he could get a glimmer of what the plot was about.

"How's the Earl of Monmoor this morning?" demanded his host most affably when the guest finally presented himself.

"Good morning, Mrs. Wilton; how do you do, Mr. Wilton. I really wish you would not call me the Earl of Monmoor," he replied. "At least you can wait until my claim to the title is acknowledged, if it ever is."

"Just a mere matter of form, my boy," replied Wilton. "I've already telephoned my principals, and Mr.—er—Moulton." He hesitated over the name, and studied Ellery's face as he mentioned it to see if it conveyed any significance to him. "Mr. Moulton will lunch with us and have a chat with you."

"Do you think it wise?" asked Ellery to whom the name meant nothing, but who had interpreted rightly the glance. "Am I sufficiently prepared?"

"Sure. You just don't remember. Amnesia explains everything."

"What's amnesia?" asked Mrs. Wilton, who did not look so well in her pink negligee as she had in evening things.

"It's a disease," explained her husband. "Very convenient for witnesses."

"I never heard of it."

"There are twenty-seven volumes in the library full of things you never heard," he retorted rudely. "The Encyclopædia Britannica."

"It's a sort of brain lesion which causes loss of memory," said Ellery, who was sorry for the woman and disgusted at her husband's reflection upon her intelligence.

"Oh, that. Of course I've heard of it. I forget lots of things myself, but I never knew that was 'amnesia.'"

"It isn't. It's plain dumbness," grinned Wilton.

"There are certain things about you I don't forget," she said sharply. "Not even that diamond bracelet you gave me can make me overlook—"

"Mr. Jackson isn't interested in family history."

"All right," grumbled the lady. "Don't you push me too far, Hank Wilton."

Mr. Wilton was properly squashed, and the remaineder of the breakfast was eaten in silence.

"I'm working here this morning, Jackson," he said when he had disposed of his bacon and eggs, and his second cup of coffee. "You just make yourself at home till about eleven thirty, and then we'll go down town."

Ellery made mental note that Wilton was remaining to keep watch over him until he was needed, and he tried concentration to identify Moulton without avail.

Wilton entered his den, which gave Jackson an opportunity to pick up a telephone book and turn over the pages casually to find without trouble half a dozen of the attorneys whose names he had conjured up last night. Although it was of no immediate advantage to him, the fact that he had remembered real names heartened him greatly.

Mrs. Wilton was settled on a divan reading a thick book which presently she laid down to make an excursion kitchenward and Ellery, wandering over, picked up the volume to recognize Burke's Peerage.

Undoubtedly, the lady was looking him up. Perhaps there was something to look up. He turned to the M's, ran his finger down the column and found, rather to his surprise, "Monmoor, Earl of:"

> Richard Graile, sixth earl of Monmoor, ninth Baron Lanning. Born 1805 at Uxbridge, educated at Eton and Cambridge. Son of Talbot Graile, grandson of William, fourth Earl of Monmoor.
>
> James, fifth earl, dying April 18, 1923, title passed to Herbert Jackson, grandson, of Antietam, Kansas, who died without issue, while search was being made for him, March 7, 1925.
>
> Title reverted to the younger branch. Present Earl of Monmoor married June 3, 1926, Lady Clarice Gruen, fourth daughter of Ambrose, seventh Baron of Graves.

With a nod of satisfaction, Ellery laid the book down in the place where he found it, and sidled to the far side of the room lest Wilton should enter and suspect him of having dipped into it.

So his suspicions were correct as regard the enterprise for which ostensibly he had been engaged. Though the family name of the Earls of Monmoor was Graile, the American claimant was dead, and his death so conclusively proved that the next in line had succeeded to the title more than a year before.

Mrs. Wilton in her cat-like curiosity had dug Burke's Peerage from among the books in her husband's library, and then left it lying around to betray the double dealing of her lord and master.

He wondered if she had read the paragraph dealing with the Monmoors, and if it conveyed anything to her; most likely she supposed that the reported death of the Kansan would prove to be erroneous, and that the new earl would resign his title without a struggle.

He hoped for her sake that she would return and restore the book to its shelf before Wilton found it lying around.

In the light of this discovery he began to build a theory to account for Wilton's behavior. The lawyer had recognized him, or thought he recognized him as a person named Jackson, then had discovered that the young man on the sidewalk did not know him.

Evidently Jackson must have been well-acquainted with Wilton; so that his failure to return the recognition was a great surprise to him.

Being sure of his identity, he had induced the befuddled youth to ride with him until he had a chance to find out whether he was grossly intoxicated or out of his wits, and he had decided quickly that the latter was the case.

Then, by a series of catch questions, he had discovered that Ellery had no notion of his own name and condition, and studied how to turn it to his own advantage.

Wilton must have known something about the Monmoor case; by the attitude of Mrs. Wilton when the stranger was introduced to her it seemed likely that the lawyer had worked upon it unsuccessfully in the past, which explained why he was so glib with his tale of the missing heir, Herbert Jackson.

Evidently Wilton had designs of some sort upon the other Jackson whose first name the amnesia victim did not know, and advanced the Herbert Jackson story as a stalking horse, probably to explain his use of the name upon first setting eyes upon the young man upon the sidewalk outside the library.

It was undoubtedly money in his pocket to keep the false Herbert Jackson under his eye, and the jubilation of Tony Frothingham, the alleged farm boy from Antietam, upon setting eyes on him meant that there was money in it for him as well as Wilton.

If he could only get some clew as to the identity of the other Jackson! If he could discover whether this, also, was to be an impersonation, or whether he really was the man himself!

Could he ascertain the first name or the initials of the second Jackson, he might look him up in the directory or telephone book, discover his business, and perhaps get in touch with his friends in some way.

Was the second Jackson named Herbert also? He sought the telephone book. Although there were pages of Jacksons there were only two named Herbert, and both, curiously enough, were physicians.

Somehow it did not seem likely that such an elaborate plot would be constructed

against the safety and pocketbook of physicians; no matter how prosperous a doctor might be he would hardly accumulate enough to attract high-class villains of the type of Wilton and Frothingham.

There were a dozen persons listed as H. Jackson; some of these might be named Herbert also, but he had no way of finding out which.

Ellery was groping like a blind man; the eyes of his mind were blind, true enough, but all his other senses were on the alert, and he summoned the legal training he was sure he possessed to inform him of the character of the game in which he appeared to be a pawn.

He drifted to the window, which looked out upon the side street, and glanced aimlessly across the way, where the façade of another great apartment house confronted him. As he gazed, there suddenly appeared at the window directly opposite, perhaps sixty feet away, a very beautiful young woman.

With the natural interest of a young man for the opposite sex, he saw that she was very striking, a tall, dark girl, with wonderful black eyes, an oval face of olive hue, crowned by a mop of lustrous black hair, bobbed with a figure that seemed to him most admirable.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DARK LADY AT THE WINDOW.

IN his present incarnation Ellery had seen but one young woman who delighted him, and Eleanor Folsom was as different from this girl as noonday is from midnight; yet midnight can be very beautiful, and he continued to look at her with increasing admiration.

She had been gazing toward Park Avenue; now her eyes swept upon him, and Ellery, like a well-bred man, prepared to avert his gaze lest he encounter a glance of resentment; but instead he saw recognition, and a smile brightened her face like moonlight darting out from behind a cloud.

She waved her hand at him, and involuntarily he returned her smile and her salutation. The girl immediately pointed downward with a gesture, and an expression which said in perfect pantomime.

"Meet me below." She was gone before he could decide what to do, and he turned away from the window in considerable confusion. This lovely girl seemed to know him, and be glad to see him; had left the window to put on a hat and wrap, and go down to the street, which meant that she expected him to do likewise, and join her in the doorway of her apartment house.

This was perfectly natural if they were friends, but he didn't know who she was, and it was very doubtful if Wilton would permit him to rush out of his apartment to meet a stranger, male or female.

He might take advantage of the lawyer's seclusion in his den and the absence of Mrs. Wilton to escape from the apartment, but what would he say to the girl, how explain his lack of recognition, and if he abandoned Wilton now, how would he discover what sort of scheme the man was cooking up.

He was sure the young woman was well-bred—it was no window flirtation—and she would be incensed if he failed to show himself after she had indicated her intention of going downstairs to meet him. While he was engulfed in this predicament Wilton came out of his private room and said curtly:

"Let's be getting downtown, Jackson. It's later than I thought."

Mechanically he donned the new coat and hat which the attorney had purchased for him, then followed the already street-garbed Wilton out into the hall, and into a waiting elevator.

They crossed the lobby rapidly, and as they reached the avenue he saw Wilton's car at the curb; the man must have phoned for it.

Perhaps he might wave at the girl if she were waiting in the door of the house across the street, and, angry as she probably would be at the slight, it was the best way out of that mess.

But he was not to escape in that manner, for the young woman was standing on the sidewalk indescribably lovely in a coat of Russian sables, and a smart green hat.

Her ravishing smile flashed as she caught his eye, and her little right hand was outstretched. Wilton, dazzled, thought for a moment it was for him, then saw that she was aiming at his prisoner, and a spasm of anxiety crossed his face.

"Why, Ellery—" said the girl in delighted fashion.

Mechanically he took her gloved hand in his big bare one, and felt a cordial pressure.

"This is a pleasure," he muttered, confused; then Wilton grabbed his arm.

"Sorry to interrupt, but Mr. Jackson is very late now, Miss," he said brusquely.

"I'll try to see you soon," mumbled the victim, as he dropped the little hand and permitted Wilton to push him into the car. He saw a flush of indignation upon the girl's face, and then Wilton threw in his gears and the car moved away.

"Who was that young woman?" asked Wilton rather nervously.

"I just can't place her at the moment."

"One of your actress friends, no doubt. Nice sables she wears."

Ellery was fuming at his ungracious departure. There was something most magnetic about that girl, and he was sure he knew her; he almost remembered her; she was sympathetic; it might be safe to confide in her if he could get a moment alone with her; he was quite certain she would try to help him.

Her fascination was not like that of Eleanor Folsom, nor did she thrill him as the little girl had done; but he was drawn to her, nevertheless. By Jove, she had helped him. She had called him by his first name, and Wilton had immediately countered by saying "Mr. Jackson."

Since the young woman knew him well enough to call him by his first name, it was obvious that she knew his Christian name, and Wilton would not have dared to use anything but his real name. Nor had he made any effort to convince her that it was a case of mistaken identity.

He said "Mr. Jackson is very late now." That meant that his last name was really Jackson, and his first name was Ellery. Ellery Jackson. It had a familiar ring; certainly he had heard it before.

Well, he had a startling piece of information, and his debt of gratitude to the beautiful and friendly young lady required cancellation; later he hoped to be able to repay her. Wilton was shooting side glances at his dupe, wondering if the encounter had enlightened him in any way; uneasy and beginning to grow alarmed at the peril of his enterprise.

As Frothingham had assured him, Ellery was a stick of dynamite—a familiar face, an arresting scene, and his recollection might return in a flood, then the explosion.

But the victim remained outwardly serene, and gradually Wilton convinced himself that the encounter had made no impression on him, nor had the name of Ellery punctured his mental fog; however, a few such incidents, and the daring game he was playing might be lost.

Their first stop was Wilton's office, where the chubby stenographer raised scornful eyebrows at the sight of the man she was sure was a pickpocket still in the company of her revered employer, then reached for her foolish little gilt hand bag which she had tossed carelessly upon her desk, and proceeded to stow it away in a drawer. Ellery flushed, then smiled amusedly, but Wilton scowled at her.

"Step into my private office, Jackson," he instructed. "Make yourself comfortable. I've got an errand to do down the hall."

Correctly assuming that Wilton had stepped out to phone on business connected with his own presence, Ellery seated himself, and his wandering eye was struck by a letter on the top of a pile of mail lying upon the shelf of the lawyer's desk. It read:

HENRY R. WILTON, M. D.

"That's funny," he mused, and, eager to learn everything possible about his captor, he proceeded to look at the inscriptions of all the letters. There were a dozen in the pile, and four others were addressed either to "Dr. Henry R. Wilton" or to "Henry Wilton, M. D."

"I thought this fellow was a lawyer," he muttered, "This is a very interesting development."

The entrance of Wilton, wearing an ex-

pression of satisfaction, interrupted his inspection of the letters, fortunately after he had piled them up again.

" Sorry to have had to leave you," said the lawyer.

" Oh, that's all right. I just happened to notice that the top letter of the pile there was addressed to you as M. D. Do you happen to be a physician as well as an attorney?"

The man looked embarrassed, then laughed shortly. " I graduated from a medical school, and practiced a year or two," he admitted. " However, I soon realized that there was no future for any but a specialist, and I had no money for postgraduate courses. I saw fellows who had gone in for the law getting rich hand over fist, and I got a job as a clerk in a law office; I wasn't earning my salt as a doctor."

" That's very interesting. Do you find that your medical knowledge assists you in your practice of law?"

" Darn little. I just wasted three years in a medical school."

" What school did you attend?"

" Johns Hopkins. Oh, I was a pretty good doctor at that. I was particularly interested in neurology. Of course I dropped everything long ago."

" Hum. That was how you happened to think of amnesia to explain Herbert Jackson's failure to put in an appearance for seven years?"

" Why—er—yes, I suppose so."

" Did you ever see a case of amnesia?"

" No, and neither did anybody else. There is no such thing."

" I disagree with you. It seems to me to be quite possible. In fact I am suffering from it myself."

" Now for Heaven's sake don't start that line again," Wilton said with considerable earnestness. " Just forget it, and think only of what I tell you."

" Will you believe me? I do not remember anything of my life beyond a fortnight ago."

Ellery made the statement for no other purpose than to watch the reaction of this apostate physician, and from the man's eyes he learned what he wished to know. Wilton laughed scoffingly, but his eyes replied that he was sure the young man was speaking the truth.

" Just as you say," he shrugged. " We're going to a certain club to lunch with Mr. Moulton."

" You spoke of him at breakfast. What does he do?"

" I told you, he is one of the partners in the law firm which is in charge of the Jackson case."

" And he will accept me on your say-so, despite my inability to remember my past life?"

" You just say you remember everything up to the day of the cyclone, and then Frothingham identifies you; that's all there is to it."

Ellery tried to look as if he swallowed this, and obediently followed his mentor down into the street. His mind was occupied with his discoveries.

In the first place he was surely established now as Ellery Jackson; at last he knew his own name. Wilton had been a physician, and had quickly diagnosed what was the matter with him during their short conversation on the way down town yesterday.

When he said there was no such thing as amnesia he lied, for he knew that Ellery was suffering from the disease, and had presumed upon his knowledge to entangle him in a plot. The young man hoped he would be able to unravel the plot during the luncheon they would have with this person Moulton.

It seemed to him that he was in much the same situation as a detective called in to solve a crime. Knowing nothing of the criminal or his methods, the detective followed whatever clews he was able to turn up until he was in possession of complete details.

Ellery was his own detective in the establishment of his identity, and the foiling of a conspiracy of some sort based on the supposition of his enemies that he was completely in the dark.

The plot depended in some way upon the possession of his person, so it seemed to him, therefore, if he could not get an inkling of it at this portentous luncheon, he would

manage to take French leave of Mr. Doctor-Lawyer Wilton; that ought to stump the plotters.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOCUS POCUS!

IN the lobby of the pretentious luncheon club, a fashionable figure was standing with his back to the newcomers which, upon executing an about-face proved to be Mr. Tony Frothingham, whose appearance here displeased but did not surprise Ellery.

Tony advanced with cordial paw, which the young man accepted reluctantly, to discover, in addition to other unpleasant characteristics, that the man had sweating palms.

"This is delightful," declared Tony.

"Greetings, friend of my boyhood," Ellery replied, with so much sarcasm in his tone that Mr. Frothingham scrutinized him in trepidation; for he was still obsessed with the fear that Ellery might be kidding them.

"We'll just drop into the lounge," said Wilton. "Mr. Moulton will be right along."

There were half a dozen people in the room, several of whom nodded in friendly fashion to Ellery; however, none approached. Nevertheless, he marked these nods of recognition, which indicated that he must be considered a person of some importance.

Mr. Moulton arrived, a mountain of a man, with great overhanging jowls, and eyelashes which were like an untrimmed hedge. He was quite bald, his nose was huge and wide-spreading. He was a powerful, ruthless sort of person, and Ellery wondered what particular kind of criminal he was.

Moulton, like Frothingham the night before, looked startled when he set eyes on Ellery, but masked his surprise and thrust out a gigantic, hairy hand into which Ellery submitted his own less gorillalike appendage with some apprehension. Moulton's grip, however, was a soft, cushioned pressure.

"Let's go up to a private room," said the monster, to whom the minor crooks were comically subservient.

Ellery observed that the meeting with Moulton attracted attention in the lounge, and he was sure that one or two remarks made behind hands concerned Moulton and himself.

He reflected bitterly that in this room, outside of the cordon of crooks, were at least three or four people who knew who he was, and considerable about him, a few words from them would perhaps dissipate the fog in which he was enshrouded; yet he could not appeal to them.

As they crossed the main hallway and were about to enter an elevator, a good-looking young Hebrew stepped forward as if to intercept him. About this man there was something familiar. Ellery almost knew his name, and he had a sense of liking toward him quite the opposite of his instinct of antagonism toward the persons in whose company he found himself.

"Well, Ellery," called the young Jew.

"Oh, how do you do," he said coldly. He had to be distant, for he was in no condition to sustain a colloquy. The Hebrew had a keen, sensitive face; would divine in a moment that there was something wrong with Jackson if he paused for further speech.

He stepped into the elevator, observing out of the corner of his eye that the young man had stopped short, and wore an expression of being slighted.

"We're taking terrible chances," Frothingham was whispering to Wilton as the elevator ascended.

"It's all right. He didn't know Weinborg either," said the other in Frothingham's ear.

They entered a private dining room containing a table set for four, where Moulton, who seemed to be the host, indicated that Ellery should sit at his right. A waiter thrust soup under the noses of all, and the meal began.

"Mr. Moulton," stated Wilton, "is my principal in the matter which concerns you. I have already supplied him with all the data, but, just as a mere matter of form, he wanted to see you, and talk with you. That right, Mr. Moulton?"

"Yup," assented the man mountain as he wiped from his chin a quantity of soup

which had missed the main entrance, large as it was. "I understand you don't remember your past life for the last seven years. Got a terrible nervous shock." His voice was rather high-pitched and shrill, not at all in keeping with his personality.

"Yes, sir," said Ellery. It was true enough.

"Well, Wilton has all the dope. Frothingham identifies you. No doubt at all you are the man. Going to be a lord. That's funny."

"I think so myself, sir."

"You'll be an improvement on what they got over there. I saw the House of Lords in session once."

Moulton seemed no further interested in the affairs of Herbert Jackson, but applied himself to a huge steak, while the others also ate heartily, with the exception of the "future British nobleman."

The steak was followed by wedges of apple pie, and cubes of orange-hued cheese, then black coffee. Moulton, having finished at last, wiped his mouth, and then his brow; the exertion of eating had made him perspire.

"Give me those papers," he commanded of Wilton. "Waiter, clear this table."

While the dishes and covers were being removed, Wilton produced a brief case, and drew from it two legal documents which he handed to his employer, who proceeded to peruse them with great care.

"Seems all right. Complete statement of the case. Just a mere formality." Taking a fountain pen from his breast pocket he proffered it to Ellery. "You fix your John Hancock on those, and you sail into the British nobility," he squeaked. "Your full name is E. Herbert Jackson; just sign E. H. Jackson, saves time."

Now Ellery had been seething with anxiety during this interminable luncheon for a scent of the plot; but the conversation had been devoted to the preposterous Monmoor claim, and there had been but little of that.

Here was the plot. He was supposed to sign something, and they had added an E to his name. E stood for Ellery. E. H. was probably the regular signature of Ellery Jackson, and these criminals wanted it.

Well, he would sign nothing without reading it, and he took the papers from the hands of Moulton, expecting a protest against taking time to peruse them.

"That's right," said Moulton. "Read it first."

The papers were a declaration of the evidence upon which he demanded the earldom of Monmoor, made out in due form, containing all the data already supplied him by Wilton and other corroborative detail. He noticed that he was described throughout as E. Herbert Jackson.

"Shouldn't I sign E. Herbert?" he asked.

"Sign E. H. That's good enough for me."

Ellery glanced at the second paper, which seemed to be a copy of the first, while the three regarded him with veiled excitement. He did not wish to sign this preposterous declaration which might get him into serious trouble, and he could not think of an excuse for refusing.

His fingers were rubbing the second sheet nervously, and, suddenly, the extremely sensitive finger tips struck a ridge in the paper. He scrutinized it; nothing visible, but now he knew.

The second declaration consisted of two sheets of paper ingeniously pasted together. After he had signed at the bottom of the page, Wilton would remove the upper sheet, leaving the lower, which protruded a couple of inches below the top sheet, and then would fill in whatever he really wished to appear above the signature of E. H. Jackson.

Dimly he remembered something about stage mind-readers who passed tablets of paper through the audience upon which persons wrote questions, then tore off the paper, and held it in their hands while the assistant collected the tablets upon which the questions also appeared through some ingenious copying system, and signaled the answers to the stage.

This was the same sort of thing. Evidently they wanted his signature, and had gone to all sorts of trouble, and constructed this elaborate hoax of the earldom of Monmoor for that purpose.

His pen was poised above the paper. How could he circumvent them? Easy. Change his handwriting. But poor Ellery did not

know what his own handwriting was like, for until now he had not had occasion to sign his name.

"Hurry up, young fellow. I'm a busy man, and I got to get away," squealed Moulton, perspiring freely in his anxiety.

Ellery tightened his fingers, bent the pen far around to the right, and scribbled as fantastically as possible "E. H. Jackson."

He repeated upon the second declaration, then thrust them both back to Moulton. The behemoth grasped them, eagerly squinted at the signature, and emitted a screech of indignation.

"Damn it, that's not your signature," he declared.

"How the deuce do you know what is my signature? You never saw it."

"This is a hell of a note," spat Moulton to his confederates. "It will never pass in the world."

"How do you know my signature?" demanded Ellery with rising anger.

"Now, now," soothed Wilton. "You forget we have specimens of your signature. You've forgotten your old style, that's all. Mr. Moulton has seen letters of yours."

"Certainly," lied Moulton. "That's it."

"You come over to my office, and I'll show you the way you used to write," the lawyer said. "I'll have to go to the bank to get them; the letters are in the vault. Maybe, though, I have some signatures to typewritten notes. I think I have."

"If you haven't, you will have soon," thought Ellery, who was glowing with satisfaction at their discomfiture.

"And hurry up about it," commanded Moulton. "I must get those declarations into the mail to-night."

The four men left the dining room together, descended to the lobby, collected their hats and coats, and continued to the sidewalk, where Moulton shook hands and left, only an angry gleam in his eye revealing the anger that was boiling within him, after which Ellery, with Wilton on one side and Frothingham on the other, walked toward Fifth Avenue.

"I'm a prisoner, and these are my jailers," thought Ellery. "There is nothing more to be gained by sticking with them, and they might force me to sign those papers properly. I think I'll be going."

A fairly strong wind was in their faces as they walked down the avenue on the east side of the street, and the wind suggested an expedient to Ellery.

He pushed his felt hat high on his forehead without attracting attention from his companions, who were trudging along sullenly, and he waited for the wind to blow the hat off. Just because he wished this to happen the wind seemed contrary-minded, and he walked a block before a sudden gust lifted it from his head.

"My hat!" he exclaimed.

There is something extremely comical about a man chasing his hat; everybody stops to watch, and laughs at his frantic efforts. It was such a natural thing for Ellery to whirl and run back after his headpiece that both Frothingham and Wilton joined in the general hilarity, nor did it occur to either that it was a ruse on the part of their victim to make his escape.

Several people tried to stop the rolling felt hat, fortunately in vain; but after twenty or thirty feet it settled down contentedly upon the sidewalk, which was not nearly far enough away from his companions to suit Ellery; so, stooping for it, he appeared to kick it involuntarily and another zephyr lifted it and carried it out upon a side street just as the traffic signal changed, and westbound motors began to move.

However, they paused for Ellery, who recovered his hat in midstreet, then dashed to the farther curb just as Frothingham and Wilton reached the opposite gutter, and were halted by the stream of traffic.

"I've got to get out of here," muttered Ellery as he jammed the hat upon his head, and, on impulse, he swung upon the running board of a taxi which turned out of the side street headed uptown, with its flag erect, signifying "For Hire."

The driver uttered a protest, but Ellery pulled open the door, leaped inside, and sank upon the seat, to discover, to his astonishment and dismay, that it already had an occupant, a girl. And the girl was Eleanor Folsom!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Recognition

By JOHN HOPPER

"YOU, man! You pick up a double time going up those stairs, y'understand?"

The speaker, a solidly built young man of medium height, whose dark, regular features bore a hard scowl, was a yearling, a member of the third class of the United States Military Academy. He stood in a barren, though highly polished, hall of the cadet barracks, and gazed up the black iron stairs which lead to the hall above.

The one spoken to was a plebe, a member of the fourth, or lowest, class at West Point. He, too, showed evidences, in his body, of rigorous exercise in drills and athletics.

"Yes, sir!" snapped the plebe, and stood rigidly at attention while he drew back his chin until it pressed firmly against the stiff, upstanding black braid collar of his gray dress coat.

"Beat it, mister!" ordered the yearling; and then he added: "You'd better snap to, Mr. Randall. This is June Week, you know."

Glad to be released, Dave Randall finished the remainder of the stairs two at a time, and ran down the hall of the fourth floor to his room.

As he slammed the door behind him he flung his cap upon his green-topped, steel table. Two fan-backed, wooden armchairs hit the floor with a bang. His roommates had been reading, their feet on top of their tables.

"What's the matter, Dave?" drawled George Horton in his lazy, Tennessee voice. "Jimmy Brice been getting on you again?"

"Yes—damn him!" quivered Dave, his face distorted with anger.

"Guess I'd feel that way about it, too," contributed Jack Longan, the sentimental roommate from California. "If a man stole my girl as plain as Brice stole yours, I'd be hankering to punch his face in."

"Oh, come off of it, you two!" cried Dave. "It's not Jimmy Brice, nor his stealing my girl, as you call it, that has anything to do with it. I'm just sick of this place, that's all. Just sick of saying 'Yes, sir' and 'No, sir,' and jumping here and running there for everybody who says so, just because he happens to be an upper classman."

But deep in his heart, Dave knew that the place was all right. It was just that bitterness which had been eating into his soul for the last couple of months. Bitterness because Jimmy Brice was gaining favor in the eyes of the girl whom Dave Randall had worshiped since way back in their high school days.

What made it doubly hard was the fact that Dave himself had paved the way, provided an introduction to Miss Peg Burton, for Brice. Plebes were not allowed to attend hops and, when Peg came down to visit Dave, he had arranged that Jimmy Brice take her to a hop, never thinking that it would be natural for the girl to be attracted to the care-free, experienced, upper classman, and that he, in return, should go on further than it was intended for him to go, and fall in love with the girl.

Since that time Dave had been growing more and more bitter, taciturn, and rebellious. He was rapidly losing his reputation of being the " best plebe in the company."

George Horton drawled again:

" Dave, you make me tired. Yes, you do—going around here with a face like a sour lemon. Forget all this nonsense. Why, June Week is almost over! To-morrow night comes Graduation Parade, and Recognition. Stick it out with good grace until then, my boy. After Recognition you will be an upper classman yourself."

Dave said nothing, and walked over to the double windows; his roommates resumed their reading.

Four stories below him was the Area, a level expanse of hard-packed gravel, bordered with concrete pavement. The barracks, forming a rectangle except for one side, hemmed in the Area. The fourth side was blocked at a little distance from the Area by the West Academic building, gray, stern stone like the rest.

June Week! The one small fraction of each year during which West Point turns away from the routine of drills, and classes, and gray life. With the ending of stern winter, hard working spring, and academic year, West Point, for one week, is eager, thrilled, and expectant.

Cadets have no duties to perform except parades and reviews which in themselves are duties enough. However, there is plenty of free time in between these stirring formations, and it is well used.

Girls, in summery, soft-colored dresses, with their escorts in full dress gray and white, are everywhere about. There are picnics on Flirtation Walk, the winding, leafy lovers' lane, which takes its course close to the banks of the placid Hudson; picnics near old Fort Putnam, which commands the wooded rise to the rear of Cadet Chapel. Every evening dignified Cullum Hall entertains the laughing, military youth of the nation, and their girl companions, with dancing.

But there is not a plebe in sight. June Week, for fourth classmen, means confinement to barracks, endless tasks, and formations for the upper classmen, for plebes are not yet on the same footing as their elders, and will not be until after graduation parade—the last event except graduation, before the close of June Week.

Dave thought of all these things as he gazed moodily into the Area. What did June Week mean to him? What had it meant to him? Nothing, save the heart eating rancor of knowing that Peg was down here enjoying all these things—with Jimmy Brice—while Dave had to keep to his room, daring to venture outside of it only when it was necessary, for fear that he would fall into the hands of some upper classmen looking for sport. For sport and plebe are synonymous during June Week.

During the preceding year the upper classmen have very little to do with plebes, except to make necessary corrections, and to make sure that they are developing along the lines essential for West Pointers. The difficulty of the academic work requires that interference with plebes be reduced to a minimum.

However, with the coming of June Week, all this is changed. Upper classmen become harsh and domineering. To the extent of their ability they make life as burdensome for the plebes as possible. This is done for two reasons: the one, in order to see if they have the stuff in them to " stand the gaff " the other, since plebedom is over forever at the close of June Week,

it is the earnest desire that a cadet's last days as a plebe be made as unpleasant as possible. Most of the fourth classmen survive the ordeal in a fitting manner due to their past year's training and, after graduation parade, when Recognition takes place, are welcomed by hearty handclasps into the fraternity of the corps.

However, there are some plebes—and they are very few—who fail to grasp the true significance of their treatment at the hands of the upper classmen during June Week. These, either openly rebel, or maintain a resentful attitude.

If they remain at West Point after Recognition, they find, to their sorrow, that the fraternity of the corps means nothing to them; that to them is attached a slight stigma of being "yellow," and the reputation of not being able to "stand the gaff." The army wants no such men.

Dave Randall had been treading dangerous ground this June Week. Each succeeding day he had become more sullen. The upper classmen saw this and were troubled. It was unusual for a man who had won through the year as Dave had, to lose out on the home stretch—June Week.

Perhaps Jimmy Brice might have understood if he thought seriously about it. But Jimmy did not. He was incapable of thinking that any woman could have such an effect upon any man. Women and money, to Jimmy, presented a similar aspect: easy come, easy go.

Dave Randall turned away from the window with a snort. He had just seen Peg and Jimmy pass by. They were evidently bound Fort Putnamward, for Jimmy was carrying a small phonograph and a blanket.

"Damn these upper classmen!" ejaculated Dave. "The next one who says a word to me, I'll knock it down his throat."

The two roommates sighed wearily. Horton remarked: "Oh, go over in the corner and die!" Yet, the next twenty-four hours were to show that Dave's words were not as purposeless as they seemed.

II.

THE next day opened auspiciously. The morning was a typical June morning at West Point: cloudless blue sky, clear sunshine, and a slight, cool breeze. This was the last whole day of June Week, for only half a day besides remained—that half day being taken up by the graduation exercises.

On this morning, the exercises to render homage to the men of the corps of other years, who had died during the past year, were to take place.

The men of the corps in full dress, under arms, were awaiting the coming of the old graduates who return to West Point during June Week to relive again their cadet days.

From a distance the music of a band playing "Benny Havens," heralded their approach. In a long, slowly marching column they neared the monument. Dave could see, heading the column, white-haired gentlemen, evidently long ago retired from active service. It was for these that the band played so slowly.

Dave felt ashamed of his bitter thoughts. He stiffened, clasped his rifle more firmly with his white-gloved hand. West Pointers were *men*, men who served loyally, truthfully, and self-sacrificingly. If these old grads, gathered here to-day, believed the life worthy, then he, too, would deem it so, and fight to carry on.

The line of graduates halted and faced the corps. The choir master of cadet chapel stepped to the center of the clearing in front of the monument. Utter silence. Upon the fall of his arm a deep, vibrating hymn filled the air. Slowly, at first, then gathering volume the majestic song swung on. The corps was rendering tribute to its members long passed on.

The last, low, somber words of the song had hardly died away when an iron-haired man stepped from the line of motionless graduates. He was Colonel Turnbull, adjutant of the corps when he was a cadet, and whose son, Dick Turnbull, was the present adjutant. With a steady, clear voice he began to read from the paper he held in his hand.

This paper contained the list of names and classes of the graduates of the academy who had died during the past year. As the names were read, distinctly and deliberately, the cadets bowed their heads over their rifles. When the old colonel had finished,

the solemn hush which followed was accentuated by the silvery voice of a bugle playing, low and lingeringly, the soldier's last call—taps.

The last note concluded the exercises. Sharp commands brought the companies of cadets to attention. The corps returned to the Area and was dismissed.

Dave, running through the crowd of upper classmen, reached his division of barracks and fled up the stairs to his room. As he was divesting himself of his cross belts and equipment, he reassured himself that he would forget that such a woman as Peg ever existed, and that he would, henceforth, do his duty as a cadet cheerfully, and to the best of his ability, in order to fit himself for service such as the old grads had rendered to their country.

His two roommates entered and began to remove their equipment. The plebes were working silently, for the spell cast upon them by the memorial exercises still remained in their thoughts. A raucous voice, heard distinctly, even though it bellowed up from the hall four floors below them, smote their ears.

"You plebes turn out down in the shower room immediately! Proper uniform!"

"Ye gods!" bewailed Jack Longan. "Another bath formation!"

The plebes hurriedly donned old uniforms, and clattered down the stairs. A bath formation was one of the little schemes evolved by ingenious upper classmen for the purpose of disciplining fourth classmen; and a peremptory summons to participate in one was not to be debated upon, but obeyed with alacrity.

The three roommates, upon reaching the showers, which were in the basement, found a number of their classmates ahead of them. These were standing in line, motionless, chins drawn in, chests raised, and shoulders drawn back to such an extent that the gray cloth of their dress coats was well wrinkled.

Upper classmen were passing up and down the line, ordering this man or that, to make more effort. Dave's roving eye saw Jimmy Brice's slightly amused countenance.

After the last arrivals had taken their places in line, and had been duly admonished and "braced" for their tardiness, the fair-haired yearling, who appeared to be the master of ceremonies, began to speak. A hush fell over the room, except for the hissing of water running full blast from tub faucets.

"You plebes give me your attention. When I say go, you all undress as speedily as possible, and form line facing the showers. The last man undressed will have to dress and undress six times. Understand?"

There being no necessity for receiving an assent, he shouted:

"Go!"

Immediately utmost confusion possessed the room. Plebes, jostling one another in their haste, struggled with their clothing, and piled it on the low benches along the walls. Upper classmen, going about, aided the confusion by shouting warnings to hurry, and encouragements to individual plebes who were gaining in the race.

Many laughable accidents happened to the plebes because of their earnestness to please, and the upper classmen, as well as many of the braver plebes, were hard put to it to maintain straight faces.

Finally, a line of naked, healthy young bodies stood in the place where the gray line had been originally. The master of ceremonies spoke again:

"Now, when I say go, the line starts moving through the showers at the left, and finishing up through the tubs at the right. Go!"

Moving over the wet, tiled floor warily lest they slip, the plebes entered one shower after another. The first one was cold, the second hot, and so on, with variations. No plebe escaped. Vigilant upper classmen were on guard to see that each man entered each shower, and immersed himself in the tubs, gaspingly or gingerly, according to the coldness or warmth of the water. Meanwhile the yearlings were busy in thoroughly mixing the piles of clothing.

When the last man had completed the gamut of showers and tubs, the entire group were allowed to dress, having been given a limit of time.

A mad scramble! And the things that came out of it! Here, one man's head was buried beneath a cap many sizes too large for him. There, one, with a red face, strug-

gled manfully to button a blouse made for a one hundred and thirty pound body around a hundred and eighty pound form.

The effect of all the different costumes was ludicrous, as no man succeeded in capturing his own clothing, though some of the more finicky had tried hard enough.

As each plebe finished his dressing he stepped forward to be examined by the cool, appraising eye of an upper classman. Passing the inspection, the plebe was dismissed.

Dave Randall was the last to be dressed. Deliberately, he stood up, and presented himself for inspection.

" Mr. Randall, you haven't laced your shoes properly! You report to my room immediately."

Boiling inside, Dave muttered a thick " Yes, sir." As he ran out curious glances of the upper classmen followed him.

Dave reached the yearling's room, which was on the first floor, and, taking off his cap, entered. He did not have long to wait, for in a moment some of the yearlings who had been in the basement came in.

Rosset, the yearling who had ordered Dave to report to the room, stepped close to him, and looked angrily into Dave's steady, purposeful eyes.

" Mr. Dumjohn, when you are ordered to do a thing around here, you do it properly. Y'understand? Slam your chin in! Move your shoulders back!"

The yearling should have been warned by the glinting lights in the plebe's eyes that he was rapidly approaching a state of uncontrollable fury which, if further aggravated, would surely break loose. But Rossett made a fatal mistake. Being a yearling he took Dave's attitude for sullenness. If the yearling had been a first classman, or even a second classman, his experience would have whispered to him to go slowly, but—yearlings are only a degree removed from plebedom and, consequently, are apt to regard themselves as experts in the art of handling plebes.

" Do you feel dumped on, mister?"

The question was asked, the die cast. At West Point, for an upper classman to ask that question of a plebe, meant that the plebe, if he replied negatively, would redouble his efforts at bracing; if he replied affirmatively implied that he felt he was being treated unjustly, and—wished to fight.

Holding their breath, the yearlings awaited the answer to the challenge. Without hesitation, it came:

" Yes!"

Rosset furiously tore off his blouse, crying at the same time:

" Take off your coat, Mr. Dumguard! I'm going to knock hell out of you. You've been too sullen, and high and mighty these days to suit me."

Dave needed no second invitation. In an instant, his coat was flung into a corner. Meanwhile, the upper classmen had cleared the tables and chairs from the center of the room, leaving a good size square space for the fight.

This time it was Jimmy Brice who assumed control of the situation, and became the master of ceremonies. Up until now he had remained in the background with the rest of the yearlings. Requesting the two men to come to the center of the room, he asked:

" Rounds, or finish fight?"

" Oh, finish!" snarled Rosset.

Jimmy looked inquiringly at Dave.

" With pleasure!"

" All right, gentlemen. Finish fight. Usual rules. Shake hands. Go!"

The yearling and the plebe shook hands and then squared away from each other. They were stripped to their undershirts and trousers, and wore no shoes. In regard to height and weight, there appeared to be little or no advantage on either side.

The yearling was seething with anger. Dave also was consumed with a passion to beat this creature facing him. The indignities which he fancied he had suffered at the hands of the upper classmen urged on his desire to destroy, to smash into bleeding pulp.

Here was a chance to give vent to his emotions, pent up for the last few days. Gone were his fine resolutions of the morning after the memorial exercises. The very presence of Jimmy Brice had been enough to infuriate him. If only he were fighting him instead of this lumbering yearling!

The yearling came in first. To his mind,

the plebe seemed inexperienced; one whom a few quick blows would finish. But he had underestimated his man. Before coming to West Point Dave had been on his school boxing team. He knew how to meet wild rushes.

Surprised, the yearling retreated for air, and for a chance to recover, blood trickling from a lacerated lip. The first rush had steadied Dave. He was the boxer now, not the enraged gang fighter.

Back came the yearling, flailing out with lusty blows, but keeping no worth while guard. Perhaps he considered the failure of his first attack was due to some miscalculation on the part of himself and not possibly to the ability of the plebe.

The yearlings were fascinated, although apprehensive lest a tactical officer, having somehow obtained knowledge of what was happening, should walk in on them. That, indeed, would be serious, involving the certainty of dismissal of the participants from the academy, and severe punishments in the Area for the onlookers. But the fight was proceeding too rapidly to allow much time to worry about being caught by the authorities.

Rosset and the plebe were standing up to each other, each endeavoring to hit a vital spot. Blows hit flesh with sickening thuds. Most of Rosset's struck Dave's guarding arms, while the plebe's went home to solid flesh and bone.

Rosset was bloody and tiring. Dave saw his opportunity. A heavy feint, and a lightninglike follow—the yearling was stretched in a crumpled heap upon the hard floor, his classmates aghast, staring at him with amazed eyes.

The red blood of victory went to Dave's head. Standing in the center of the room, a vindictive figure, he shouted, shaking his fist:

"And that goes for the rest of you, too. You've been feeding me filth on a spoon long enough. I won't take it, see! That means you, too, Brice!"

The boy was crazy, beside himself. To threaten upper classmen in such fashion! The yearlings gasped. This from a plebe! There were no precedents for this in West Point.

Jimmy Brice hit the floor in front of Dave with a single leap.

"You yellow hound! You mean to tell me—a West Pointer—that I've been feeding you filth on a spoon?"

"Yes."

"Put up your hands!"

The yearlings forgot the prostrate Rosset. Here was a deadly fight—a real battle in comparison with the first. Wide-eyed, they watched the movements of the contestants.

Dave was in better shape than he was for the first fight, which had served, it seemed, as a warming up. Both men were fighting mad.

This was no unequal fight! In Jimmy, Dave had met a dangerous opponent. Back and forth across the room the fight surged. Now, one or the other would crash against a wall or, being rushed indiscriminately into an alcove, would become inextricably mixed with chairs and tables, and would knock carefully hung clothes from their pegs. The onlookers had to be continually jumping from one point of vantage to another to avoid the path of combat.

The plebe swung a heavy blow, which, if it had landed, would surely have stretched Brice alongside his classmate, who was beginning to awaken and take a dazed interest in the proceedings. Blood, in small splashes, made slippery spots on the floor.

On one of these Brice lost his footing. As he went down the plebe struck out like lightning. It might have been that he started the blow before Brice slipped, but the yearlings took another view.

"Shame," they cried, and started to intervened, for the blow had landed on the unbalanced Brice's forehead.

He sank to his knees, his head lowered for an instant. He looked done for, and the plebe backed away, still keeping in a position of readiness.

Shaking his head as though to clear the mist from his brain, the yearling pulled himself to his feet.

"Stop the fight!" cried a classmate; but Brice heard, and shook his head. Dave's laugh was unpleasant.

"Let him come," he taunted. "I'll finish him this time—finish him so he won't steal any more girls."

Grim looks descended upon the faces of the upper classmen. With all their souls, they hoped their champion's victory.

The reason for the reference to girls suddenly struck Jimmy. "You cad!" he breathed through clenched teeth.

Confidence often spells misfortune. Dave was thinking more of getting in the finishing blow than of his guard. He drove his fist straight forward, to find—empty space.

Before he could recover, a sharp, powerful crack resounded in the ears of all. The plebe sagged, and dropped to the floor.

A quick, imperative knock on the door! In unison, the hearts of the upper classmen leaped to their throats.

Tense faces stared at one another. The traditional, dreaded precursor of the entrance of a "Tac" into a cadet room. A Tac was a regular army officer assigned to a company of cadets to supervise them, and to report infractions of regulations.

The door burst open, but—instead of the olive drab, Sam Browne belted uniform, an excited group of fourth classmen stood in the doorway.

"What do you want?" demanded Brice, who was nearest, while his classmates breathed much more easily than they had a second ago.

"What are you doing to him?" George Horton, the leading plebe, demanded, pointing to the heap that was his roommate.

"Were you men told to report here?" countered Brice in a stern, ominous voice.

Long and steadily, the yearling and Dave's roommate fought a battle of wills before their silent partisans. The plebes behind Horton were beginning to get nervous.

Some one shifted his feet, another coughed. Horton felt his gaze being beaten down by those unflinching eyes. For an instant, he allowed his gaze to flicker.

That brought relief, but, try as he could, after having once allowed his eyes to waver, he could no longer squarely meet those eyes of Brice. Finally, the plebe stammered:

"No-o, sir!"

Even one year's training at West Point was not to be denied. Obedience and deference to one's military superiors are cardinal virtues at that stern place.

"Then get out—the lot of you!" Brice barked the order.

The group of plebes were slow in going; as if they were being forced away purely by an effort of indomitable will—and it was just that!

Brice and his classmates breathed still more easily. The situation had been dangerous, and for seconds that had seemed like minutes, they had feared the outcome. No sign of it had been in their faces for they were upper classmen, and upper classmen have a standard which must be maintained before plebes.

"You men step out on a double time—and make it speedy, too!"

This last order broke the revolt completely. The plebes were only plebes once more; and not a group bound together for the protection or rescue of a classmate, but a mere collection of individuals with the thought of reaching the haven of his room uppermost in each mind.

Up the plain, clean, painted hall they ran, bobbing up and down. Brice looked after them until the last gray form had disappeared.

"Phew!" exclaimed a yearling. "Did you ever see the like of that before?"

"Something must be done about it," said another. "The plebes cannot be allowed to get away with this. What a precedent it would be!"

Something was done about it; but not by the yearlings. At West Point, the first class rules cadet life, formulates the policies of the corps, and, in general, sees to it that the traditions of West Point are carried on.

From the first class comes the honor committee, that sober board of twelve men, one from each of the twelve companies. It decides all questions involving honor, and punishes those who regard their honor, and the honor of the corps too lightly.

There is only one punishment for a violation of honor, no matter how slight. It is dismissal from the academy, forever. Where honor is concerned West Point gives no second chance to those who violate it. So, it is natural that all questions of a more serious nature be referred to the first class. And so it was in the case of Dave Randall and his classmates.

Shortly after lunch, on that same day, the first classmen of Dave's company were gathered in the room of the cadet company commander. Dick Turnbull, president of the first class, was there to advise, and to represent the authority of the class as backing whatever this meeting might decide.

"Well, what are we going to do about it, Dick?" the company commander was saying.

"I say let the whole matter drop," replied Turnbull. "I'll admit that what that plebe Randall and his classmates pulled was pretty serious. But then you've got to consider the circumstances. I gather that there is a girl mixed up in this affair between Brice and Randall. These confounded women are always messing things up." Here the group of first classmen smiled, for they recalled a certain report on a delinquency list of not so long ago, which had furnished a good bit of jest at Turnbull's expense.*

"Doubtless," Turnbull went on, "Mr. Randall, since he has been a good plebe heretofore, lost his head, and considered the whole corps as wronging him, instead of one man. As for the rest of the plebes, they were as much at fault as Randall; for what they did was little short of rebellion. Yet, there is an excuse for them, also. They aren't upper classmen, and cannot be expected to have so strong a spirit of the corps until long after they have been recognized. Now, if you thought a classmate of yours was being manhandled unjustly, wouldn't you get excited and, without thinking, especially if some one else led, join a mob to rescue him? No, fellows, I'd say let the thing drop here."

"But the discipline, the precedent it would set in the corps, Dick!" remonstrated the company commander. "Think of it! A man saying that he had been 'fed filth on a spoon,' when he had been getting no more than all of us had received before him. No matter what his personal feelings were, he should have restrained them. Do we want such men in the corps? Men who will fly off the handle and destroy everything in sight, refuse to obey their superiors, be sullen in the performance of their duties, because of an outside reason—a woman. It isn't fair. It's pretty bum sportsmanship, to say the least, I think."

The rest of the first classmen, however, were with the company commander. A vote was taken, with the result that a severe lecture was to be given to all the plebes, impressing upon them the gravity of such actions as theirs in the army.

For Dave Randall, no punishment was voted. Only one first classman after another declared that he did not care to shake hands with Mr. Randall that evening after graduation parade.

With eyes blazing with indignation, Turnbull addressed them:

"Do you know what that means? Why, you might as well 'silence' the man. The under classes will follow your example, and no one will recognize him!"

The first classmen said nothing. Perhaps it would be a good idea to silence Randall. A terrible punishment, to be sure, for, a man who is officially silenced by the corps is much like the "Man Without a Country." No one speaks to him, he lives his days in loneliness. Incidents are very rare, where men have stood that censure for long. One did, for a year, but he was exceptional.

No. The first classmen did not want to go so far as to silence him. They just did not care to know him. He had not done anything, perhaps, which merited an official silence, but—

The meeting broke up. Time was drawing near to graduation parade itself.

III.

THAT momentous event was heralded by a clarion-voiced bugle making the Area ring with first call. For this one parade most of the cadets had been dressed many minutes too early. Cheers floated across the Area from the many-windowed barracks. Graduation parade!

The plebes, in stiffly-starched, virginal white trousers, were legging it awkwardly across the Area. Fourth classmen had to be in ranks by the two minute bell. They

* "Gold Cloth," Argosy, December 11, 1926.

were followed by groups of upper classmen at a leisurely pace.

Ranks formed on the road which bordered the quadrangle of barracks. A hubbub; noise of rifle butts scraping the macadam; raucous orders of upper classmen to plebes, for this was the last parade at which these plebes would have to keep their chins in, and their shoulders pulled back. A whole year they had been obliged to do these things, but, after this parade, would come Recognition, the event which marked the end of plebedom.

Clear and loud above the noise sounded adjutant's call. Almost instantly, the confusion on the road resolved into perfect order and quiet. The band struck up a stirring march; and off went the corps on graduation parade.

The parade was not long. There was the march of the gray and white lines across the fresh cut grass of the wide plain. The perfect halt. The long line, stretching from one end of the plain to the other. Expectant silence and then, at a signal, the first class left ranks and marched to the reviewing stand, the band playing " Home, Sweet Home." Then followed the thrill-invoking command, " Pass in review!"

Second classmen now stepped out and took the posts of command forever vacated by the first classmen. Last, was the march of the straight lines, with their even rows of rising and falling knees, past the hushed, thrilled crowd, past the long, motionless rank of first classmen,

The parade was over. The companies were striding through the sallyport of barracks which led into the Area, where, now, Recognition was going to take place.

Many of the white trousers of the upper classmen became suddenly soiled; oddly enough, all in the same place, as plebes planted sure and heavy shoes. Other upper classmen were wiser. They, prepared, caught the plebe's ascending foot, and jerked its owner ignominiously to the ground.

Finally the companies were brought into line and halted. Visitors crowded into the Area to watch this picturesque formation—the fourth class being accepted officially into the corps.

Captains commanded: " Dismiss the company!"

First sergeants fell out, and shouted: " Front rank; about face! Dismissed!"

And there they were in two ranks facing each other; the plebes who had been the silent, perspiring, bracing, rear rank files for so long; and the merciless, dominating upper classmen!

What an orgy of handshaking; strong, firm handclasps. They were not longer plebes and upper classmen, but all brothers in the great brotherhood of the corps.

" Damned glad to know you, Tommy, old boy!"

" Say, you're not such a hard man after all, Bill!"

And so on.

But there was one man in that great, mixed, laughing, handshaking mass of cadets, who was as much alone as though he had been on the Sahara Desert. It was Dave Randall.

No quick succession of upper classmen, with white-gloved hands outstretched, dashed up to him. One or two men, mistaking him for some one else, did grasp his hand, but these, after they realized their error, smiled awkwardly, murmured perfunctory words, and passed on.

This was Dave's bitterest hour. Like a sudden revelation, the knowledge came to him that West Point and the corps meant far more to him than he had ever dreamed it would. Now he was alone, virtually an outcast, all because of his own, foolish, spiteful acts.

This was Recognition, the goal his classmates had been striving for for a whole year. The just reward had come to his classmates, testified by their glowing faces and happy smiles. But to Dave had come nothing save—remorse.

With despair in his heart, he shouldered his rifle, and slowly walked through the clamoring groups, to his division of barracks.

Not long after Dave reached his room, his roommates burst in, hats on the backs of their heads, their rifles dragging the floor. So quickly they had assumed the careless ways of upper classmen! Seeing him, they sobered.

George Horton stepped quickly beside Dave who was gazing somberly into the Area below.

"Dave, old man," he said, as he gripped his hand, "it's a shame. We're all mighty sorry—and, Dave, your classmates will stick by you."

"Fellows, it's white of you, but—I don't know. Guess I'm not wanted—here."

Jack Longan broke in.

"Don't say that, Dave! Stay here and fight it out. To hell with them! You'll make as good a West Pointer as any of us. Show them they're wrong. They'll be damned glad to recognize you some day. If you quit now, what have you to say—to those outside?"

Hardly had the roommate from California finished speaking, when the door opened, and a tall cadet, a man noticeably erect even among erect men, entered.

From force of habit, the three roommates snapped to attention and awaited the visitor's pleasure. Never before had such an awesome personage as the regimental adjutant, entered their room.

He was in full dress, the heavy gold of four arcs and four chevrons of his office gleaming on the gray of his sleeve.

"Aw, forget it, you fellows!" he laughed. "Aren't you going to take this recognition business seriously?"

Grinning sheepishly, the brand new upper classmen awkwardly tried to assume the careless attitude belonging to their new position in cadet life.

"You're Dave Randall, aren't you?" he asked of Dave. Then, stepping forward, he seized the astonished Dave's hand in a mighty grip. "I'm Turnbull, and I'm very glad to know you.

"What I came up here to see you about is this mess you are in," he went on. "My fiancée, Doris Holt, knows your femme, Peg Burton—so I've heard a lot about you. I know you must feel pretty low and probably are about ready to give up. Don't do it, man! The corps of cadets has made mistakes before and I think it is making one this time.

"I know you better than you know me, Randall. Your dad and mine were in the Philippines together. You don't remember me, I guess, for you were young then. But, Randall, be worthy of your father. He sure was some man. Stick it out, and everything will come out all right.

"I've got to beat it, because Doris is waiting down below for me. If I don't see you again before I graduate, good-by and good luck, old man. I'll be looking to see you, a brand new shave-tail, arrive on my post some day about three years from now."

After the regimental adjutant had banged the door behind him, Jack Longan pounced on Dave with glee.

"There! What did I tell you! Dave, he knows you've got the stuff. Dick Turnbull—of all men—the best man in his class! You've just got to prove it to the rest of the lunkheads that you've got the stuff in you, and you'll do it—never fear!"

Dave did not feel so merry—nor so sure. But Dick Turnbull's act of seeking him out, and his talk, had helped considerably.

The reference to his father had a profound effect. Captain Randall, killed in the Philippine insurrection, what would he think, if he knew that his son was rejected by the corps?

"By Heaven, I'll stay. I'll graduate, if I die for it!"

"That's the old fighting spirit!" approved his roommates in unison.

IV.

DAVE'S resolute determination was to receive a severe dampening; one which almost forced him to reconsider, and give up West Point for good. It happened that night, at the graduation hop.

This dance was held in the gymnasium, as Cullum Hall, large as it was, was too small to accommodate the huge June Week crowd. The main floor of the "gym" was like a kaleidoscope for color.

Black, gold, and gray streamers—the academy's colors—hid the ceilings and the brick walls. A palm-isolated orchestra played in the center of the floor. Uniformed, slim youth; alluringly gowned girls with slender, silk-incased ankles; staid diplomats; gray generals; all united to give honor to the first class at its last hop.

Jimmy Brice was escorting Peg Burton. Dave picked her out, with anxious eye, from among the crush of gliding couples. Her glorious hair of burnished copper was not hard to locate. He cut in and steered her to a door and, silently, they walked down the stairs and out into the cool darkness of a June night.

"Peg," he whispered, "is it all over between us?"

"Yes," she answered. Silence. Then:

"Don't you care—any more?"

"Dave Randall! How could you expect me to—to care for a man like you?"

That hurt; hurt like blazes.

"Has Jimmy Brice—"

"No, Dave," she said, almost resignedly. "Jimmy has been wonderful. He has been trying, all evening, to exonerate you. But —how could I help knowing, when every one is talking about it?

"Dave, I've cared a lot. More, perhaps, than you'll ever know. But, you didn't trust me, did you? You showed all the meanness and ugliness that was in you. I can never forget it. Now, don't you think it better that we both say good-by, for good, to-night?"

"But, Peg—Peg, dear—I love you. I loved you so much that I was blind. I was mad with jealousy. Oh, I know I have acted like a fool and a cad. But isn't there some way I can show you that I care—the right way? I'll do anything in the world for you—anything. Please, dear, forgive me this once. I love you so. I'll make good. I swear I will."

"Dave, I'm afraid it is too late. I don't believe I could ever feel the same toward you again." The girl's deep, dark eyes looked at the suffering young soldier. "Please take me back, will you? We must have missed several dances."

That night was the last Dave saw Peg for some time.

V.

JUNE edged heatedly into July. The first class had graduated and the new second class had gone on furlough.

Jimmy Brice did not go. He was one of those unfortunate yearlings who, having failed to make the required grade in the June examinations, were held at West Point to await the decision of the War Department as to whether they should be discharged from the academy, or should be turned back to join the next class.

Dave regarded the misfortune which had befallen Brice with indifference. He could not, however, completely shake the feeling that, indirectly at least, Brice was the cause of separating Peg from him, and also, one of the main causes for Dave's suffering from non-recognition at the hands of the new first class. Often, Dave reflected bitterly that if he had never introduced Jimmy to Peg all that followed would not have happened.

The corps, during this summer period, consisted only of the first and third classes. These were in Summer Camp, whose neat rows of brown tents filled the level stretch of ground near Fort Clinton parapet.

Summer Camp, which comes twice in the four years of cadet life: once, yearling year, and once first class year, means a summer devoted to drills and practical, military exercises.

Yet, Summer Camp is not all labor and hardship. Drill takes only the mornings, while the long, lazy afternoons can be spent in canoeing on the Hudson, swimming in Delafield Pond, cool hours reading or sleeping beneath the heavy foliaged elms on Fort Clinton parapet. Three evenings of the week are given to hops at Cullum Hall, and the remaining four offer band concerts, and moving pictures in the gymnasium.

Many girls come to West Point to help make the social life: sisters, fiancées, or friends of the cadets. Taking it all in all, while not as pleasant as a furlough, or the vacation given by civilian colleges, Summer Camp is a pleasant, delightful, and romantic time, which the West Pointer seldom appreciates until he has left off the gray, in favor of the olive drab.

There are, however, portions of the summer that are genuinely unpleasant, but necessary. These are when the corps goes on its practice marches. On them—and they last anywhere from two to three days —conditions approximating those of the field are encountered.

The corps is divided into units corresponding to the various branches of the regular service: field artillery, cavalry, infantry, and others. Fully supplied with all the equipment appertaining to the branches, the corps marches miles to a selected "battlefield" and fights a sham battle.

It was the first sham battle of the summer and, as Dave lay, in his tiny pup tent on the hard ground, he reflected over the long, dusty march of that day. Then, as was his habit, he turned back and reviewed his life since Recognition.

By every one, save his own classmates, he was avoided. It had been hard at first, but, as the days wore on, he became used to seeing the faces always turned in another direction. He withdrew more and more in himself.

At times, he thought he even detected a gulf, ever so slight, between himself and his own classmates. Finally, his reverie ended, as it always did, with the determination to follow Turnbull's advice, and stick "until hell froze over."

Night still possessed the rows of miniature tents. A muffled bugle blowing reveille shattered the cold silence. The day had begun. The attack was to start at dawn.

Dave had just finished rolling his pack when a cadet detailed as messenger ran up to him.

"Say, you and Brice are to report to Captain Smith's tent at once!"

Obeying the order, Dave slung his pack over his shoulder, and hastened toward the row of officers' tents. Captain Smith and Brice were awaiting him.

"Mr. Randall," said the officer in his crisp, military voice, "last night's wind blew down a number of targets we placed on Hill 97 yesterday. You will go, with Mr. Brice, and repair the damage. Take a truck and pull out at once. The field artillery will start firing at five thirty, so it is imperative that you leave the vicinity of that hill before five. Any questions? All right."

The two cadets stepped backward a pace, saluted, and then turned, to go in silence to seek out their truck. It was awaiting them on the road at the edge of camp. Presently they were rumbling and jolting over the uneven country road.

During the trip to Hill 97, neither man spoke. Their common duty would be as well served without a speech, as they had not spoken to each other since their fight back in June Week.

Reaching the hill, whose slope was serrated with trenches containing cardboard effigies of men, many of which had been blown down during the night, the cadets left their truck and busily began their work. In a short time, the attack on the hill, by the combined arms of the corps, all using service ammunition, would begin.

Randall and Brice had to work rapidly for there seemed to be a huge number of targets which needed attention.

The red sun had turned golden. The morning was getting on, and still the two figures in campaign hats, gray shirts, gray breeches, and black leather puttees hastened from trench to trench.

A dull report, at a distance, followed a second afterward by a sharp detonation over the field, caused the two men to look up from their task with astonished, suddenly pale faces. A puff of white smoke drifted lazily across the blue sky above their heads.

Brice was the first to grasp the significance of what was happening. He looked at his wrist watch, and groaned. It had stopped.

"Quick, Randall!" he yelled. "The artillery has opened fire! Run!"

Running like mad, they started across the wide field, heading for the woods which edged it.

The artillery was laying down a barrage! Another explosion followed the first, and still others came in rapid succession. Several puff balls now overhung the field.

Lungs bursting, legs turning into lead—would they ever make those sheltering woods? Dave heard a piece of shrapnel whistle as it passed him in the race. An ear-splitting detonation—meteors circling at dizzy speed in a vast, black curtain, then—nothing.

When Dave came to his senses, he looked up into a light blue summer sky, high

above him. It was pleasant to lie there; so peaceful. He hadn't known delicious peace like this in ever so long, not since he was a small boy—in the Philippines, kicking his heels against the ground, looking up at the sky while his brown-skinned nurse hummed strange songs and sewed on odd garments.

Thunder! A sharp crack of it. No; the sky was serene. Another crack! What— Then, the return to full consciousness.

"Brice!" he screamed; and tried to rise.

For an instant, pin points of brilliant light filled his vision. His right arm! Deadened, numb for so long, now it began to pain excruciatingly. Faint, he dared hardly look. His gray shirt, on the right side, was red—damp, sticky red.

Courage! Damn those shrapnel!

"Brice!" he called again. No reply.

After several Herculean efforts, he staggered drunkenly to his feet. At a little distance to the rear of him he saw what he had feared to see, a huddled form in gray.

Struggling over the uneven ground, spent and breathing heavily, he dropped to his knee beside Brice. Another detonation made Dave involuntarily duck his head.

"Jimmy!" he cried; and at the same time tugged with his good arm until he had turned the body over on its back.

Hardly aware of what he was doing, in terror he shook Brice's shoulder. He was rewarded. Brice's eyelids flickered, and slid back.

"Oh!" he groaned.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Are you hurt?"

Uncomprehendingly at first, Brice looked at Dave. Then:

"Oh—my leg!"

He *was* hurt; and hurt badly. There was a jagged, blood-drenched tear in his breeches, just below the right hip.

Frantically, Dave looked around him. There was no help. The sky was still serene and blue, the air warm on the field because of the golden sunshine.

No one in sight. Only the dangerous messengers from the far off battery of "seventy-fives."

"Jimmy, we've got to get out of here! No telling when one of those shrapnel will do for us. Here; put your arm around my neck."

Randall bent over his comrade in misfortune and, with his good arm, tugged with all his strength to raise him. The pain must have been supreme for Brice, but he said nothing.

Clenching his teeth, the perspiration coursing down his dirt-grimed face, he did his best to struggle to a moving position. It was no use.

When Dave's energy was exhausted, his chest rising and falling with each huge intake of air, he was forced to realize that it was hopeless to try even to move Brice, let alone drag him to the protecting woods not so far away, yet much too far.

"Can't make it, Jimmy boy! What are we going to do?"

"Run, man! You can make the woods. No use—both of us—getting done up. Go ahead, I tell you! Every second you stay—some shrapnel—go on, for God's sake!"

Still Dave delayed. The woods, a couple of hundred yards away, stood, protective and strong, temptingly. A dash of a minute—provided no shrapnel caught him.

After all, why should he stay? This man meant nothing to him. In fact, he, Dave Randall, ought to be glad that it was Brice and not he—after all that Brice had done to him. Nobody could blame him for saving his own life; especially if, by no means in his own power, he could aid the other.

Brice was getting himself terribly worked up—so much so that tears began to trickle over his blood-drained face.

"Damn you!" he cried. "Why the hell don't you go? Go on. Will you go on—"

Dave looked at him curiously. Odd that he should be so anxious for Dave to leave him, with his torn leg, alone—the awful minutes of complete isolation, unable to move, leg burning like the devil, feeling the shrapnel come nearer and nearer until their half inch lead balls kicked up dirt into his face.

Should think he'd be afraid to be alone—would scream—and beg Randall to stay. If he were in Brice's place, he wouldn't care if the man whom no one in the corps

thought worthy of knowing, stayed or ran, died or lived.

Without so much as a parting word to Brice, Dave ran. Brice, hearing him go, closed his eyes, clenched his fists, and then relaxed.

Safe. No shrapnel had halted his second dash for life. While he leaned against the heavy trunk of a tree to catch his wind Dave gazed at the still form of Brice.

It fascinated him. He could not take his eyes from it. That puff of smoke which was now drifting away had come pretty close. There was something pathetic about that gray, lumped figure—pathetically brave, too.

Brice was taking his assignment just as he would take any other duty given him. In the corps, men obeyed and accepted their lots unquestioningly.

VI.

JIMMY BRICE heard the crunch of gravel beside him—made by a foot striking the ground—something he had never expected to hear again. He looked up into the fierce eyes of Randall who stood there, his gray shirt stripped from his body leaving a white, athletic undershirt splashed with ugly red.

"I thought — you — went?" muttered Brice feebly.

"I did—damn it!"

"Why did you come back?"

"The corps," Dave answered. "After all, we belong to the corps. Yes, even *I* do!"

Then, deliberately, Dave turned his back, faced toward where he judged the battery to be, and began to wave the partially red-dyed, gray shirt. Back and forth; his good arm began to tire. The other, hanging by his side, ached beyond telling.

Was there any one at the battery observing? Even if there was, could he be seen through field glasses at such a distance? A gray shirt is so small.

Smoke balls, unabatingly, appeared against the blue sky at irregular intervals. He ducked involuntarily. That one was close. A piece of lead tore into the ground at his feet.

That same deafening detonation. Circles and circles of star light, ether—

From an immeasureable distance, Dave heard voices. They disturbed him, forced him to return to the reality of pain. Since the voices would persist, he might as well make an effort to hear what they were saying. The gruff one said:

"Picked up something moving, through my glasses. Looked like a flag. Ordered the battery to cease firing, and telephoned you at the hospital station."

Here a softer voice took up the conversation.

"Lucky we got here when we did. They've lost so much blood. Wonder what happened, anyhow? They had orders to be out of here by five. Darned—

"Oh, here's the ambulance. Load them in. They've got to be rushed back to the hospital at the Point."

Dave ceased to follow the conversation. And that was his last lucid interval until some days later when—

Some one, in white, at his bedside exclaimed:

"Glory be, Mr. Randall! Are you awake at last? Sure, we thought you were going to sleep forever!"

Dave opened his own eyes widely, and gazed into the twinkling ones of Miss Eagon, the day nurse.

"You've been a bad patient," she told him. "Gossiping about fights and guns and—all the cussing!"

She stopped and looked at him, her hands on her hips.

"It must be a wild life you all lead back there in barracks. I never heard—well, never mind. And the red-headed lady you raved about! Sure, I knew her the minute she stepped in the door the other day. And you talking a blue streak about her that very minute. Poor girl!"

The first, faint rose color Miss Eagon had seen on Dave's cheek began to glow.

"How's Brice?" was his first question—to change the subject, maybe!

"Here I am!" piped a voice. "As fit as can be, except for this darned leg. The medico says he'll let me out in time to see the first football game!"

Dave twisted his head. In the second bed of the room was Jimmy Brice, calmly smoking a cigarette, his brown eyes friendly and inquisitive.

"Thought you'd never come to," he explained. "The boys from camp have been plaguing the life out of me, talking to me, and looking at you with goo-goo eyes."

"At me!"

"Sure. At you. Didn't think they hauled all the way down the hot road from camp just to see me, did you? My boy, you're in for it! You're a hero!" And Jimmy gazed impishly at the astonished Dave.

This was too much. He fell back against his pillow.

"Here!" admonished Miss Eagon severely. "That will be enough for you two. I can't have you both gabbing away. So sick you are!"

"That's right," smiled the incorrigible Jimmy. "Say, Miss Eagon, every time I break into the hospital you get younger and prettier all the time!"

"G'wan!" she retorted. "You cadets are all alike!"

Days of convalescence followed. The torn muscles of the arm reknitted.

But it was the last of August before the army surgeon, in command of the cadet hospital, would listen to Dave's requests that he be allowed to return to the corps for duty. At Jimmy Brice, who had begged as earnestly and as often as Dave, he shook a reprimanding head.

Of a glorious, golden autumn morning, Miss Eagon received the notice ordering that Cadet Randall be sent back to duty. Exultantly, Dave gathered his few personal effects together and slipped familiarly into his well pressed "gray and white."

He had about finished his preparations when he heard Brice call his name. Feeling a tinge of remorse because he had been so demonstratingly happy about his going, before the still confined Jimmy, Dave approached the invalid's chair.

"Dave," Brice began. "There is something I've been trying to tell you ever since we've been here, but I've let it slide as long as I could. Guess I was afraid to spoil this pleasant friendship we've had.

"I know you don't want to hear any 'postmortem' thanks, but just the same, Dave, I want you to know how I feel about what happened in that field. I did not expect you to come back, nor did I blame you for going. If I had been in your place I think I would have got out and stayed out."

"Oh no you wouldn't!" interrupted Dave awkwardly.

"I'm not so sure, especially if I had had the things back of me you had: non-recognition, and—your femme gone, stolen presumably by the very man whom you risked death to save."

Randall winced a little, at the mention of the girl.

"It's about her I wanted most to talk to you, Dave," continued Brice earnestly. "She never did care for me. Not one single instant. I *knew* it, yet, I took advantage of you as a plebe, and, after that, kept taking advantage of what fate threw into my lap when Peg cut you because of what happened before Recognition.

"I liked Peg—a lot. You know how I've been with women. Just one infatuation after another. But with Peg it was different. I could see that she didn't care about me. She talked too much of you. I tried to be fair—but I couldn't resist dragging her, even when I saw what an effect it was having on you.

"Well, I've been wrong, and so every one else has been—even Peg. You are a true West Pointer, Dave. You've got the stuff in you—which we denied, last June. I want to say, I'm glad to know you, if you'll let me."

"Hell, Jimmy, hell!" Dave choked, as he grasped the white hand. "Forget it. I deserved all I got. It was no one else's fault but mine. If I hadn't been so darned thick—"

After a moment of silence, of understanding, the two men released their strong handclasp and Dave turned to go. As he was passing out through the door, Brice's voice, for a second time, arrested him.

"Dave, I wouldn't delay too long about the 'red-headed lady,' as Miss Eagon calls her. I know she is waiting, and—she thinks

maybe you don't care, any more, after what happened at graduation hop."

"Jimmy, I won't!" promised Dave as he slowly closed the door.

VII.

It was an odd, a thrilling feeling to be whole, and out in the world again. Tenth Avenue, with the Mess Hall and the East Academic building on one side, the towering, citadel-like Administration building—which passengers on Hudson River boats see rising apparently out of the solid, long, gray wall of the riding hall—and the West Academic building on the other side were just the same as he had left them in July.

Now he was going back to the corps. Back again to the men who had never received him. True, while he had been in the hospital, they had been pleasant enough to him, not only his own classmates, but first classmen as well.

But who wouldn't be kind to a man shot up and tied to a hospital bed? Despite what Jimmy had said, that Dave was a hero, and that the men had come to their room purely to see him, Dave doubted. The corps was still—the corps. While it might laud whatever little he had done out there in the sham battle, yet, when it came to Recognition, and accepting him unreservedly as one of them, that would be another matter.

Anyhow, this time he had played the part of a man.

"A true West Pointer," Jimmy had said.

That was what he would be—"a true West Pointer"—and he would never give up the fight to stay in West Point—and yet—if he could be one of them—one of the corps, accepted—

The Area was a beehive of activity. Bewilderment possessed Dave until he remembered the date—August 27. To be sure, the corps was settling down to permanent quarters in barracks for the winter. Truckloads of belongings; clothing, mirrors, buckets, and cadets, were arriving from camp, and were being deposited in front of the various divisions. The second class, Brice's old class, was returning from furlough, sporty, out of place in their civilian regalia frantically dashing about trying to locate trunks and suitcases which were strewn about the Area.

Plebes ran here and there, like gray, frightened hares—just as Dave himself had done the same time last year—seeking second classmen's baggage, or securing water buckets, soap dishes, or whatnot else for upper classmen's rooms.

Dave passed quickly through the door of his old division of barracks, and on up the stairs to the room assigned to his old "wives," Horton and Longan. They fell upon him, pummeled him, called him a "deadbeater," and likewise made known their pleasure in the manner of cadets, the rougher the treatment, the more affectionate the welcome.

So busily occupied were the three roommates that they did not hear the door open, or see the group of first classmen, accompanied by second classmen still in "cit" clothes, until one spoke.

"Glad to see you back, Dave!"

Dave whirled about, as did his roommates.

The first classman, evidently the spokesman for the group, continued:

"This is rather late, but—damn it, man, you're too good a fellow to keep out of the corps! It needs men like you."

He went over to Dave and clasped his hand in a firm grip. After the first classman, the others: Rosset, he whom Dave had fought last June, leading the second classmen.

After they all had left, Horton was the first to recover himself.

"Well, if you haven't got a little Recognition all of your own!" Then exultingly: "I guess old Dick Turnbull was right. Didn't I tell you so, big boy, didn't I?"

Dave did not answer him. The lump in his throat was too large. Grabbing his hat, he dashed out of the room. He wanted to be alone, to think, to give his poor, whirling brain a chance to realize what it all meant.

Recognition! At last! The corps was his. The corps!

He, David Randall, was an actual part of it at last. Not an outsider, unrecognized,

even though he did wear the gray. His dad—and Peg! oh, God, he was glad, glad to know that he could truly know himself as one of the corps.

When the tumult in his breast was calmed, he realized, with a start, that he had been traversing the plain with rapid, almost unconscious strides. He must go back to barracks, back to his room and clean up. It was getting time for lunch.

In barracks, from his green topped table a small, square envelope marked "Special Delivery," put to flight everything except a haste to learn its contents. He knew the handwriting.

Could he ever forget? All plebe year—Peg. Heart pounding more than ever, he tore it open with trembling fingers.

West Haven, Aug. 26.

DEAR:

When this letter reaches you, you will be back in barracks, I think. Miss Eagon wrote me that the surgeon expected to let you go the day the furlough class returns.

I am sailing for Italy to-morrow, where I shall finish my studies in music. It was my wish to see you before I leave, but since that is impossible, I want you to know that I made a terrible mistake that night—the night of graduation hop, and I am so sorry.

PEG.

Dave walked over to the window of his room, the letter hanging between his fingers. The Area, with its baggage, presented almost the same appearance it had that June morning some weeks ago, when he was still a plebe. Then, he had been buffeted by jealousy, by the fancied injustices of plebe life. So this was West Point, and here lived the corps.

A bugler stepped from the sallyport across the way and, clear and loud, First Call rang across the Area. With a singing in his heart, Dave Randall took his cap from its peg, and walked downstairs to take his place in the ranks forming outside. For the first time, he felt that he was a member of the corps. Recognized!

THE END

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MY DOG

HE lies observant at my feet;
His eyes
Deep shadowed pools of sacrifice
His god to greet.

No thought to question my command
Or right
Of punishment; his heart contrite—
He licks my hand.

And when the bitter hours are come
To me;
He sorrows—in his look I see
Love stricken dumb.

"He's but a dog"—so some men tell;
Even so—
His soul would meet my soul and go
With me to hell.

Steve Hogan.

Harlequinade

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER

Author of "Her Hour of Reckoning," "Miss Wynn's Secret," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PREVIOUS PARTS

WHEN Francis, Lord Barrington, encounters Jess Trelawny as the feature dancer in an exclusive London night club he realizes he has made a mistake in becoming engaged to Denise Crowley, a forty-three-year-old woman of worldly charm, but uncertain reputation. Because of a shooting scrape over a woman when he was nineteen, Frank Barrington had been exiled at Boganny's mining camp in California, where he had saved Jess from the jealous frenzies of Kerry Marvel, a dancer in the same troupe, and the husband of the woman over whom Barrington had fought, Juanita. The troupe had disbanded, and Turco, the manager and Jess's guardian, had arranged an act that took Jess from the coast to London. Will Murch, the other member of the troupe, married Sally Leggett, daughter of a wealthy lumberman and, unknown to all but Barrington, illegitimate daughter of Denise Crowley. They, too, are in London, and are determined to free Barrington from Denise Crowley. Jess, in love with Barrington, is frightened over receiving candy and flowers from Kerry Marvel, whom she has not seen for over a year; and meanwhile Turco is sick.

CHAPTER XX.

FOR THE FIRST TIME.

IT seemed suddenly that the whole of London was aware of Kerry Marvel's return to the land of his fathers. In another day or two Jess would have discovered it without the vanguard of gifts. If not exactly a new star in the Hollywood firmament, Kerry, in almost record time, had made an astonishing success. It was in a *diablo* part, of course, and he had chanced to present himself for any sort of an engagement just at what might be termed a psychological moment, and been given an opportunity. A shake of the kaleidoscope, and, behold, a perfect pattern.

Will Murch ran into him at the Variety Artists Club, where little Will was apt to

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 7.

drift more often than his wife knew about, for it was good to hobnob with old friends now and again, even if one's own destiny lay in copper mines. Will brought back the tale to Sally, and Sally lost no time in taking it to Percy Street.

"All dressed up and swanking about what he'd done, and what his press agent is going to do for him," was Sally's way of putting it. "And his wife is dead. She died of her heart out to Reno before she could divorce him, and he says he went out there and held her hand at the end. And Will says he isn't half so bad but what he might be a great deal worse. He asked after you. He's seen your act, and thinks it's great. He says you'll be more famous than ever your mother was."

Turco, who was convalescent now and sitting in the big chair in the kitchen, shook his head at this last remark. He wasn't going to own that anybody, even Jess, could touch the fame of Dora Trelawny.

"He asked Will to find out if you'd let him come to see you, Mr. Turco," Sally went on. "He wants to ask your pardon and thank you and—and all sorts of things."

Jess, on a stool beside Turco, her head against his shawled knees, started slightly, and Turco must have felt the tremor, for he laid a hand on her head and stroked it.

"We shall be glad to see Kerry," he said, and his voice had a ring of its old-time clarity. "It's a grand success he's made, and no one so pleased as me. He wasn't himself at Boganny's—or for some time before—but perhaps he's found solid ground, now that the poor lass has gone."

Yes—poor Nita. Jess thought about her, with her great haunted eyes, her skeleton body burned out for the love that had turned to ashes, and the everlasting torment of her soul. Somehow she had poisoned Kerry. Would he be different now? Jess wondered, and was rather excited at the prospect of seeing him again. Turco had no apprehensions, so why should she feel any?

Her life just now was a mass of perplexities, and it was only here at home in the cozy kitchen, which was also their sitting room, with Turco getting better, and the ugly spotted kitten Mrs. Smith had foisted on them because of the mice, keeping them company by the stove, that Jess had any sense of peace.

She hadn't seen Barrington since the night when Turco first fell ill, and that was more than a fortnight now. Nor had she heard from him directly. But she was quite sure, from Sally's manner, that he was keeping himself informed through her.

It was irritating that Sally scarcely mentioned his name now; nor was it natural. Every night when she went to her cabaret Jess wondered if he might not be there somewhere in the serried rows against the walls.

So many gleaming shirt fronts, but it was impossible to know if the heart of Barrington beat behind one of them. And, after all, why should he be there? Of what special interest was Jess Trelawny to him?

Columbine had her work to do, and it behooved her not to be looking out for a man who belonged to another woman while she was dancing. One night she thought she saw Frank, and something slipped in her brain, and the lapse was communicated to her knees. It it hadn't been for her partner, she would have made a serious *faux pas,* in the strict ballet sense. After that threatened mishap she attended to business and kept her attention off the white shirt fronts.

Kerry came in one afternoon at teatime, and the minute she saw him Jess knew why Turco had been so placid. It was due to his gift of second sight, of course.

Yes, Kerry certainly was all dressed up, as Will Murch had reported; but not offensively so. He had come back to see what he could do toward booming the British film industry, he said.

One would have thought that Kerry had been born in a Hollywood studio. He was a little condescending to Jess in spite of that "undying love" on his gifts' card, and treated her as though she were a child. He had some money to pay back to Turco, but he wasn't at all condescending to him.

"It was just a nightmare," he said, addressing Turco, and almost ignoring Jess. "I'm not going to blame it on Nita—she's gone now, and little to be said about all

that happened before. I went through a bad time."

"Sure you did," Turco agreed. "You had good stuff in you, Kerry. I was always hoping— What about a drink?"

Kerry laughed. "Nothing in it. I've cut it out." Then, offhandedly, he added: "I have married again, you know—or you will know when my press agent gets busy. She was lead in the company. We were married six weeks ago, but we're saving up the announcement for when the film's released."

"Not Marta Pressler!" exclaimed Jess.

"Why, yes," Kerry said blandly, as if to ask, "Why not?"

"But she's one of the big seven—or is it eight?"

"Sure she is," Kerry agreed in the tone of a man who would not be caught looking at anything less than a star of the first magnitude.

"Oh, I'm glad, Kerry. I'm most awfully glad," Jess said heartily.

"So am I," said Turco.

When he had gone—and it was a long time afterward—Jess turned to Turco with her old crinkly smile. Her eyes were moist and warm, and there was an hysterical catch in her breath as though she wanted to laugh and laugh until the tears actually overflowed.

"Oh, Turco, how strange! Do you know what I am?"

Turco nodded slowly as mandarins are said to nod.

"A conceited little love, that's what you are. You thought—"

"Yes, of course I did. I thought Kerry would be horrid in every way just as he got to be during that tour. And now he's a screen star and married to one of the real planets. Oh, Turco, I didn't mean that for a pun!"

Turco heaved with laughter. He liked puns. In the good old days his world of the halls rang with them.

Then the nurse came—there was only one nurse now—and said she must put Professor La Turcque to bed; and he had first to be coaxed and then bullied before he would allow himself to be put anywhere.

Jess went into her bedroom to rest for a little while before starting to her work. So many things to think over! Kerry had been a stupendous surprise. At Boganny's he had been so wildly jealous that he might easily have injured her for life because he thought she was having an intrigue with Frank.

And now she might actually have intrigues with anybody, and Kerry Marvel wouldn't turn a hair. Life is short and love is fleeting. Love? Oh, no, Kerry had not loved her. Yet, he thought he did. Was it just thinking that made the difference? If one thought very hard, could one fall out of love?

Life, emotions, people—nothing was static. Where had she got hold of that word "static"? Oh, yes, in a crossword puzzle. It meant—it meant—

She slept for awhile, and then it was time to have her cup of cocoa and a biscuit and make ready to go to the cabaret. She had given up taxis, except now and again for coming home when the weather was bad. Thirty pounds a week is a lot of money, but Jess had plenty of reasons for practicing economy. One couldn't regard the whole of that comfortable salary as income.

To-night was very pleasant, with no sign of rain, for a wonder. There was a three-quarters moon with little black clouds scudding across its funny, half swollen face. The pavement felt pleasantly hard to feet accustomed to the squelch of mire, and at 9.45 P.M. Percy Street was fully alive to the enchanting hazards of life.

The restaurant and the bake-shop mingled their harmonious odors; there was laughter, the sharp tap of high-heeled shoes, whisperings between couples at area railings, and the crash and roar of traffic from the main thoroughfare at the end of the street.

Jess was at home here. She walked briskly and assured, bound for her bus in the Tottenham Court Road.

She thought: "I am striding along as though I owned the earth, and so I do, because my darling Turco is better and the doctor didn't lie to me, although I did think such hard things of him. Yet, except for Turco, I am not at all happy. In fact, I

don't really own a single square inch of the earth, and I am the most miserable creature on the whole face of it. Why can't I forget something that never even happened? What's the matter with me, anyway?"

And then, if thoughts may be described as faltering, Jess Trelawny's did. She saw him, Frank Barrington, standing in the opening of the cul-de-sac she must pass in another few seconds. He was well in the shadow, but she saw him by an accident of the scudding clouds.

In one brief flash the moonlight shone full upon his face, and it showed her something as miserable as her own soul. He didn't know she saw him, and Jess walked on past the cul-de-sac as though she hadn't seen; but she didn't get very far.

Under a street lamp she halted and pretended to search in her bag for something. Would Frank follow her? She was longing to see him, speak to him—aching all over with a sudden heavy need that weighed her down as though with chains. No, he was not following.

Could she possibly have been mistaken? Perhaps there had been nobody in the cul-de-sac, only a vision projected by her imagination. She turned and walked back slowly.

He was still there. Jess got the wretched impression of a man stood up against a wall to be shot.

"Frank!" She touched his arm. "I thought it was you, but I came back to make sure. Are you very unhappy, Frank? Because I am."

It was all so clear now. Frank Barrington loved her, and although he hadn't meant her to know, the great secret was revealed.

Their hands met, and he held hers gently, as though they were a pair of frightened little birds.

"I've waited here to see you pass every night," he said. "I'm a ghost, haunting you. Forgive me, Jess."

His voice sounded cracked, unnatural.

"I can only spare a few minutes," Jess replied.

"I know the time. There's enough and too much to spare for me to go home, change, and then sneak in to see your turn."

"I always thought you were there—in the background," Jess said.

He still kept her hands, although she tried feebly to pull them away.

"I love you, Jess."

"Yes, I know."

"But I can't tell you so."

"Yes, I know you can't."

"I adore you—I love you—love you—love you! I remember when I first saw you."

"I remember you before I saw you," Jess said enigmatically.

"There isn't a moment, not a thought I have, that doesn't belong to you," replied Frank.

"But you shouldn't tell me, should you?" Jess reminded him.

"No, and I'm not going to—not until I honestly can. But all the same I want you to know."

"I think you've seen Sally," Jess hinted.

"Oh, yes, lots of times."

"She's never said so."

"I asked her not to."

"Did you—did you tell her what you mustn't tell me?" Jess asked timidly.

"That I love you? Oh, she didn't need much telling. Sally knows."

"I don't think we ought to stand here holding hands like this," Jess ventured, the little birds fluttering again. "Turco might be looking into his crystal now and see us. Let's walk along toward the bus, or I'll be late."

They walked along with that slow and apparently aimless gait that marks a pair of lovers. Romance in Tottenham Court Road! Well, why not? There has been a-plenty, and will be more.

"But we're going in a taxi," Frank said when he found himself lined up with her at the bus stop. It had taken him some time just to realize where he was, that it was Tottenham Court Road, and not a suburb of Paradise.

"Oh, I don't think I ought—" But of what use to protest? Her heart wasn't in it.

They got into the cab, and in another second his arms were around her, and, difficult though it may be to believe, the

young Trelawny was being kissed on the lips by a man for the first time in her life.

CHAPTER XXI.

TO STEM A TIDE.

NEWS had come to Sally from the schoolmistress at Boganny's, that her father was not very well and had a special need for a family representative, since he was laid up and could only direct the mines by proxy. Would Sally and her husband make it convenient to return soon? It was just rheumatism, the schoolmistress wrote—Job was no great letter writer, and he had delegated the task to her—but at his age he had to be very careful. He also missed Sally. She was not to be alarmed, however.

There followed a budget of local news, over which Sally shed the hot tears of nostalgia. Boganny's had just celebrated Charley's birthday with a brass band up from Grass Valley, and no end of people whose names were detailed for the benefit of the exile.

Red Beard's wife was ailing. ("Of course she'll marry him if Mrs. Smithers cops it," commented Sally.) Miss Johnson, of the post office, was keeping company with Dave Lynch, but hung off about marrying him because she'd lose her job if she married, and Dave was still as unlucky as ever.

He would keep on "prospecting" when everybody knew there wasn't a square inch of the country thereabouts that hadn't been gone over for ore with a fine tooth comb from the hour Job Leggett's father struck copper. Small chance had Dave Lynch of striking anything.

Ah Fong, the older of Boganny's two Chinamen, had imported a young wife from Pekin, and nobody quite knew how he had managed to get her smuggled into the country, but there was going to be trouble on account of Ah Fong's youthful assistant, Sung Lee. Somebody's throat was in danger of being slit. It might even be two people's—the young wife's and Sung Lee's.

There was good hard snow, so that the toboggan run on that slope from Great Bear Mountain was in tip-top shape, and an Indian found off his reservation, drunk and in possession of several bottles of poisonous contraband, had nearly got Charley Boganny into trouble with the law. But Charley had been able to explain all that.

In her sumptuous hotel sitting room the erstwhile Miss Leggett realized what all millionaires claimed passionately to be the truth: that money has nothing to do with the essentials of the heart, and may be a serious handicap to the attainment of happiness.

Sally suddenly knew that what she yearned most for, in the way of food, for instance, was not to be procured in this place except in a grossly misunderstood form—buckwheat cakes with maple syrup, fried salt pork, hominy grits, and cornpone. One would be ashamed to ask for them, even.

Waffles, yes—if one didn't mind them being served with powdered white sugar and being called something in French, which they were, because honestly, they weren't waffles. Oh, Lord—and the fried chicken! The chickens over here all tasted different from the chickens at Boganny's.

Homesickness. And then Sally had lately become aware of the fact that within some six months or so she was going to bring a small Leggett-Murch into the world.

"I gotta go home, I gotta go home!" she wailed on Will's shoulder that night when she showed him the schoolmistress's letter. "Poor old pap! He might die—and you enjoying yourself at that college, thinking that because you're going to step into pap's shoes some day they could ever fit you."

"Of course they couldn't," Will replied soothingly. "I wouldn't be such a ninny as to think that. And we'll go back as soon as you say. Next week?"

Sally had got rid of her mentor and "chapperone" as soon as the great discovery was made, and Miss Cormick was now on her way to Berkeley. Happy Miss Cormick!

"Will, I just *love* you," Sally said with tearful solemnity. "You're the kindest boy I ever knew, and that's why I married you. I like your funny hair, Will. Do you think the baby will have stand-up hair like yours?"

"Heaven forbid," said Will.

"But I don't suppose we can leave London until something's done about Frankie and Jess," Sally said musingly.

"Look here, sweetie, keep out of that. It's none of your business." Will was emphatic.

"I'd like to know why not?" Sally flared. "Didn't I give him up to her? After I met you, I mean. And anyway, he wasn't so terribly struck with me, so you needn't be jealous, Will. And can't I see with my own eyes how it stands? Whatever for do you think Frank asked that old woman to marry him?"

"It shows what an ass he is," said Will—who, it may be remembered, had once loved the fledging Trelawny. He still felt there were few men living who could qualify as worthy of Jess Trelawny. He himself was not, and had never been, one of them.

"Sally, old dear, I don't want you bothering about other people's troubles—not just now. Your dad's seedy, and it's up to us to slip across as quick as ever we can. I do hope he'll like me. We don't hardly know each other yet."

"He'll like you, if I do. And he'll be so pleased about the baby. We'll have to call it Job—or Jobina, as the case may be. Do you mind?"

"What you say goes, old dear."

"Still, a week or two longer here wouldn't make much difference. I know pap's rheumatism. Whenever he wants something he comes down with it and gets pathetic. It's happened to me before—twice. Both times I was at Frisco visiting a girl friend that I met when she came on a camping party to Boganny's, and then pap has to get lonesome and send out his rheumaticky S. O. S. It was just that he wanted me back.

"Will, much as I long for home—and you don't know how much that is—I just can't leave England until I know what's going to happen to Jess and—er—Mr. Turco. It was Mr. Turco brought me'n you together. Well do I remember how that was. It was as if he saw at once we were made for each other."

"You're not thinking of Turco," Will said shrewdly. "Keep out of it, Sally. No good ever came by meddling in other people's business."

"We'll see," said Sally.

Other people besides Sally were meditating a desertion of London, only most of the others, except those with their hearts on Switzerland, were thinking of southern climes, sunshine, and a blue, inland sea. There was the Riviera, of course, and there were also the playgrounds of Algeria and Tunisia, as yet not too overcrowded. There were even such things as retreats in North Africa.

Denise Crowley knew of one on the outskirts of Carthage. She was very clever at unearthing things of that sort, being one of those women who, knowing what she wants, usually finds that either man or nature has provided it somewhere. Denise had discovered the villa in Tunisia, which was exactly what she had in her mind.

The agents, at her command, had photographs specially taken, a couple of dozen views, both inside and out. It was a pink villa with narrow pierced windows, a sweet little courtyard with a fountain, and a sizeable walled garden in which everything grew that one could hope to find. It was luxuriously furnished in a combination of old Moorish and modern French styles, and belonged to some lady of the Bey's family.

The place appealed immensely to Denise, although she supposed she would have to make certain changes in the furnishings, but that was nothing. Whatever happened, she must have that villa. The attic in Shepherd's Market was getting on her nerves, and she knew she could let it for half the rent of the villa.

She began deliberately to make her preparations, and it was not until all the business was completed, her own flat arranged for, and a season's lease of *La Rose d'Or* signed and sealed, that she prepared to tell Frank about it.

Perhaps he might think it strange that she hadn't consulted him, but in the beginning he had expressed himself as willing to leave the choice of their honeymoon house to her, and so now she pretended she had kept it back as a surprise. She could not bear to own even to herself that had she

consulted him, he might have raised some stumbling block.

It was a Sunday, and she had written asking him to come in about nine o'clock as she had something most important to discuss with him.

Frank had been down to Barrington Towers that week battling with his soul, and also having a heart to heart conference with his really impressive inheritance. Peggen had accompanied him, and the old man and the housekeeper, augmented by a couple of maids, had warmed up a big corner of the mansion for his benefit, and given him a faint gleam of what the Towers as a home could be like.

Here, indeed, was a responsibility, as his sister Myra constantly pointed out, but for the first time Frank came to regard it as a pleasant one. Never before had he felt that Barrington Towers really belonged to him to live in, if he wanted to. His uncle and his cousin Sylvester, both dead, and himself a free man—it was strange how the cards had fallen.

Denise's request that he come to see her that Sunday evening cheered him up, if anything. If she had something important to discuss it could be only one thing, because there was only one thought in the world just now that held any significance for Frank Barrington. He was faced with a problem which has presented knotty difficulties for others of his sex, and gained many men opprobrium for simply cutting the knot and letting it go at that.

When you have asked a woman to marry you and she has said "yes," and then, almost too soon for the upkeeping of your own self-respect, you find you are madly in love with another—what are you to do?

So far Frank had done nothing except wait for a suitable opportunity to tell Denise all about it and throw himself, not upon her mercy—which was an absurd way to think of it—but upon her good-natured, understanding friendship, the thing he had banked upon when he proposed that she link her life to his.

Denise left the curtain undrawn. The three-quarters moon had waxed to full and was now regretfully on the wane. It was pleasant to see the bright sapphire sky patterned in oblong lozenges against the slanting wall. The room was not overlooked, so drawing the curtains didn't matter.

"Frank, my darling! How I've missed you—but I don't mind if you've had a good time. I don't want you ever to imagine that I'm feeling ill-used when you're not with me," she greeted him. "All the same, it's simply heavenly to have you back again."

He kissed her hands gently, and then she threw one of her lovely arms around his neck and drew his cheek to hers.

Of course the room was perfect, and so was Denise. Every detail of lighting and coloring and the arrangement of her carefully selected belongings had been thought out.

She had on a gown that matched the star-bright sky, with a chinchilla collar and bands on the flowing sleeves, the sort of attire that women wear in the company of some one near and dear, an intimate gown with glimpses of lace and embroidered silk underneath, and demanding fantastic house slippers.

"You've dined, of course?" It was half a question.

"Oh, yes, thanks. I had dinner on the train. Will you forgive my appearance? I hadn't time to change. Been playing golf all the morning. It's frightfully rude of me—"

"Frank, what nonsense you're talking. As though between you and me anything like that mattered. And I simply adore you in those funny shapeless things. I shall have to take up golf myself if you're so keen on it."

Frank's face twitched nervously, and he made a little grimace to pass it off.

"I hope I shall get keen," he said. "But you see—well, I haven't as yet had much opportunity for it."

"I know, my poor darling." Her voice sank to a low note, and she pressed his hand. "Sit down, sweetheart. We've got such a lot to talk about. We don't want to be sad to-night or—or think of those unhappy years."

He started slightly. Denise was recalling to his mind all that he owed her. But

for Denise it would never have been made certain that Nita's hand had held that revolver and that it was fired before Frank Barrington could wrench it away from her. But for Denise he would still be treading that deadly round in the sad company of convicts. Was she reminding him purposely?

"I have to thank you for everything," he said humbly.

"Darling, I don't want your thanks, and I really need your forgiveness for leaving it so long. There were reasons—I scarcely dared be mixed up in that case when it happened, so I simply fled. It was cowardly of me, but I wasn't supposed to be at Nita's that night. Never mind, it's all over now. Storm-battered barks, you and I—eh, Frank? But coming to harbor at last."

She got up and went to her desk, bringing back the photographs of *La Rose d'Or*.

"There—now look! Do you think that will do for our honeymoon? It's not very far from Tunis, if we get bored."

Frank went through the packet with an air of forced enthusiasm. There was a sharp line between his brows, and his lips were compressed.

How was he going to tell her, when it seemed that she ought to see without being told?

"I shouldn't take that place if I were you," he said uncomfortably. "That is—well, not until things are more settled."

Her features grew a little hard. "As far as I am concerned they are settled," she said. "And I have taken it. I signed the agreement Thursday. That reminds me, Frank, if we're going to be married before Christmas it's time to be making arrangements with the registrar."

A dozen times the name of Trelawny trembled on Denise Crowley's lips, but always she repressed it. She dared not put Frank to the test of a direct accusation. She dared not say, "Come, let us face the thing squarely; let's be brave and honest about it. You think you are in love with this girl, but I am sure it's only an infatuation that will pass." She dared not say, "We'd better put off our marriage for a few months, or until you understand what you really want."

She felt that Frank was waiting for her to give him that opening, but she did not care to believe he wanted her to release him here and now.

Gone—a long time gone—were the days when Denise would have welcomed with secret delight just such a situation. In those old days she would have bargained with the man, and got more by her own method of bargaining than the cleverest lawyer could have obtained for her.

So many thousand pounds for her broken heart as against his freedom. Oh, if only she could feel like that now! If she went into court over Frank Barrington her tale of a broken heart would be all too true—let the whole world smile or jeer. Only, she would never make Frank suffer that ordeal at her hands.

He gave no direct answer to her suggestion about the registrar, but sat silent for a long while staring moodily into the fire.

Perhaps there were pictures in the fire.

What on earth had Jess Trelawny and he said to each other that night in the taxi? He hadn't been with her since, nor had he lain in ambush merely to catch a glimpse of her, nor gone to the Follies. They had said things to each other that night, of course, but nothing reducable to any sort of form.

There had been despair and tears in it, and passionate protestations; something about Boganny's, and a great deal about "I knew the first minute I saw you!" Of course, Jess would get over it if they never met again. But Frank didn't want her to get over it. He would rather she went into a convent.

And he—supposing Jess took the veil—he must make it very plain to Denise that their marriage would be one of friendship only. He could sacrifice Jess and himself on that altar, remembering all he owed Denise. Oh, bother! No, he couldn't and he wasn't going to, and what he owed Denise Crowley was even less than she should have given him in the name of common justice.

He had spent years in prison because she had found it inconvenient to herself to give evidence at his trial, and had slipped away to the Bosporus, shutting eyes and ears to

the fate of an innocent fool who could never have proved his innocence without her testimony.

Yet because he was madly in love with Jess Trelawny, he needn't suddenly pick flaws in Denise.

Denise was still waiting for him to speak. He wished she had less patience.

So at last he was forced to say something and it sounded stupid.

"Do you think we can possibly be ready before Christmas?"

Denise leaned back and closed her eyes. "I am ready as soon as—as you like," she murmured.

"There are a lot of things I ought to see about at the Towers," he said, feeling unutterably caddish.

"What sort of things?"

"Well, the usual. The place has been neglected since my uncle's death. I didn't quite realize how important it was, although Peggen's been eternally pestering me."

"I thought you meant to let it," Denise said, her eyes still closed.

"Well, I've changed my mind about that. I'd rather like to live there."

Denise gave a miserable little laugh. "I'd be a sort of Paula Tanqueray in that setting. I'm not very fond of English country life."

"I was afraid you wouldn't care for it. I didn't know, until recently, that it appealed to me. I've been slow in finding my feet."

"And have you found them now?"

"To—to some extent. I'd wish you'd make it easier for me, Denise. You were such a good friend. What jolly times we've had together! I can't tell you—"

"Indeed we have, darling. And if you think I've so set my heart on this villa that I'd make a scene over giving it up, you don't know me. I love you so much, Frank, that there isn't anything on earth I wouldn't do to please you."

She was sitting up now, very straight, her eyes wide open and her hands clutching the arms of the chair.

"I want your life to be absolutely perfect," she went on. "Perhaps I can't give you a child, but that isn't impossible. Where my own life is concerned I have concealed nothing from you. You know me as I am, but you don't know me as I can be and will. Because I love you. I have never loved before." She began to lose control of herself. "Frank, I know the world so much better than you do. I feel such a tenderness for you. I want to—to save you from the things that hurt and sometimes maim."

He looked at her in blank astonishment. She wanted to save him from—but heavens above, hadn't he already been hurt and maimed! Did she mean he must be saved from Jess Trelawny?

"What things?" he asked bluntly.

"Mistakes, dear—taking some foolish step that you might be sorry for afterward, when it was too late."

Poor Denise!

"And am I in danger of doing that?"

"Oh, my dear boy, how can I tell? You've been so strange lately. Young men sometimes behave unwisely. Remember Nita and how reckless you were about her."

"Look here, Denise, that's what I do remember—one of the things I can never forget. But I was really a boy then, and I'm glad to feel that I didn't behave like a cad where Nita was concerned, although it cost me dearly. I'm not a boy now, and I know my own mind as well as I ever shall know it. You and I have been beating around the bush to no purpose, yet all the time I believe we understand each other.

"We were such good friends, my dear. I wish you would let me tell you something, and try to understand. It takes courage—more than I feel I've got—to try to tell you, because I don't want to hurt you, yet if I didn't you might be hurt a great deal more later on. My God, it's difficult!"

"Oh, Frank—please—please! Wait a minute."

She got up quickly and rushed from the room while he stood irresolute, wondering whether or not to follow her, fearing that she had something desperate in mind, and feeling for himself an unutterable sense of self loathing. Women like Denise were capable of mad things. But why should he qualify her, sort her out as being of a different order from other women? Because her life has been more helter-skelter?

He thought of Jess, and a lump came into his throat and his eyes grew misty. Was it only one for Jess and two for himself that he felt that parting from her forever would be equal to tearing out his very heart?

Why wouldn't the words come, the very simple words—"Denise, I have made a terrible mistake. I don't love you in the way a man should love the woman he marries." Probably because the code was against it; the same code that had impelled Frank Barrington to keep stubbornly silent when he was accused of shooting Nita's husband.

It seemed ages before Denise came back, but when she did she had herself well under control. She held out her hands and smiled into his eyes with a cool friendliness that amounted to impersonality.

"You must forgive me running away like that, but I had to be by myself for a moment. I might have said or done something both of us would have regretted. Even now I shall continue to beat about the bush a little. Yes, Frank, I do understand, and we'll let it go at that. You don't want to go to Tunis, and you do want to settle down at Barrington Towers. You want to wait a little longer before we're married. Very well. Now, my dear, shall we say good night on that? Isn't it enough, just for the moment?"

Her eyes were very bright now and her voice held an indefinite suggestion of challenge.

"Good night, then," he said abruptly. There was nothing else to say unless he chose deliberately to be either dishonest or brutal.

Scarcely had his footsteps died away when the telephone rang in Denise's bedroom and she uttered a little exclamation of satisfaction as she hurried to answer it.

The long distance call she had asked for had come through more quickly than she expected. She sat down in a low chair by the table where a shaded lamp cast a warm pool of light and took the instrument in her hands.

"Is that you, Harry? This is Denise. I want you to do something for me. Oh, yes, I've heard all that before, but you know I've always warned you that some day I might take you seriously. When are you coming to town? Well, if you could, to-morrow. Oh, I'll tell you when I see you. It's quite a small favor, really. Yes, I'm splendid, thank you. And you? That's good. I've been dallying with the idea of Tunis for the winter—or rather, Carthage—but it's still a bit in the air. Biarritz is beyond my means, I fear. I'm getting old and poor, Harry." She threw a tinkle of laughter into the telephone. "All right, Harry, then I'll hope to see you about tea-time to-morrow. *Au'voir*—you delightful creature."

Left dangling.

But wasn't it entirely his own fault?

Frank went over it again and again and all to no purpose. Why he hadn't plainly said this or that, why he had delivered himself of such inanities—futile self-questioning.

There was on him such a longing for Jess Trelawny that it nearly drove him mad, yet as things were he had no right even to think of her. Down at Barrington Towers he had thought of nothing but her—when it wasn't of Denise. Every room in the house, every inch of garden path, rolling meadow and winter woodland had been full of Jess, and he had visioned her in all possible moods and circumstances.

He did so long just to see her, but to-night he couldn't even watch her dance—and that was always a dubious joy—because there wasn't any cabaret on Sundays. He went around to the hotel where he hoped to find Sally and talk about Jess, but the Murches were out.

Inquiring forlornly if there was any idea where they were or when they might be back, the clerk, who knew him and knew how friendly he was with Sally, was unexpectedly informative, and said they had gone to Percy Street.

"Mrs. Murch left word in case you called, my lord, but I couldn't say when they're likely to return."

Of course, Will and Sally were free to go to Percy Street when they pleased, and probably they'd been invited to-night. They

weren't pariahs, like Lord Barrington. The professor would extend them the glad hand of welcome. Frank tugged his cap over his eyes and scowling fiercely started out for Percy Street. He wouldn't be welcome, but he didn't care. He was fed to the teeth with the absurdity of his position.

"I've got it—oo'er, I've got it—'Rummy!' Oh, I forgot. Oh, I'm sorry. All right, I'll stand on it. Another round then, but I can't draw again. I've only got 'Rummy two.' I do believe, Will Murch, that you—oh, I wish I hadn't declared."

"Shut up, Jess. You weren't obliged to declare if you didn't want to."

"I'm out of this," said Sally in a tone of desperate tragedy. "Forty-two. That's somewhere around tuppence. My hat, but you can lose money at this game. Are you 'Rummy nothing,' Will?"

"Naw—seven."

Turco grinned as he laid down the perfect hand he had won on the draw.

"Turco's 'Rummy nothing'! But he mightn't have been if Jess hadn't declared before her hand was full."

"It seemed close enough," grumbled Jess. "That makes two and a penny Turco's won, and I'm not going to play any more."

"Cold feet?" inquired Will Murch.

"Well, they really are cold. We've let the fire nearly out, and it's time I made the cocoa."

"I'll help you," said Sally, jumping up. "Here's your tuppence, Mr. Turco."

"Thank you," said Turco, dropping the coins into the pocket which held his gambling gains. "I shall buy me a cigar and a haircut to-morrow."

They all jeered good-humoredly at Turco who most obviously stood in need of a haircut, Jess saying if she had only known it was lack of money that had stood in the way of his acquiring one she would gladly have treated him to it, whereat Professor La Turcque replied that it was very kind of her, but he preferred to earn his own luxuries.

They were much drawn together to-night, these four, since next week this time Will and Sally would be on the high seas, and no one could say when they would all have another evening together.

"Goodness knows I'm homesick enough for Boganny's," Sally complained, as they gathered around for the modest supper, "but I'll lay you any odds you fancy I'll be shedding tears for lil old London in no time. You must come out to us for your honeymoon, Jess."

Jess turned a blushing rose color and Turco, who had been amusing himself by idly laying out cards at the side of his plate, looked up with an inquiring air.

"She's got a pink aura all right," Sally went on. "Why, even I can see it, and I'm no clairvoyant."

"This is the first I've heard of your engagement, little love," said Turco. "May I ask who's the happy man?"

Then, without any warning, Turco went quite pale and sat rigidly with his eyes fixed on space, while his hair had the effect of bristling like a cat's.

"I knew it; I knew it," he muttered. "I knew it."

"Mr. Turco, what's the matter?" cried Sally.

"Hush—" Jess admonished her. "He's seeing things."

"That was why we went there," Turco continued, as though in a dream. "And now the bridegroom has come."

"He doesn't know what he's saying," Jess explained. "In a minute he won't remember a thing about it."

Sally shivered deliciously and put her arm through Will's.

"Welcome to the bridegroom!" said Turco.

He got up and walked slowly to the door, flinging it open.

And there in plus-fours and a golfing cap, looking slightly sheepish, stood Frank Barrington.

Turco blinked, gave himself a little shake, and apparently returned to his normal condition, for instead of repeating that "Welcome to the bridegroom," he was slow to invite the visitor in.

"I'm awfully sorry," Frank said awkwardly, "but I just happened to be passing and I saw lights, and the street door was open, so I—I thought I'd look in and see

how you're getting on, professor. You were feeling rather ill the last time we met."

"I am all but recovered," Turco said solemnly.

"That's good—that's splendid," Frank replied with great heartiness.

"Hello, Frank," sang out Sally. "Oh, do come in. That door makes such a draft."

"Yes, do come in," said Turco, forced to give an intimation of hospitality. "You just happened to be passing?"

"On my way back from the country—Barrington, you know. Thanks, it's awfully kind of you. I hope I'm not intruding or anything like that."

"Not a bit," said Sally. "I'll bet we're all just tickled to death to see you. Shake hands with a lord, Jess; Lord Barrington in case you've never met before. This is Miss Trelawny."

"Don't be silly!" said Jess, giving her a dig with an elbow. "Will you have some cocoa, Frank?" She spoke his name shyly and smiled into his eyes, holding out the cup she had just filled.

Turco, a little in the background, looked on with a pathetic, despairing expression. It was painful to see Frank fumble for the cup, because he was returning Jess's intimate gaze, and to observe that the young man's fingers closed over hers, so that they stood holding the cup and saucer together.

"Break away!" said Sally. "You aren't registering heart interest in a movie close up. Don't they make a handsome couple, Will?"

Will frowned at his wife and gave her a word of advice under his breath.

Well, now that Barrington was here, Turco made the best of it. Illness had tamed him a little, and he felt he was no longer strong enough to stem the tide of fate single-handed.

Jess was in love with the fellow—oh, no doubt about that. And Turco knew from Sally Murch that Barrington was engaged to marry "a woman old enough to be his mother."

The old man felt like a sick animal, only it was his heart that was sick, and he wanted to go off somewhere in a corner and nurse the ache of it. It hurt to see Jess suddenly so happy, all crinkly smiles and dimples, whereas for days past she had been a wan little sober-sides who had to be coaxed and teased into anything faintly resembling a playful humor.

Presently they began to talk of Boganny's, and the atmosphere became heavily charged with sentiment. Will and Sally were going back, and many moons would pass before they all met again.

Jess brought Turco's concertina and they sang "The Long, Long Trail" and "Clementine," as having some direct bearing on the situation. Frank couldn't feel out of it, since he, too, was of Boganny's, and Turco gave up trying to insinuate that he was a stranger.

Jess's eyes were bright with tears and she sat close to Sally, their hands clasped. She thought about the miracle that was going to happen to her friend, and it seemed to her that Sally was somehow set apart by that wonderful thing. How proud and important she must feel. Did Frank know? Perhaps Will had told him, or Sally might have told him, herself. He had been seeing a lot of the Murches lately.

The party broke up rather late, and it would have been later if Will hadn't whispered to his wife that she must be good and take care of herself.

So off they went, and Jess had no chance for more than a word of farewell where Frank was concerned. It was so little, yet she felt happily at peace for the moment.

"It's time you were in bed, Daddy Turco," she said with mock severity.

By way of showing his independence, Turco sat down and began to fill his pipe.

"Come here," he said.

"Turco, you're not going to scold. I didn't know Frank was coming."

"No, because you've been meeting him outside," Turco said gravely.

"Only once," Jess replied. Her lips trembled. "And then it wasn't planned."

Turco puffed hard at his pipe, and his tired old features looked unutterably sad.

"Turco—he cares for me, but he can't tell me, yet."

"Then how do you know?"

"In a way he did tell me."

"Poor little love."

Meanwhile Frank, driving back with the Murches, was getting a scolding from Sally.

CHAPTER XXII.

BENEVOLENT CONSPIRACY.

THE next afternoon Denise Crowley was again awaiting a visitor, and again she had set the scene with care and foresight. There was a tray on the sideboard with decanters and a siphon, and the lady's maid who attended by the day was trigged out in a rather natty costume —it could scarcely be called a uniform—of golden brown taffeta, buttoned to the chin and set off with lawn collar and cuffs and a whisp of an apron that was just a lacey frill.

Denise, herself, was rather more made up than usual, and she wore mauve with a swathing of tulle around her throat. With her hair done in a special and slightly old-fashioned way and given a coppery gild, she was more than a little reminiscent of the Sarah Bernhardt of thirty years ago.

To-day Denise was not striving to attain an effect of youth. That would have been unseemly and unbecoming. If she looked forty it was quite youthful enough. To-day she could be more or less herself, a sophisticated woman of the world with a far vista backward into that land of the past strewn with its amusing anecdotage of people and things now long scattered and vanished.

The dressed-up maid knew that Mrs. Crowley was expecting a Sir Henry Santoyne, who had called before at the flat in Shepherd's Market, and she suspected him of possessing a slight Oriental strain, in the few glimpses she had caught of him. However, she couldn't be sure about that, and, anyway, he certainly did look distinguished.

"I am at home only to Sir Henry this afternoon," Denise said, and all would have been well if she hadn't remembered that her expected guest abominated China tea, and he might prefer tea to any other refreshment. So at the last minute Miss Dayton had to put a raincoat over her brown taffeta finery and rush out to get some of the other sort of tea, and while she was gone the doorbell rang. There was nothing for Denise to do but answer it herself.

This did not perturb her at all until she had opened the door and discovered, not her old friend Harry on the mat, but her daughter, Mrs. Will Murch.

That Sally was indeed her own flesh and blood had never struck her forcibly until this moment. She saw herself standing there, rather hard and bright and young, except that Sally was not attired in the mode of twenty-five years ago. Denise saw herself as she must often have looked when about to make an adventurous and brilliant attack to gain something she wanted. The vision filled her with a vague sense of apprehension.

"I thought I'd just come around for a little chat," said Sally. "So glad I've found you at home."

In another moment Denise and she were sitting facing each other across the hearth-rug, and Denise was murmuring something about tea.

"Oh, thanks, I can't stop for tea," Sally said. "I have to get back to meet my husband."

That was a relief, anyway.

"It's awfully good of you to call on me again," Denise said uncomfortably. "I've been meaning to—"

"This isn't what you'd call a call," Sally interrupted. "I'm starting for home end of this week. My pap's not very well, and he wants me'n my husband to come back, because there's a sight of things to be looked after at Boganny's."

"Oh, you've come to say good-by," Denise murmured. She felt a little faint. This girl was her daughter, and it seemed incredible. She started slightly, but that was only because the maid, on returning, had let a door slam.

Sally leaned forward in the low padded chair and gesticulated with a forefinger.

"Mrs. Crowley, there's something I've got to say to you if I die for it."

"My dear child, are you going to be tragic? Has anything dreadful happened?"

"Pretty awful," said Sally. "You've heard me speak of my friend, Jess Trelawny. You met her at Frank's that night."

Denise got up and went to one of the windows where a curtain needed adjusting.

"Yes. What about Miss Trelawny?"

"Frank's head over heels in love with Jess," Sally said impetuously. "They're both in love with each other. If you don't know it already, it's time you did. I hope I haven't given you a shock or anything, but it's the truth I'm telling you."

Denise turned away from the window, her breast heaving.

"Who sent you here with that story? Was it Barrington, or your Miss Trelawny?"

Sally's face flared crimson. "Neither of 'em. I—I just came because I felt I had to. I thought you might have a heart—a woman like you—but of course I ought to 've known better."

"A woman like me? What do you mean?"

"Everybody knows." Sally stared sullenly at the carpet. "Well, you are, aren't you? But you can't be *all* wrong. It was you got Frankie out of jail, wasn't it? He told Will—my husband—and about how grateful he was."

"Grateful!" Denise echoed scornfully.

"You see, he really fell in love with Jess at Boganny's, only he didn't quite know it. Mrs. Crowley, when you were young, weren't you ever in love? Didn't you ever just love somebody so much that you felt you'd die without him? It would have been a long time ago, but still you could remember if you looked back. Probably you're thinking about Frank's money and his title, but that isn't what Jess is thinking about, believe me."

"Oh, how dare you talk to me like this!" Denise exclaimed. "How despicable! Really, I can't listen to you any more. I must ask you to go, if you will be so kind."

But Sally's blood was up and she was impervious to this more than hint.

"You'll have to listen to me, then, whether you like it or not. Believe me, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but have you ever thought over the sort of life you've led? Everybody knows, so I'm not telling you anything new.

"Why don't you let Frankie go? He's only one of dozens, and you wouldn't miss him. He's such an awful fool that he probably don't like to ask you, himself. Why, last night you should have seen him 'round at the place where Jess lives, the two of 'em looking into each other's eyes—"

"That is not true," Denise said unsteadily. "Lord Barrington was with me last evening."

Sally stared at her. "Oh, well, he must of left early, then. He was at Jess's for supper and we sang songs and everything until nearly midnight. He said he'd just got back from the country."

Denise bit her lip and fiddled impatiently with a paper cutter. "If you've quite finished, I really must ask you to excuse me."

The doorbell rang and there was a swish of taffeta going down the hall to answer it.

"Will you ask Frankie, then? Will you just ask him if he loves Jess Trelawny?" Sally implored desperately.

The maid opened the door and announced: "Sir Henry Santoyne, madam," and an elderly man whose fluffy white beard and hair contrasted oddly with a very brown skin, came into the room.

He was a rather imposing old man, tall and a little corpulent, and he had a strong nose of the eagle's beak order, characteristic of the Semitic tribes. He went straight to Denise taking both her hands and kissing each in turn.

"My dear Denise, what a joy to see you again. I can't tell you how happy I am. See, I have brought you a little present." He tugged at a pocket in his voluminous frock-coat and brought out a small bottle of perfume loosely wrapped in tissue paper. "'Jockey Club'—I remember it used to be your favorite. I wonder how many ladies of to-day ask for Jockey Club scent? Eh? Not many, I'll warrant."

He cast a humorous half glance in Sally's direction, as though to say that he was sure one so youthful as herself had never even heard of Jockey Club.

Denise was obliged to effect an introduction, but in her nervousness she made a little slip and named Sally as Miss Leggett, whereat the old man glanced quickly from one to the other and then back again as

though to be sure of his ground. His brown eyes were round with surprise.

"But of course!" he exclaimed. "So this is your daughter?"

Denise made a quick movement, a hush gesture, but Sir Henry was now looking at Sally, shaking his head lugubriously.

"Do you know, young woman, that twenty-five years ago your father cut me out with this charming lady? And I insulted him by calling him a rough diamond. He didn't like it and we almost came to blows—"

"Harry, for God's sake—"

Sally stood there, ashen and trembling.

"Are you my mother?" she demanded.

Sir Henry again glanced from one to the other, and now he saw his blunder.

"Oh, my dear Denise, I'm awfully sorry. This is a mistake, of course," he said.

"Are you my mother?" Sally repeated, never taking her eyes from Denise Crowley's face.

"Yes—I suppose I am," the older woman replied.

"Then I'm sorry, too—sorrier even than Sir Henry," Sally said. "I guess I'll go now, and I wish I'd done what you asked me and gone before."

"You were always a bit of a fool, Harry," Denise said rudely, when Sally had taken herself off. "I'd scarcely have introduced the girl as Miss Leggett if I wished to acknowledge our relationship, would I? It happens, though, that she's married, and if I'd only said Mrs. Murch, you wouldn't have known." Denise stamped her foot and her cold eyes flashed blue fire. "It came so awkwardly, too, for she was lecturing me just as you came in. Oh, well!"

Sir Henry Santoyne twined the fingers of one hand in the meshes of his curly white beard. On the littlest finger was a ruby ring and it seemed to wink maliciously. He himself, however, was gravity personified.

"How was I to know, meeting her here? The resemblance between you is quite startling, too. You separated from Leggett years ago, I understood."

"Not long after Sally was born," Denise said. "You know all about that. He didn't want me; he wanted the child, so I—er—I gave her to him."

Sir Henry permitted himself the merest ghost of a grin, but his beard hid it.

Denise motioned him to a chair and as she seated herself she opened the little bottle and drenched her handkerchief with the light, aromatic scent.

"It's been ages since I've had any of this," she said offhandedly. "Not very subtle, is it? Like *eau de cologne* with a pinch of lemon, and catches your nose at the back."

"Stimulating," murmured Sir Henry. "Always reminds me of old days in Paris. You were very lovely in those days, Denise, and you still are. What's all this I hear about you and Barrington? I thought the old fellow was dead. Thought I'd heard he'd died a couple of years ago. But, of course, he couldn't have."

Denise sniffed sulkily at her handkerchief.

"The old earl died, and his son, too. This is a nephew," she said.

"What? Not *that* fellow?"

"Precisely."

"But he's—"

"My dear Harry, he wasn't guilty. Take it from me, for I know. It happened that my testimony got him a pardon."

The old man's thick eyebrows lifted. "You misunderstand me, my dear. I wasn't thinking of that, although the case interested me tremendously. I was given a seat on the bench at the magistrate's hearing, and made up my mind then that the boy was innocent. Everybody thought so, including the prosecution, but Barrington was only nineteen, and what can you do with a boy of that age when he thinks he's shielding a woman? He'd have gone to the scaffold sooner than speak."

Denise stifled an inclination to hysteria. Yes, Frank might have hung for Nita Marvel. Strange!

"Well, what were you thinking of, Harry?" she asked. "Not of Barrington's having been accused and convicted of murder—what then? But I haven't offered you anything. What will you have? Tea? Or—"

"Nothing. At least not for the moment."

Those curious round, brown eyes, that

hooked nose, the winking ruby on his little finger, symbols of something alien and difficult to comprehend even if one did know something about men of the East, for Harry Santoyne did not openly proclaim the Oriental that lurked somewhere in his composition.

"Is it money, Denise?" he asked.

"What? What do you mean?"

"Are you marrying Barrington for his money? Or the title?"

"For neither," she said quietly, her eyes lowered. "I'm in love with him, that's all, and it's more than enough."

Sir Henry leaned back in his chair and heaved gently with a series of bubbling chuckles.

"Now—now, you can't tell a tale like that to your father confessor. What did you want to see me about, specially? If it's money—"

"Oh, don't you men ever think of anything but money?" Denise cried in tones of deep disgust.

"Sometimes, but if we dwell on other things too long, the ladies are sure to bring us back to the main issue."

"Well, Harry, I never robbed you," Denise replied.

"No, my dear. There's a little strain of the Jew in me, although you mightn't suspect it. I've often thought you had a bit of it yourself. That's what has helped us to be such good friends. I will say this for you, Denise, when you weren't man-hunting, no one could wish for a better companion. I've been a widower on your account for many years, and I'd give up my liberty to-morrow if you'd have me. It's ridiculous, this boy business of yours, although I'm told there's a vogue for it nowadays among the—er—the more mature members of your sex."

"Call me an old woman then!"

"Not at all, and Heaven forbid. You're not an old woman, Denise, and that's why it's all the more ridiculous in your case. I'm sixty-seven and look a good deal older than that, so I feel rather a fool playing the gallant with you, even. But if you were a flapper!"

Sir Henry heaved again with those bubbling chuckles, while his nose and the tip of his beard displayed a tendency to fraternize.

"All that's needed to get through this world with complete satisfaction, is a comfortable income well coupled with a sense of proportion. I leave aims and objects to those who are busy with 'em. I had my own day of darkness. It began in a salt mine.

"Lose your money if you have to, but never lose your sense of proportion—if you ever had any—and you seem to have dropped both, my dear Denise.

"But I'm giving you advice that you haven't asked for," he continued, "and you said over the telephone last night that you had a favor to ask me. Let's hear all about it."

Denise drooped a little after her outburst. Scarcely did she know why she had sent for him, except that he was the most dependable of all the many old friends, and last night Frank's attitude had frightened her to the point where she felt she must seek shelter.

"We've rather got the cart before the horse," she said with a rueful laugh. "It was Sally who did that. Oh, never mind. I just wanted some one to play about with and amuse me a bit. I'm going through a bad time just now."

At this point the distinguished maid pranced in with the tea tray, fully aware of her splendor, and of the roving round eyes of the old man whose russet complexion was a good match for her frock. He, too, looked distinguished, she thought, like something out of the Crimea which by rights should be hung with glittering stars and medals. And Mrs. Crowley looked like an actress. It was all as good as a play, and how much more interesting, still, if Lord Barrington should turn up at this minute.

Denise's lovely hands fluttered over the silver and china.

Three lumps—she remembered that just as she had remembered that Sir Henry liked Indian tea. No cream, but a slice of lemon and a dash of Jamaica rum. No toast or bread and butter, but one or two of these thin, dry cakes.

Sir Henry offered her a cigarette from

his elaborately chased case, a slender cigarette in a sand-colored wrapper with a long cardboard mouthpiece and good for about half a dozen whiffs.

"Oh, how delicious! I've always been meaning to get some of these," said Denise appreciatively.

"I will send you a couple of hundred—"

Exit maid, but no further than the other side of the door.

"And you were saying?" the old man prompted. "How far do you want this playing to go? As far as Tunis?"

"Oh, dear me, no. Tunis is reserved for my honeymoon."

"I shouldn't in the least object to taking the principal male lead in the drama of your honeymoon, Denise. I could dye my hair and whiskers, and I always go to fancy dress parties—when I do go—as a sheik.

"I look rather well in the trappings—in the pale blues and scarlets with all that gold embroidery stuff forbidden by Islam. I've often wondered how they reconcile the tinsel with the teachings of their religion. However, we Christians get over our own little worldly stumbling blocks."

"Harry—"

"My dear?"

"I want to ask you something. It sounds undignified, but I want to make Frank jealous."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" Again the hand with the winking red ring sought the curly white beard. "What's the lad been doing?"

"He thinks he's in love with a ballet dancer. Isn't it stupid?"

"I don't know, but it's certainly old-fashioned. Well, why don't you let him have her?"

"He'd probably marry her if I gave him his head, and I simply can't stand by and see him ruin his life—"

"But how do you know he will? And it's his life, isn't it?"

"It's mine, too" Denise flashed back. "We were such good friends until this girl turned up. She's a daughter of Dora Trelawny."

"Ah, really? Adorable Dora. I knew the fellow she ran away with, and he wasn't worthy of her. Is this girl like her mother?"

"Much prettier," Denise said bitterly. "Harry, you must help me to think of something. I count on you. You've never failed me yet. I know it's only an infatuation, and if I could get the girl away somewhere for awhile without Frank suspecting me of a hand in it, I feel sure he'd forget all about her.

"She's in a cabaret show in London now, and I'm sure he sees her constantly. She lives with an old actor, a guardian of sorts. Frank was there last night, and so was Sally, who's a friend of hers. They're all against me, every one of them."

Denise was almost sobbing now, and the sight of it was a strange revelation to Sir Henry Santoyne. He had seen other people weep on Denise's account—in his day he had come near to shedding a few tears himself—but never before had he seen her in the least shaken for any reason whatsoever.

"I shouldn't cry about it if I were you," he said philosophically. "Let me think." As she was occupied with her handkerchief he poured himself another cup of tea and seasoned it to his liking, while the distinguished maid on the other side of the door held her breath for fear of missing a word.

"I'd like to have a look at Dora Trelawny's daughter," the old man went on. "Where's she dancing?"

Denise told him.

"And I'd like to meet Barrington."

"Harry, you used to back plays and things, didn't you?"

"Sometimes I do still, just for fun, because I've never made any money at that game, except in Paris. I've got something in the Albion Review now. By jove!"

"Harry, you've certainly thought of a way out—I'm positive you have!" Denise cried.

"Perhaps this girl's not strong enough, big enough—you know what I mean. But her mother would have been."

"The young Trelawny is clever," Denise admitted grudgingly. "She's been well trained, she's got charm and she knows her

business. What were you thinking of, Harry?"

The old man chuckled again, like an amiable sultan.

"Dora's daughter," he mused. "I wouldn't be sorry to help her if she's in any way her mother's equal."

"It's to help me," Denise reminded him.

And then Sir Henry told her that there was a quarrel on at the Albion Theater, between rival stars, and the management would be only too glad to get rid of them both except for the high cost of buying-in their contracts and finding likely successors. This Jess Trelawny was comparatively unknown, but her mother's was still a name to conjure with, particularly in Paris. Only it would certainly cost two or three thousand pounds to turn the trick."

"Please do it for me, Harry," Denise pleaded.

"What's to hinder Barrington following her? Paris, as the airplane flies, isn't very far away."

"I somehow don't think he would follow her. The girl's ambitious, and I feel sure she'd give him his marching orders if the bait was tempting enough. If a couple of hundred a week were dangled at her together with a star part at the Albion—well, I know what I should have done when I was young. Oh, Harry, I do beg of you to help me. I haven't a penny myself that I can touch. If I had, I'd throw the whole lot in, everything."

"This is what you might call a benevolent conspiracy," mused Sir Henry.

"Call it what you like, but—"

"Not so fast, my dear girl. I reminded you awhile ago that I have a bit of the Israelite in me. I never yet threw away good money without a chance of getting something in return for it."

Denise waited impatiently, accepting another cigarette while her visitor occupied himself in reverie, and a highly keyed-up young woman on the other side of the door marveled at the devious ways of adventuresses and their paramours.

"It's just this, Denise. Suppose our plot doesn't come off? Suppose, for instance, that Barrington and the ballet dancer continue to—er—to admire each other?"

"You could insert a 'no-matrimony' clause for the run of her contract, couldn't you?"

"That would be in the nature of a challenge, and anyway, I didn't know you were afraid of his marrying her. Suppose it doesn't come off as planned? What then?"

Denise showed him a face that was a mask of tragedy.

"Then my life is finished. I shan't care what happens. Oh, I don't mean that I'd kill myself. Only—well, I shan't trouble about anything very much."

The ruby ring winked at her, playing hide-and-seek from the meshes of the cotton-wool beard.

"In that case—if it comes to that—what about giving me the right to pick up the pieces? Think it over, Denise. A great many years ago you contracted a sort of hole-in-the-corner alliance with that terrific backwoodsman, Leggett, just at the moment when I thought you were mine.

"All right—I forgave you. Lots of things have happened meanwhile, but we won't go into them, either. When I lent you that villa of mine on the Bosporus and you settled down happily there as it seemed, for nearly seven years, I began to have hopes—for both of us. I didn't ask anything of you, while my wife was alive.

"I cared too much for her, and for you. And I'm not asking for anything now, except the right to pick up broken pieces, if there be any. I care such a lot for you, Denise—I won't use the word love—such a lot, that I'd honestly rather see you happy for a brief hour than gain anything at all for myself. Yet, don't forget the Jew." He laid a brown forefinger against the side of his nose and tapped it gently.

"I can trust you, Harry, and it's a bargain," Denise said.

"That's all right, then. Now I think I'd better be going—"

On the other side of the door the eavesdropper tiptoed away with long, cautious strides, suppressing as far as possible the rustling of her frock.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

One Man's Meat --

By BEN CONLON

JIMMY STERNING, of the sales force, slammed some contracts and letters into a drawer—this being easier than arranging the disordered top of his desk—and lit a cigarette. He knew, or thought he knew, why Wheaton had sent for him; and yet, as he walked briskly down the corridor toward Wheaton's office, he comforted himself with the thought that he had often imagined future calamities which had turned out quite all right.

He stamped out the lighted cigarette at Wheaton's door, and entered.

"Good morning," he said. "The switchboard girl told me you wanted to see me."

"I did," said Wheaton. He drew his cigarette case from a vest pocket. "Have a cigarette, Jimmy," he invited. There was a strange note, half sad, half determined, in Wheaton's manner.

Sterning accepted the cigarette and lit it. At the moment he would have gambled heavily that this time his fears were well grounded.

"Jimmy," Wheaton began, looking rather mournfully at the litter of papers on his desk, "I am forced to break a little unwelcome news to you."

Sterning managed to summon a rueful smile.

"I sensed it," he said. "You're going to give me my notice, Mr. Wheaton, and the worst of it is, I haven't a leg to stand on. I haven't been delivering, and I've known it for some time. I can't tell you just what the trouble has been. They used to call me 'Sign-'Em-Up Sterning,' and for seven months I was second on the bonus list, wasn't I? And you yourself told me that Lane's victory was rather a Pyrrhic one, that the credit man turned down enough of his orders to set me in first place."

"That was true," Wheaton agreed. "Your orders stuck, Jimmy—when you were going strong. Just what the hell's been the matter with you?" he asked, more as a friend than an employer.

"Lord!" Jimmy replied. "Don't you think that if I had known, I'd have sought some remedy? I'm darned if I know. I've lost the old pep. You ought to have fired me weeks ago. When I think of you in the

years to come, Mr. Wheaton, I prefer to think of you as the man who gave me every chance, who held me on much longer than I deserved, rather than the man who fired me. Why, I haven't even had the initiative to quit my job. I've been getting good money, and I didn't have the nerve, I guess. Shake, Wheaton!"

It was the first time he had ever left off the "mister," and the expression in his face told the other man that the omission was based upon earnestness rather than familiarity. "When do I get the well-known needle?"

"Before we talk about needles," Wheaton suggested, "I wonder if you couldn't get some new lease on life, slam-bang through in the old Sign-'Em-Up Sterning way, rush in where angels fear to tread—you know, Jimmy. God! I didn't sleep well last night, knowing that I had to tell you this message this morning. You've got something on your mind that's eating you. Forget it! You're no drone, never have been one, and never could be. D'ye think, Jimmy, that if I gave you some uptown territory you could kick into the work in the old way? I hate to see you go, Sterning. Let's say you've just had a relapse, and that from this moment you're on your way to a quick recovery. Wha'd'ye say, Jimmy?"

He gave the listless salesman an affectionate thump on the arm.

"I say no," Sterning decided. "Do you think I'd risk falling down on you the second time? Nope! Not Jimmy Sterning. The uptown territory's twice as tough as this old reorder route I've been moping about for the last few months. I'll slip in the resignation this morning. Of course if any firm I try to connect with should give you a ring—well, you know. I don't expect you to lie for me, Mr. Wheaton. Just soften the truth a little—tell 'em I was one of your crack go-getters for several months."

"And that won't be stretching the truth the least bit," said Wheaton. "Jimmy, maybe you're right; probably you need a complete change of air. And listen! Usually when I give a man two weeks' notice, or even when a man gives me notice, I'd rather pay him the extra salary that instant and not have him around, for his mind is never on this job during those two weeks. But I want to ask a favor of you. Will you do something for me?"

"Don't be goofy," commanded Jimmy, with a warm smile. "Shoot!"

"All right. I want you to break in this new salesman. I hired him this morning. Name's Roswell, a typical small-town boy without in any sense being a hick. He's clean-cut and neatly dressed, and his skin and eyes fairly radiate good health. I know he's a comer.

"Now, if I turn him over to some of these go-getters that are staying on the pay roll, I am not sure he'll get an even break. These fellows are pretty egotistical and jealous of any possible inroads. Funny thing. They wouldn't be worth a continental if they were any other way. But you're in a different position, and while I know a fellow usually isn't very much in love with the guy who gets his job, I wish you'd tell me that you'll spend the next ten days breaking in Roswell right; for if you tell me that you will—well, my worries stop."

"I tell you, then," said Sterning. "Trot in this boy wonder. If he keeps up the gait I set for him, he'll have your job in another year."

Wheaton smiled.

"O. K., Jimmy," he said, as he pressed a buzzer under his desk; and when his secretary appeared with pad and pencil he told her:

"Not quite ready for the dictation yet, Miss Crouse. Please ask Mr. Roswell to step in for a moment."

A few minutes later, when Sterning and Roswell left the office together, the former almost liked the keen-eyed young man who was to be his successor.

"I think the first step is lunch," Sterning suggested. "We'll drop into the Antlers Grill downstairs, and while we're eating you shoot any questions at me that you can think of. You see, I have no further interest in this job for myself. You're starting to work for a white man, never forget that.

"Wheaton is a driver, but he's a human being, and if you make good for him, nothing would make me any happier. After

lunch I'll take you around and put you in right with certain members of the trade. I'll give the correct dope to all my real friends among 'em, for often, you know, they hold out on a new man when they've known the old one very well."

Roswell looked his thanks. "You're giving me an awful good break," he acknowledged. "'Tain't twelve o'clock, though, is it?"

Sterning grinned a trifle.

"You're probably used to some small-town grind where you get in on the dot, and go to lunch promptly on the first stroke of twelve," he said. "But the first thing to do is to forget all that. If you feel hungry, lunch at eleven, or any time you want to, so long as you do your work. Come ahead—we'll get into the grill early, before it gets crowded, and we can nab a nice, secluded corner so we can talk."

An hour later, when the waiter had cleared the dishes away, and they sat with their coffee before them, Jimmy Sterning had completed sizing up the new man and agreed with Wheaton that here was a comer.

"You've got a good chance, Roswell," he told the novice, "so don't make any of the mistakes I did. Just keep plugging along, and keep all your relations on a business basis. You know, the idea of a salesman being a teller of funny stories and all that bunk—that started to pass out about the time Roosevelt rode up San Juan Hill.

"Don't cheapen yourself with the customers, or in fact with any of the employees. You know the old saw about what familiarity breeds. Don't take out any of the stenogs, and don't pal around nights with the salesmen. I got a taste of that once. Went out with one of the young squirts, and we had two cocktails apiece at dinner, and next day this fellow began boasting around the office of the wild time we'd had, and I suppose Wheaton and the rest thought we'd punished about a gallon of liquor."

"As a matter of fact, I don't drink," Roswell told him. "But I'm afraid part of your advice has come too late. You see, I got talking in the office with Miss Hallett this morning, and it seems her mother was brought up in the part of the country I came from, and I suppose I was a little lonesome, and—"

"And so you invited her out to dinner," Sterning finished.

"Well, really," Roswell explained, "she invited me to her home to meet her mother; said her mother'd be glad to talk with some one from my part of the country. It seemed a little nervy going up to the girl's home first crack out of the box, so I felt called upon to invite her to a show after dinner."

Sterning was silent for a moment. He was thinking. Yes, that would be Dora Hallett's method. Wheaton had been right when he said that something was eating into the mind of Jimmy Sterning. Dora, in fact, was one of the reasons why Jimmy Sterning was rather glad to shake the dust of the old office from his heels.

Dora was pretty, there was no doubt about that, and once Jimmy Sterning had thought that some time in the future, when he had saved some money, and was getting more settled, and—but the attitude of Dora herself had changed all that. Dora Hallett had shown herself grasping and self-centered, willing to be taken about to night clubs and theaters when Sterning had been second on the salesmen's list, and even designing enough to look up a man's salary if he appeared like a good enough matrimonial prospect for a girl who meant to sell herself both high and respectably.

"Of course, if you've made an appointment, that's that," he told Roswell. "And understand, I'm not giving you any advice as to how to live your private life. What I told you just happened to have a bearing on the job you're starting."

He paused again, thinking of Dora. Very likely her keen woman's intuition had singled out Roswell as a real go-getter, and go-getters go-get money, and—well, Dora was Dora.

He shifted the subject.

"You'll probably like New York, Roswell," he said.

"I know I will," the other rejoined. "Gee! If I'm not sick of small towns! No chance to grow, the same old tiresome

people to meet day after day and night after night, no real money to get. I give myself five years to make some real money in this town—then I suppose I'll get married, and move to the suburbs if any children come along."

Sterning smiled a little, inwardly, at the youth's unsophistication, and contrasted him with the other members of the sales force—cynics, for the most part, who talked enough about girls, but not much about marriage.

Late that afternoon, after he had guided Roswell over a part of the territory, he shook hands at the entrance to the subway.

"I'd call it a day, Roswell," he advised. "See you in the morning."

"But it can't be quitting time," the small-town youth demurred.

"Not quite, maybe," Sterning agreed, "but we've put in a good day's work. See? The lights are beginning to go on along Broadway."

Roswell turned and gazed down the pulsing canon.

"Gee! That looks great to me, Sterning!" he murmured. "Those are the trenches I'm out to take! Just give me five years."

Sterning smiled a little bitterly over the newcomer's enthusiasm, as he wedged himself into a crowded subway local.

"Poor kid!" he said to himself. "He'll be burned out in a couple of years, and then —out! But Lord, what a *worker* that guy is!"

He left the local at an uptown station, walked east a couple of blocks, and let himself into his small apartment. The windows had been closed, the air was stuffy. He flung the windows wide open, and as he took a deep breath detected the taint of soft coal smoke.

"Poor Roswell!" he murmured.

He was thinking of the sort of town Roswell had very probably left—some small, interior, really American village, perhaps with overarching elms along a quiet Main Street, and velvety lawns hosed down by contented home owners at sunset, and flowers and broad verandas, and white houses with green blinds—

"Poor Roswell!" he said again, and then laughed, a trifle bitterly, as he realized that all his pity was for the up-and-coming new salesman and none for himself, on the brink of being out of a job, in fact with little ambition to try for a new one in the same line. He recalled that night clubs were expensive, and that the companionship of Dora Hallett had been expensive, likewise an apartment when he could have lived in a room, and tickets for Broadway hits when he could have gone to movies, and a car, and garage rent.

The thought of the car gave him an idea. He stepped to the telephone and called a Wadsworth number.

"Hello," he called, after the connection had been made. "Schwartz's garage? That you, Harry? Say, I'll take that offer. It's away too cheap, but the car's only eating itself up with storage. Send me the check to-night. I'll mail you a receipt. Deduct the garage rent from the check. Yes, I may go out of town for awhile; making a change. S' long."

He hung up the receiver, and sat and thought for awhile. Then he shaved, took a cold shower, dressed with considerable care, and made for the subway. He had determined that this would be his last night in New York, and he would make it a good one.

Next morning he realized with a feeling of remorse that "good ones" cost good money. He waited for the first mail, received the garage check, and cashed it on the way down town, closing his small account while he was at the bank. He arrived at Wheaton's office about ten thirty.

"I'm still ready to keep my promise and stay ten days if you really want me to, Mr. Wheaton," he told the sales manager, "but take it from me, this new man, Roswell, doesn't need any instructor. We stepped fast yesterday, and he knows the ropes pretty well. And say—he's a natural-born salesman. If I didn't know better, I'd say he was a seasoned man in his line."

"I like the cut of him," Wheaton replied. "He boosts you pretty well, too, Jimmy. Well, I'll see that Miss Crouse gets your envelope made up—but you're rather in a rush, aren't you?"

"I'm simply fed up on this town," Sterning told him. "What you mentioned in our talk yesterday may be just what I need—a complete change of air. I heard some time ago that Older & Kent at Albany could use a salesman, and I'm going up to reconnoiter—taking the night boat at five."

"Good luck to you, old top," said Wheaton. "If it's open, and they want any recommendation, have old Tom Kent get on the wire to me, and reverse the charges. I just know you're going to find yourself, Jimmy. And don't forget that the mails are working. Don't suppose you've saved much money. You're like all these young whirlwind salesmen—it gets coming big for awhile, and you think it's going to last forever. So if you should ever need a little—"

"I won't," cut in Jimmy promptly.

He put out his hand.

II.

It was a mellow evening on the night boat. There was dancing, and lovers sat and spooned in secluded corners; but Jimmy Sterning went to his stateroom early. He was on the first lap of a come-back, and he would prepare for it by catching up on sleep.

But Tom Kent happened to be absent from his office the next morning, and Older's manner was far from gracious.

"You left a job in New York to apply for one in Albany?" he asked, with just a tinge of satire. "And a job that you just *heard* was open? What's the matter—in poor health?"

"In rather good health," Jimmy replied, "but—well, New York didn't quite agree with me, though."

"Well, this is our dull season, as you should know," Older informed him. "We have nothing here. Sorry," he was courteous enough to add.

Jimmy Sterning became used to this sort of reception as he traveled westward by easy stages. At Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, he received much the same message. And he was discovering that idling about hotels was expensive.

The persons he ran against in hotel lobbies were strangers. He had no particular desire to sit talking with them, but he went to theaters, to movies, dallied over his dinner each evening. He checked up his receding finances in his room one night. The residue was surprisingly small.

He had the choice of two courses. Either he could return to New York, get some tip from Wheaton as to vacancies in wholesale houses in the city, or take a chance and move on to Buffalo. His ardor for getting away from New York was becoming a trifle spent.

Next morning, however, he decided in favor of Buffalo. He knew that a return to New York would mean a repetition of the old grind. Somehow he sensed that the star of his destiny was in the West, and, packing his grip hurriedly, he paid his hotel bill and started toward the New York Central Station.

There would be a better chance in Buffalo than in the other up-State cities, he assumed, since it was larger and would have more places to call upon.

He inquired the fare. He had about two dollars and a quarter in his pocket, besides a lone twenty-dollar bill, the last of the automobile money. He decided he would rather not break the big bill. He wanted to land in Buffalo with at least twenty dollars, and make a new start.

He determined that never again, after this lesson, would he be so free with money, which was now proving so hard to get. But the price of a ticket from Rochester to Buffalo proved to be two dollars and forty-eight cents, and Sterning found it necessary to break the twenty-dollar bill, and decided that he would ride this comparatively short distance in a day coach. These economies he had been promising himself must start some time.

He climbed aboard the incoming local, put his bag in the rack above him, and as the train started enjoyed the rolling panorama outside. He felt a little nervous as he wondered just what would happen if he failed to connect in Buffalo.

That would mean having to return to New York, and, much against his will, negotiating a small loan from Wheaton, and he decided that Wheaton had been too good

a friend of his to risk weakening the friendship in such fashion; and, besides, Dora Hallett might hear of it. And he felt just a little bitter as he thought of Dora Hallett.

He decided to quiet his jumpy nerves with a smoke, and, grimly recalling that it was a cold world, thought to take down his bag and carry it with him into the smoker.

" This confounded local seems to be stopping at every house and twice at every double house," complained a loudly dressed young man who sat in the leather seat opposite his own reversed one. " Gee! I want to make Buffalo in time to call on a customer of mine, that don't come in afternoons, sometimes. I'm a salesman," he added proudly. " Have the whole State of New York out of New York City. Couldn't get a chair car from Syracuse—all taken," he felt called upon to explain.

" I'm a salesman myself," Sterning told him. " Happen to know how many wholesale houses there are in Buffalo? Was thinking I might get on with one."

His loudly-dressed acquaintance volunteered various bits of information, but gradually as his conversation drifted into channels of women, wild parties, stories of drinking bouts and other things that Sterning was trying to forget, the latter made hasty devoirs, snatched up his suitcase and returned to the day coach. The train was pulling into some small town, and as the engineer applied the brakes and the train groaned and jerked, a roughly-dressed, unshaven man lurched through the door of the car, and his bleary eyes rested upon Sterning.

" 'Scuse me, brother," he said. " That guy yuh was talkin' to in the smoker says would yuh mind droppin' in there a minute. Says he's got somethin' important he forgot to tell yuh."

Hopefully, Jimmy strolled into the smoker. It must be something about a possible situation in Buffalo; even this loud-mouthed stranger would hardly have had the courage to summon him in this fashion on anything less important.

The loudly-dressed salesman had found another listener, and was continuing his monologue. Jimmy waited. " So we lapped about four quarts o' Scotch between us," which was the story's conclusion, then touched the speaker on the arm.

" You thought of something else—about the Buffalo situation?" he inquired.

" What's that?" asked the salesman, with a puzzled look on his face.

" Some fellow back in the day coach told me you wanted to see me again to tell me something," Jimmy informed him.

The train was just starting and, even before the other answered, Sterning cursed himself for a credulous fool. " You must have got him wrong," the salesman said. " I didn't have anything special to tell you."

With a spurt that left the salesman looking after him more puzzled than ever, Jimmy scurried back toward the day coach as the train gradually increased its momentum. He had a definite suspicion that he was not going to find his suitcase in the rack; that the bleary-eyed man had seen him guard it carefully in the smoker, and sensed that it contained something valuable —whisky, maybe.

A quick glance into the rack of the day coach confirmed his worst fears. The suitcase was gone—and so was the bleary-eyed man.

III.

Two weeks later Jimmy Sterning walked along Euclid Avenue, in Cleveland, and decided that positions were at a premium. Buffalo had been a blank, Cleveland the same. The evening air was balmy; Jimmy was glad of that much, at least, for to-night he could not register at a hotel for the excellent reason that he had no baggage, and probably not enough money in his pocket to pay for the room in advance.

" What a bum I'm getting to be," he told himself, as he sat late that night on a bench in a little municipal park.

His next thought was at dawn, when he awakened and decided that even summer breezes can be painfuly chilly when one has slept in the open all night without a blanket. He stood up, stretched himself, and started to walk again, although he wondered just where he was going, and why.

He recalled a cheap-looking lunchroom down by the railroad station.

Although Jimmy Sterning had admitted to himself that he was getting to look rather seedy, it did not lessen his irritation when a down-at-the-heel customer sitting on the next stool and finishing a meal of coffee and sinkers, turned to him and said: "Which way yuh bound, bo?"

When he looked up indignantly and then saw the other's smiling face, however, it subdued some of his ire. The fellow looked friendly, anyhow, and the world had been pretty unfriendly to Jimmy Sterning for the past couple of weeks.

The sight of the beaming, unshaven face of the man next him changed the nature of his repartee.

"Don't exactly know myself," he answered sheepishly, fingering the few one-dollar bills in his trousers pocket. "Nowhere, I guess."

"That's about my position," the friendly stranger told him. "Say, yuh look all right to me, pal. S'posin' we go nowhere together."

The whimsicality of the man quite won Jimmy. The stranger frankly confessed that he was broke, but his face usually wrinkled into a broad smile as he talked. He seemed happy, carefree.

Gradually Jimmy found himself confiding things that a short time before he would have regarded as solely his own business. He recalled the old saw about one touch of nature making the whole world kin. He reached in his pocket and drew out a dollar bill.

"I guess you need this as badly as I do," he said. "Take it. Anyhow, it'll see you through the day."

The shabby stranger accepted this unexpected manna, and regarded Sterning with a look of mingled surprise and gratitude.

"Thanks, pal," he said. "But listen. I ain't spendin' no whole buck on just a day's grub. Listen, pal, you come with me an' I'll show yuh how to make a buck last the both of us for two or three days. Yuh say yuh're about broke. All right. Then yuh need to go slow. It's a pretty cold world. You don't know it—yet, maybe, 'cause yuh ain't use to it, I can see that. But yuh will.

"C'mon with me, pal. I been lookin' for an honest buddy. I'm on my way to the harvestin' out in Dakota. Then there's the thrashin', after that. It 'ud sure do yuh a lotta good. Yuh'd be surprised how many o' your kind o' guys yuh'll find out there harvestin'—college boys, even school-teachers—men, I mean—an' guys that git run down in health. They git a vacation, an' build up, an' at the same time make themselves some dough. Wha'd'ye say?"

Sterning felt in a reckless mood. The unfortunate before him had a whole lot more of humanity in him than many of the well-dressed men he had interviewed the past few days. As a result, he followed his new acquaintance to the purlieus of the city, rode a westward freight train with him that night, and woke up in a small town in Western Ohio, where his friend, Scrubby Fink by name, took charge of the itinerary.

"A goodlooking guy like yuh could panhandle some coffee at a house," Scrubby suggested. "Yuh git that, an' when yuh meet me back o' this shed here in 'bout half an hour, I'll have the rest o' our breakfast."

Sterning found that he couldn't go through with the panhandling. His training had been too different for that. But he found a little Italian grocery store hard by the tracks, and bought a half pound of coffee out of the slender remains of his fortune. When he returned Scrubby was sitting composedly before a rich and steaming "mulligan," which he had prepared in the midst of his jungle of cans with some meat he had secured somewhere, and a few vegetables he had bought for a nickel.

At first the atmosphere depressed Sterning, but as the savory odor of the stew reached his nostrils, he decided to trade his birthright for a mess of "mulligan," and remained with Scrubby Fink. And later, with the coffee depleted, Scrubby skipped over to the little Italian grocery store and returned with two cigarettes which he had persuaded the proprietor to part with for the small sum of two cents.

Right then Jimmy Sterning entered upon the higher education. He decided to share the balance of his funds—four dollars and some change—with Scrubby, who seemed to regard this as a fortune.

Scrubby proved to be an excellent provider of necessities, if not of luxuries. They were well into the State of Iowa before the last of the money was gone. During the journey westward Sterning learned how to tackle and subdue a freight train going at twenty miles an hour; learned how to select the proper grades at which to board trains; how to ride " blind baggage " and how to " decorate " on the top of a passenger train.

He was growing huskier in body, and the cobwebs of city life seemed cleared from his brain. It was now he who was dominating, although at the outset Scrubby had directed the itinerary and assumed full charge of the commissariat. He began to feel like the old, peppy Jimmy Sterning—like " Sign-'Em-Up Sterning."

His advancement delighted Scrubby Fink, who took a certain pride in the resourcefulness of his pupil. And yet Sterning realized that now, entirely without funds, he could not continue to live the life of Scrubby Fink, whole-souled, honest enough in his way, but a mendicant, a pariah.

" Now we hit a train goin' north," Scrubby told him, " an' to-morrow we're in the wheatfields."

But two happenings of the morning had their influence upon Jimmy. One was at the water-tank where he and Scrubby Fink had breakfasted—an old, white-haired tramp attempting to board a moving train had stumbled against the end of a tie and gone sprawling beneath the wheels before Sterning's horrified eyes. That was enough for Jimmy; and, also, looking in an old and tattered railroad folder, he had discovered that he was within fifteen or twenty miles of Bradford—which, he recalled, was Roswell's home town. Somehow, he thought his destiny might lie there.

Scrubby all but cried when Jimmy announced his decision.

" But what'll yuh do?" asked the hobo. " Where are yuh goin'? An' can't I go, too?"

" I'm afraid not, Scrubby," replied his companion. " I'm going to walk to this town of Bradford near here and get any kind of a job. The harvest season is on here. Why go north to Dakota? And, anyhow, Scrubby, our ways are different, yours and mine. I can't keep on with this now that the money's gone. I can't be a beggar. But good luck to you, old friend. You know you wouldn't be happy unless you were on the wing. Write to me some time, General Delivery, Bradford, Iowa. If I've left there I'll leave a forwarding address."

His farewells completed, he set out alone down the track, looked at his reflection in the first clear stream he came to, smoothed his thatch of hair as best he could with a small pocket-comb, and removed the worst of the railroad grit from his face with a moistened bandanna. Then he set out across lots in the direction of a large red silo.

IV.

THE man who sat in his shirt sleeves on the farmhouse veranda seemed reasonably friendly.

" I could use a man," he admitted, " but you know yourself most of you fellows don't want to work. You get fed, an' then keep on goin'."

" I'm one that wants to work," said Sterning, emphatically. " I'll work first—and eat after I earn it, if you want proof." He talked smoothly, convincingly—he reminded himself of the old " Sign-'Em-Up Sterning." He talked himself into a job.

At first his awkwardness with a pitchfork excited the merriment of his fellow-workers, but he was earnest and willing, and the time came when he was able to outwork some of the best of them.

His employer showed his approval in several ways. Sterning had told him that he knew how to run a car—although he refrained from the information that once he had owned one.

" Drive a Ford?" asked his employer.

" I can drive any kind," said Sterning.

Accordingly, he got the job of driving into Bradford to replenish the farmhouse supplies. Threshing would be on in a short time, and threshers have he-man appetites.

" Won't run away with my car, will you?" asked Farmer Bell flippantly.

" There wouldn't be much percentage in

that, even if I were a crook," replied Jimmy grinning. "That old rattletrap isn't worth fifty dollars, and you owe me more wages than that."

He cranked the car, and started out. He was curious about this town of Bradford. He wondered if it could be the town that Roswell was from. No one at the farm seemed to know Roswell. He decided he would make inquiries in town.

The folks he met seemed healthy and happy. Glistening automobiles were parked in front of several of the spacious white houses. Bradford looked like a prosperous community.

Sterning shopped with the ardor of a woman, enjoyed a soda in the clean, well-equipped drug store, listened to a speech in front of the Bradford radio shop. He grinned as he stepped into his car for the return trip to the farm.

He was well out Main Street on his way back to the farm before he recalled that he had not inquired about Roswell.

It was on his second trip to town that he met Mary Corbell. The noon sun was gilding little patches of pavement along tree-lined Main Street.

Sterning watched the trim figure bustling along in front of him. She seemed in a hurry. All this formality between men and women was silly business, he decided.

The girl was evidently bound for the center of the town, and was doubtless trying to make time. He would ask her if she wanted a lift.

Then, as the girl stepped to the side of the road to allow the car to pass, Sterning caught a glimpse of her straight-gazing blue eyes, and gathered that here was no young lady to ask to hop into an automobile. Regretfully, he rode on. But, the mere fact that he showed no signs of making an advance, apparently had its impression on the mind of the blue-eyed girl.

"Mister," she called, "just a minute. I wonder if you are going clear into town."

With a quickened heartbeat, Jimmy Sterning stopped the car and removed his hat respectfully.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "I'd be very pleased to give you a lift."

Mary Corbell smiled. She hopped into the car, realized that here was a gentleman, that he wanted to talk to her; and she gave him his opportunity.

"If you had asked me to ride, I shouldn't have accepted," she said, coyly. "Rather queer folks, we women, aren't we?"

Jimmy smiled.

"I wanted to ask you," he said. "And I have plenty of time. I wonder if I couldn't drop you exactly where you were headed for. You seemed in somewhat of a hurry."

"I am," the girl admitted. "I'm a stenographer at the Thompson Wholesale House. I happened to slip home for lunch to-day, and I'm afraid I'd have been a little late getting back if it hadn't been for you."

The Tompkins Wholesale House! It gave Jimmy Sterning an idea. Maybe his job was waiting for him right here in Bradford. And once more, his mind entirely taken up with Mary Corbell, he forgot to ask about young Roswell.

On his next Bradford trip, he stopped his car in front of the large, drab building which housed the Thompson firm, and walked into the office.

"I wonder if I could see Mr. Thompson?" he asked Miss Corbell. "I'm going to ask him for a job."

Mr. Thompson happened to have gone home for lunch, and Sterning was rather glad of this development. He remained and chatted with Mary Corbell.

"By the way," he asked, in the course of the conversation, "did you ever hear of a fellow from this town named Joe Roswell? I think he said he was from Bradford, Iowa—although it might possibly have been Ohio."

A peculiar expression crossed the pleasant-featured countenance of the girl before him. She looked out through the small window in front of her.

A tall, elderly man was crossing the street toward the office. She turned back to Sterning.

"Are you serious in asking Mr. Thompson about a job?" she asked. There was just a tinge of suspicion in her tone. Meanwhile, the tall, elderly man had reached the curbing and was approaching the office

door. " If you really want a position here, do not mention Roswell at all," she whispered quickly.

As she finished, the elderly man entered.

" Mr. Thompson," said the girl, " this gentleman wishes to see you."

" Come inside," Thompson invited, motioning Sterning to an inner sanctum. " What can I do for you?"

Jimmy Sterning told him. Mr. Thompson sat and listened. He proved to be a friendly, approachable person, but a business man, nevertheless.

" We could use the proper kind of a man," he said, finally. " But I'm afraid you haven't the training. You say you've been doing farm work. I know Bell—suppose I could call him up. Anyhow, you look honest enough. But do you know anything about selling goods?"

Jimmy thought it over a second. He didn't want any long investigation of his credentials, and he felt that one white lie wouldn't hurt anybody.

" I'd like to learn," he replied evasively. " Didn't think there was much to it."

" Well, you'd find there's a lot to it," answered Thompson dryly. " Sorry. I like your face."

" But listen!" Jimmy insisted. " I'd like to go to work for you. Don't pay me one cent of salary. Straight commission. You can't lose much that way, can you?"

Thompson scratched his chin thoughtfully. He liked the ardor shown by this young man, and his honest eyes.

" Well, if you're game enough for that," he decided, " I haven't got the heart to say no. But I'm a little afraid you may be disappointed. All right. Straight commission for the first month. And no drawing account. You see, what we call a drawing account—"

He explained the meaning of the term, and the experienced young salesman before him smiled inwardly.

He appeared at Thompson's office at eight o'clock the following Monday morning, neatly dressed in a conservative suit bought at the Bradford " New York Store " with his earnings on the farm.

" I'm ready," he smilingly announced to his new employer.

Yes, Jimmy Sterning was ready. With four years of selling technique behind him, a healthy body, a clear mind and an abiding faith in his own ability, he started out. Thompson was completely bowled over when his " green " man sold nearly twice as much goods for the same period as any salesman he had ever employed.

" I'm going to hedge, Sterning," he said at the beginning of the second week. " I'll let you work on commission this week, but then you go on salary. Would you mind mentioning the matter to Miss Corbell when you go out, so that she can make a memo of it?"

Jimmy wouldn't mind.

Mary was once more her own gracious self, although she had looked at him suspiciously when he had mentioned Roswell's name. He decided that he did not like that look of suspicion on a face made for smiles and trust—and he let the matter of Roswell drop.

Sterning continued to drive himself. Thompson, who at first had liked him for what he was doing for the Thompson Company, gradually learned to like him for his own sake.

" If you believe it 'll work, go to it," was one of Thompson's sayings when Sterning outlined a new sales scheme.

When the new salesman sold a big line of canned goods to a man that Thompson called " a tough nut," the wholesale-house man shook him by the hand.

" You're there, Sterning," he smiled. " I'm elated over that sale. You see, I'm a stockholder in the Bradford canning factory, and I've been trying for years to put in our various brands of canned goods with that fellow. Good work."

The months glided by. They did not simply wear by, as they had seemed to do back in New York. Sterning worked night and day on a plan to consolidate several wholesale houses within a range of several counties.

Thompson was a little leary at first. Then Sterning had a good talk with him one day—told him the truth, his past career, his disappointments, his experience, and why he felt confident the scheme would work out.

"I felt all along you'd had experience, Jim," Thompson told him, "and that you'd let me in on it all in good time. Well, if you believe it 'll work, go to it."

Sterning went to it. It took time, and a great deal of hard, sometimes discouraging work, but he finally put the deal through to the profit and delight of Thompson, who saw to it that Sterning himself received some of the benefits.

"Seems to me you ought to tell Miss Corbell about this," said Thompson, grinning, "although I suppose I'm a darned fool for suggesting it. She's the best stenographer I ever had."

It seemed to Sterning, too, that he ought to tell Mary. He strolled with her that evening through the moonlight that filtered down through towering elms.

"Mary," he said, "we've talked a good deal about affection, you and I, but we haven't said much about money. Married people need money. Have you ever thought about that part of it?"

Then he waited, breathlessly. He was like a dog that had been kicked. He was thinking of what Dora Hallett back in New York would say in such a situation.

"I don't know as I have, Jim," Mary answered seriously. "Of course, when we get married, if you ever fell sick I could brush up again on my Pitman."

Sterning's heart bounded.

"Mary," he said, "you'll never have to make any more of those pothooks and curlicues. You'll be comparatively rich when you marry me. I've got enough money right now to make a first payment on that Calder house up near the golf links." With a boyish pride he told her of the deal he had consummated.

Perhaps Mary was not as dazzled as she should have been. Her mind featured an entirely different phase—not jewels, or flashy clothes, or a speedy roadster, but companionship—with Jimmy.

"Do you mean to say, Jim," she asked, "that this means you can quit traveling around selling goods and stay back here in Bradford and manage the place, and be with me?"

"I certainly do," Sterning answered proudly. "Stay right here. I like these small towns. Now Roswell—"

He stopped, embarrassed, then decided to go ahead with his story:

"Some people do better in small towns," he said. "I had to come here to find success, and as I look back I think my success was due to one man. He was the young fellow who succeeded me in a position from which I was fi—from which I resigned. No, damn it all, Mary. I'll tell you the truth. From which I was absolutely *fired,* and deserved to be fired. This chap was so full of confidence and energy that I've tried to pattern after him, and I know it was his example that made a man out of me. It was this Joe Roswell."

"Do you remember," Mary asked, "when you first mentioned Roswell to me? I didn't exactly know who you were then. It seemed odd a person like you, a stranger, apparently well educated, working on a farm near here and then coming to Thompson's to try for a job. I thought maybe you were some detective, thought possibly that Roswell had put himself in wrong again somewhere, and that you were trailing him to put him in prison. Then I thought that maybe you were serious about wanting the job, and I warned you against mentioning Roswell's name to Mr. Thompson. If you had, he'd have fired you out of the office. He hated Roswell—had every reason to hate him.

"Joe Roswell was the laziest, good-for-nothing idler in this town. He embezzled two thousand dollars from Mr. Thompson and went East. But New York must have done something for him—he wrote Mr. Thompson last week, and sent fifteen hundred dollars on account."

"Poor Roswell!" murmured Jimmy. "So that was why he was so greedy for money. Well, I don't think he'll make the same mistake again. All I hope is that he hasn't married Dora Hallett," he concluded, half to himself.

"Who's she?" Mary asked.

And Jimmy Sterning had to spend some time to convince Mary that so far as he, Jimmy Sterning, was concerned, she was nobody in particular.

THE END

Double Indemnity

By C. C. WADDELL

Author of "Adventure's Price," "Midnight to High Noon," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

"OH, THAT BROTHER OF YOURS!"

WITH a common impulse, Ed and Rossiter swung toward the door.

It was idle to continue the search. They had already found enough --maybe more than enough.

The call upon them now was to follow up these clews they had unearthed, and either confirm or disprove that revolting fear which neither of them would put into words.

Pausing only to let Rossiter gather up one or two little things to serve as personal mementoes, they hurried out again to the car.

Their investigation of the dead man's scant assets had been made none too soon. As they drove down the lane to the main highway, they met three State troopers on motorcycles wheeling toward the house. Rossiter's urgency or haste was plainly justified.

Had they let half an hour elapse that telltale notebook and express receipt would have been dumped into the official hopper, and it might have been days before red-tape regulations would have permitted them to be inspected.

The leader of the uniformed trio scowled with chagrin at the sight of them, and flung up his hand as a signal to halt.

"Didn't lose any time browsing around into your brother's things, did you?" he complained harshly. "Don't you know, you ought to have waited until we got there?"

"Well, I don't imagine our coming made much difference." Rossiter shrugged. "We found the place locked up. You'll have to get a key somewhere, if you want to go inside."

"Oh, I've got the key all right." The

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trooper slapped his pocket. "Took it off'n Al when I frisked him. Want to go back with us?" he offered more amiably. "You can't touch anything, but you can watch us as we check 'em up, and take 'em in charge."

"No," Rossiter declined. "I will go over them later, after you have made your examination. I suppose they'll be taken some place where I can see them."

"Sure." The trooper nodded. "Down at our headquarters. You can come in any time after a day or two, and claim 'em as the next of kin."

He remounted his wheel, and rode on with his two companions.

"Well, we got out of that very nicely," commented Rossiter. "I was afraid that, in order to save our face, we'd have to go back with them, and stand around for another hour while they dawdled over an inventory. However, there's nothing now to stop us, and I suppose the thing to do is push right through to Portland.

"I don't know, though," he considered after a moment. "The chances are that there'll be nothing to call you back here again; and it may be that we'll both want to follow that trunk through to New York.

"Probably it would be best to stop at the hotel as we pass through North Conway, get our bags, and check out. We'll get breakfast, too, at the same time," he decided. "You certainly look as if you needed a cup of coffee to brace you up, if you don't mind my saying so."

"Small wonder, is it?" growled Ed. "Outside of being knocked unconscious, the only sleep I had in forty-eight hours was during a drive to Portland yesterday afternoon, sitting upright in a limousine.

"And not only the loss of sleep, either. There's scarcely been an hour since I first got to New Hampshire, that I haven't come up against some kind of fresh shock."

"By gum, that's so!" murmured Rossiter sympathetically. "Listen, boss; wouldn't it be better for you to lie over here to-day, and take a good rest? You don't want to let yourself in for a spell of sickness."

"No! No!" Ed protested excitedly. "We're going to sift this thing out without any delays, I tell you. A lot of rest I'd get, wouldn't I?" he sneered. "Mewed up in a hotel room, stewing my brains over this puzzle, and trying to make two and two equal nineteen.

"You're right about stopping for breakfast, though," he agreed. "We both ought to eat something, whether we want to or not; and besides, I've got to report to Mrs. Strickland, and also—by George!—call in that note I left with the hotel clerk.

"I don't want all the State troopers and deputy sheriffs in this neck of woods hunting around for me, and sending the news down to New York that I am mysteriously missing."

They had got to North Conway by this time, as the sign board at the town line informed them; and, in deference to the Sabbath quiet—for this was Sunday morning—proceeded along the broad main street at a more decorous pace, and drew up in front of the hotel.

The hands of the town clock in the rounded cupola of the local temple of justice down the street were just pointing to seven as they stopped, and Ed lost no time in hurrying in to the desk to demand his note.

"Lucky you came in when you did, Mr. Bell," smiled the clerk as he handed it over. "After what you told me last night, I began to get worried over your failure to show up; and acting on your instructions, I was just about to send this over to the sheriff, when I saw you in the doorway."

Ed grunted an acknowledgment; and asked to be put into communication with Mrs. Strickland, who having spent a practically sleepless night, was already awake, and answered his ring immediately.

Greatly relieved at hearing his voice, and eager to learn what he had discovered, she asked him to come up at once, and received him without the benefit of make-up, and in a hastily-donned negligee robe.

She was evidently hopeful of good news; but one look at his face as he came in sent her spirits tumbling down to zero again.

Then, as he finished his report of what they had discovered among the effects of the dead Greeky, she dropped her head in her hands and gave an uncontrollable shudder.

"Oh, Ed!" she gasped. "A trunk shipped out of the very house where she had been taken! Do you suppose—"

"Don't say it!" he cut her off sharply. "Don't even think it! I'm trying to put such a horrible idea out of my head. Why is it, that when we come up against something that puzzles us, our minds always leap to the most ghastly explanation possible? After all, there might be a dozen different reasons, and all perfectly ordinary, why Helen should have sent a trunk to New York."

"I know! I know!" she moaned. "But such horrible things are constantly appearing in the papers. One can't help thinking—"

She broke off at a new suggestion.

"Shall you want me to go to Portland with you?" she asked. "If so, I shall have to hurry and get ready."

Ed looked at her face, haggard and drawn without its customary powder and rouge, and shook his head. The anxiety she had been through had evidently told upon her heavily.

"I think not," he said. "It would only be an added strain on you, and could serve no good purpose. In fact, it might hamper our investigation.

"We can't tell until we get there what we may have to do, or how rapidly we may have to hop around to prosecute the search; and if you are along, it might hold us up and cause unforeseen complications. Much better for you, Mrs. Strickland, to stay quietly here at the hotel and rest. I shall let you know at once of any developments."

She did not attempt to disguise her relief at his decision; but she vetoed the suggestion that she remain at the hotel.

"No," she declared, "I am going to end this nightmare motor trip here and now. I shall send the car back to town by Henry, the chauffeur, and the girls and I will take the train this morning for home.

"Don't forget to let me know at once, though, of anything you find out, Ed. You'll wire me aboard the train, won't you, if necessary? And after I get home, I shall be constantly listening for the ring of the telephone, expecting to hear from you."

She turned then with a whirl to her packing; but as Ed started to go out the door, she paused and called him back.

"I just want to urge you to be careful," she said. "You are going with that Rossiter; and I know I won't have an easy minute, bothering over you. I warn you, Ed Bell, that the man is no friend of yours."

"Maybe he isn't; and then again, maybe he is." Ed gave a hunch of the shoulders. "Honestly, I can't tell myself, Mrs. Strickland; I am constantly veering between the two opinions. However, you need have no fear; I watch my step like a hawk whenever he is around.

"And so long as I've come through safe out of all the perils of flood and field that I've been up against, I don't imagine that anything is going to happen to me on this trip. I'm beginning to believe I bear a charmed life."

He left her with that, and went downstairs to find that Rossiter had already checked out for both of them, had their bags stowed away in the roadster, and had breakfast waiting for them on the table. The necessary supplies of oil and gas and water for the car were all attended to. There was nothing left to do, but eat and be off.

Ed made short shrift of the eating part of it. In spite of Rossiter's importunities to him to fortify himself for a hard day, he took no more than a nibble of toast, and a hasty swallow of coffee, and announced that he was ready to start.

As he climbed heavily into the car, showing none of his usual pep, the sales manager again looked at him critically, and shook his head.

"Look here, boss," he protested. "Let's hold off until this afternoon anyhow, and give you a chance to rest. I don't want you dying on my hands."

"No," Ed sniffed ungraciously: "there'd be no double indemnity in that, would there? You'll take precious good care to see that I go out by violence.

"However, in the meantime, you needn't try to make an old woman out of me," he snapped. "I'm all right, and I'm not going to have anybody threep it down my throat

that I'm sick. If I am, the best medicine I can get is action, and not to sit and twiddle my thumbs. So no more argument on that score, if you please. Let's go."

Rossiter made no reply, but it was plain from the way he yanked his gears at starting, that he was mad all the way through at the way his friendly suggestion had been received. Still they had not gone far before he cooled down, and was again his own smooth, conciliatory self.

"That was a dirty dig you gave me about the double indemnity, boss," Rossiter laughed. "You don't really believe that that's anything more than a joke with me, do you?"

Ed was in no humor to mince words. And that warning of Mrs. Strickland's stuck in his mind. Women have strange intuitions sometimes.

"I don't know whether it's a joke or not," he said glumly. "But I do know that you offered Slade half of your double indemnity to bump me off, and I have good reasons for believing that you actually made a deal of the sort with Varney when he shot at me through the window."

"Did Varney admit that?" demanded Rossiter sharply.

"No; but he wasn't very convincing in denying it. I have proof, though, outside of anything I got out of Varney."

"Proof?"

"Yes; proof. I know, for instance, that the room from which the shot was fired was rented only a few days ago by a dark, slender, young fellow named Rodriguez."

"Rodriguez?"

"Yes. Seems to me, if I had been in your place, I'd have picked out an alias that wasn't so close to my own. But perhaps you had some reason for it."

"And do you happen to know what was the business of this Rodriguez?"

"Murder, I should say." Ed twisted the corner of his mouth. "In order to get a lease, though, he represented himself as an importer in a small way, I believe.

"But he was careful to say that he would seldom be around the office himself. A young man associated with him would be in and out more or less. That was, of course, to give Varney the chance to get in there unquestioned, when he wanted to take a crack at me."

"Just so," commented Rossiter equably. "But suppose I should bring to you, boss, a dark, slender, young fellow, whose name is actually Rodriguez, who is actually an importer in a small way, and who actually has rented that office you refer to? Where would your proof be then?"

"Do you mean to tell me there is such a person as Rodriguez?" demanded Ed incredulously.

"There is. And furthermore, his connections are so high that when you know them, I don't believe that even you will believe he would have permitted his office to be used as a sniping-post.

"By pure luck it happens that I know him, and that I chanced to run into him on the street just after he had rented his office in the next building to ours. So that is how I am able to refute so promptly what I'll admit looked a pretty strong chain of circumstantial evidence against me.

"And I'll tell you another thing, boss," he went on. "This Rodriguez and the young fellow that's in with him, a guy named Farroni, are both bugs on rifles and rifle-shooting. What I think, if you care to ask me, is that they were fooling with one of their guns up in the office, and that it was accidentally discharged.

"I don't really believe that Varney had any more to do with it than I did. What I mean is, that shot which seemed so unquestionably meant for you was just a startling coincidence, the same way that my being there to jerk you from under the hoofs of that plunging horse was a coincidence.

"And the crash of that bridge under you, when it was meant to go down with the weight of the truck, was another coincidence. Lord! You seem to have had a regular shower of them. Well, it's like everything else in life, I guess; it never rains, but it pours."

What was there for Ed to say? He noticed cynically, though, that Rossiter had not failed to bring in again a mention of that rescue from the runaway horse; and the idea came to him that possibly the

purpose of stressing that incident was to lull him into a sense of security.

He grinned behind his hand, therefore, when Rossiter asseverated a little later:

"No, boss; I like money as well as the next man. But that double-indemnity racket isn't even a temptation to me. I figure I can make a whole lot more out of you living, than I'd get on you dead."

"In that case," said Ed, covering a yawn with his hand, "I suppose I can do as I did yesterday, and sleep all the way in to Portland with a feeling of perfect safety?"

And apparently suiting the action to the word, he huddled down into the seat of the roadster, pulled his cap down over his eyes, and gave an imitation of dropping off into slumber.

But this was only to keep from talking; for in spite of his own weariness and in spite of Rossiter's fair protestations, he was still so unsure of the fellow, that he did not intend to let himself lapse into unconsciousness.

All the way into Portland he kept one eye alertly cocked on his companion; yet he was bound to admit at the end of the journey that there had not been one move in all the miles that tended in any way to justify his doubts.

The church bells were ringing out as they entered the city, and the quiet, tree-shaded streets were thronged with decorous crowds of church-goers.

Ed was afraid as they stopped before the lodging house on Cumberland Avenue whose address they had gathered from Greeky's notebook, that possibly the landlady might be among these worshipers, and that they would have some time to wait for her return.

But to his relief she came to the door herself, a hard-faced woman of the grim, silent, New England type.

At first, she would tell them nothing; but after Rossiter had taken her aside and talked to her privately for a minute or two, she became more amenable to answering their questions.

Grudgingly she admitted that a trunk had been taken away from her house the night before last. It had belonged to a lodger, who had kept a room with her for some two or three months past, but had occupied it only at irregular intervals, being away a good part of his time.

On the day that the trunk was taken away, he had come in during the afternoon with a young lady she had never seen before, but whom he introduced as his sister, Miss Roberts. Roberts was the name he had given her when he took the room.

The two had gone upstairs together, and were there for some time she knew. She had not seen the young lady go away; but she must have left before six o'clock, for at that time Roberts came down into the basement where she, the landlady, was getting supper, and told her he was giving up his room.

He seemed excited and nervous, and had his arm in a sling; told her that he had cut himself rather severely while packing his trunk, and was afraid he had made rather a mess with the blood around the room, but would leave two dollars with her to pay for cleaning it up.

"Wuth five, ef 'twas wuth a penny," she said grouchily. "I was a fool not to look in there, afore I let him go."

Then, she concluded, he had hailed a passing cab, had his trunk, which he had dragged out into the hall, brought down, and had driven away. That was the last she had seen of him, and that was all she could tell.

"Do you remember what the young lady looked like, that he introduced as his sister?" asked Rossiter, disregarding the finality of this last remark.

She gave a description that could hardly be mistaken as a word-portrait of Helen Lincoln.

"And the man?" demanded Ed through tight-drawn lips. "What did he look like?"

"Kinda dark and slim," she pursed up her lips, "with a bold, impudent way that somehow you couldn't help likin'. Favored this gentleman consid'ble," she indicated Rossiter, "only o' course, he was consid'ble younger."

Ed staggered toward the door, as if he wanted air.

"I'm going," he muttered thickly. "That's enough!" Then, as he made his way unsteadily down the stoop, he added:

" It's more than enough. Blood, the trunk, all those details. Everything fits in. Oh, that damned brother of yours!"

CHAPTER XV.

A FAMILIAR ADDRESS.

ED felt himself seized by the arm, and whirled about.

" How dare you say such a thing?"

Rossiter's eyes were burning, his lips drawn back from his teeth, he looked positively murderous. Ed was reminded involuntarily of that rattlesnake he had encountered in the hayfield, when it coiled menacingly to strike.

But he was in no mood now to adopt placating measures, as he had with the rattler when he shared his eggs and milk with it.

" Because it's true," he declared stubbornly. " And you know it's true, as well as I do."

For a moment, he thought that Rossiter was about to spring at him, and he braced himself to meet the attack.

But a group of feminine church-goers, evidently belated, came hurrying along just then; and the two men, more by habit and instinct than through any conscious gallantry, moved aside to give them the sidewalk.

The interval, brief as it was, afforded Rossiter an opportunity to collect himself.

The dull flush that had swept up over his face subsided; the venomous glitter died out of his eyes.

" By the eternal, you'll be sorry for that, Bell," he muttered in a low voice. " You are slandering the dead."

Ed was too crushed to pay much attention; yet a realization of Rossiter's brotherly feelings did give him a stirring of compunction.

" Maybe I shouldn't have said it—to you," he granted grudgingly. " But what else can you make out of it? The act of a fiend?"

" Maybe," assented Rositer. " But not the act of my brother—not the act of the kid."

Ed's answer was a jeering laugh.

" A slim, dark fellow with bold, impudent ways," he recited the landlady's description. " Favored you considerable. Came and went at irregular intervals. Called himself Roberts. These crooks always take a name as nearly like their own as possible. What more do you want?"

" So was Rodriguez a certain alias to your mind," countered Rossiter significantly. " So was he a slim, dark fellow. So were the circumstances connected with him equally convincing. I tell you—"

Bell interrupted with an impatient gesture.

" The two cases are entirely different," he protested vehemently. " Take the landlady's story, and see how it coincides with and dovetails into everything we had before.

" We know "—he started checking off his facts upon his fingers—" from the bus driver, that your brother and Helen arrived here at Portland in the early afternoon, and started off up Congress Street together. Approximately fifteen or twenty minutes later Helen and this so-called Roberts—who is too much like your brother, even to his name, to be any one else—appear at the lodging house together.

" What her reason was for going there with him, or in coming to Portland at all, we may never know. But the rest of the story is plain as print.

" She was introduced as his sister, and accompanied him upstairs to his room. The landlady did not see her when she left, for the reason that she never did leave—alive. The blood-spattered room "—he turned white, and brushed his hand before his eyes as if to shut out the picture he had conjured up—" the blood-spattered room tells the story. His fishy explanation, when he came downstairs nervous and excited to say that he had cut himself in packing up, confirms it.

" His idea was to get away as quickly as possible, and remove all evidences of his crime; so he gave up his room and paid the landlady to clean it herself, knowing that in order to rerent it she would do a thorough job.

" The trunk with its awful secret he dragged out into the hall, so that no one

else would see the condition of the room; and did this, mark you, with one arm supposedly so badly cut that he had to wear it in a sling.

" But to get the trunk away he did not phone for an express wagon. Instead, to cover up his trail as much as possible, he hailed a passing cab to convey it to the express office, and there addressed it to Miss H. Lincoln, New York, knowing that it would be held uncalled-for, and hoping that by the time the nature of its contents was discovered it would be almost impossible to trace back to the lodging house.

" This attended to, he hurried back to North Conway to join his pals, and created as strong an alibi as could be managed; and so was present when the bridge across the ravine went down with me that night."

Rossiter, who had nodded at almost every item of this pronouncement as Ed checked them off, shook his head at the final one.

" No wonder you are such a successful builder, boss," he commented with the shadow of a smile. " You have constructed a wonderful edifice out of flimsy materials. Men have been hanged on less of an indictment than that."

" Your brother would hang, if he were alive," muttered Ed vindictively. " I'd see to it that he did, if I had to pull the rope myself."

Rossiter paid no heed to this interpolation; but went on as if he had not heard it.

" Yes," he repeated, " you have built up a wonderful edifice; but it will never stand. You've got a rotten foundation. I have no doubt," he conceded, " that everything happened just about as you say.

" Miss Lincoln was deceived or cajoled into visiting the lodging house and going up to this room. She was done to death there, and her body disposed of in the way that you suggest.

" But "—he paused—" this fellow Roberts was not my kid brother. I know that as well as I know that I am standing here; and before I get through I am going to make you admit it, too."

" But how can you get away from the fact that he brought her to Portland, and—"

" I am not trying to get away from anything," broke in Rossiter. " I want every fact that I can get hold of."

He swung around toward Ed as if this had given him a suggestion.

" Listen, boss," he said, " you and I are on opposite sides of the fence in this thing. You are out to dissolve the mystery in regard to Miss Lincoln, and establish her good name by putting all the fault on my dead brother.

" I am out to clear my brother of that foul aspersion. But at present our ways lie in the same direction. We both want to get at the facts. So let's string along together.

" Come on." He caught Ed by the arm, and drew him toward the roadster. " The first thing we've got to do is get on the trail of that trunk, and see what it may furnish to us in the way of evidence."

Ed yielded to his proposal. After all, it seemed about as good a method as any to accomplish what he had to do. And certainly Rossiter had some peculiar faculty for effecting results, as evidenced by the manner in which he had induced the taciturn and unwilling landlady to come across with what she knew.

So the two rode down town together as if on terms of perfect amity, and, having little traffic interruption, soon reached the office of the express company.

" You'd better let me go in here alone, I think," suggested Rossiter as they drew to a halt. " I know something about ways of getting around the red tape in these concerns, and it's probable I can get along better if I am by myself."

Sure enough. He had not been gone very long, when he came out again with all the data that they required.

The trunk in question had been shipped out the same night it was received and was probably in New York by this time.

He knew exactly where it would be taken on its arrival in the metropolis, and had duplicate copies of all waybills and papers connected with the shipment, also a personal note from a leading official of the company at Portland, bespeaking him every courtesy and attention from the men he would have to interview in New York.

"Now I don't know how you feel about it," he said, "but to me it seems highly important that we get down to New York as quickly as possible.

"It's now ten minutes of eleven." He glanced at his watch. "We've got time, if you say so, to put the car up in a garage and catch a train to Boston that will get us there in time to make connection for the afternoon express to New York.

"In that way we'll save time and a hard, nerve-racking drive, and you can either send after the car or have it shipped down to you, as you think best."

Ed was only too glad to accede to the proposition. He had been looking forward with anything but relish to the prospect of that four hundred miles of motoring without rest or relaxation, and which could not possibly get him home until late the next day.

And now to realize that he could make it in the comfort of a parlor car and arrive at a seasonable hour that very evening seemed an arrangement which left no opportunity for dispute.

Accordingly the roadster was stored away, the tickets purchased, and almost before he could realize it he was reclining in a softly upholstered chair and gliding over the rails.

The journey was made without incident, in contrast to most of his recent experiences. But as a matter of fact he knew very little about what happened *en route*. He had started out with the firm determination to keep a wary eye on Rossiter, just as he had on the drive down to Portland; but tired nature got the best of him. Lulled by the motion and by the temporary freedom from having to bother about anything, he drifted off almost before he knew it and, except for the necessary change at Boston, slept practically throughout the entire trip.

Consequently he arrived in New York refreshed and more like his own buoyant, indomitable self than he had been at any time since taking on the fifty-thousand-dollar policy.

Hailing a taxi as they came out of Grand Central Station, he and Rossiter drove across town to the express depot to which they had been directed, and again Rossiter went in alone.

Waiting outside in the cab, Ed remembered his promise to notify Mrs. Strickland of any developments; and, realizing that she too must be at home by this time, stepped to a telephone booth in a neighboring drug store and called her up.

But before he could voice his intelligence she began to talk to him. She had just received a telegram, she said, in answer to one she had sent to Helen's parents. "And it is the strangest thing, Ed," she said. "I can't understand it at all. They wire me: 'Don't worry about Helen. We are sure that everything will turn out all right.' Now what do you make of that, Ed?"

"Nothing," he replied soberly, "except that they are probably of some optimistic cult, and do not know that they are in for the bitterest disappointment of their lives."

"Oh, Ed!" she broke in sharply. "You don't mean—"

"Yes," he told her. "No use trying to keep the truth from you. It is as bad as we feared—terrible. But don't ask me to tell you any more now, Mrs. Strickland. I have a lot of things to see to in connection with the affair, and I really haven't all the details yet myself. I will come to see you the first thing in the morning."

Then, with a word or two more, he rang off and went back to the cab. As he reached it, he saw Rossiter coming out through the receiving depot, and he quailed with a sudden panic.

Rossiter was undoubtedly coming after him. He would have to go inside and see that awful trunk opened—gaze into it after its lid was thrown back. He felt that he could not go through such an ordeal.

But Rossiter, instead of beckoning or calling to him, came on out to the cab. There was a puzzled expression on his face.

"I can't understand it!" he exclaimed. "That trunk, they tell me, has been called for and delivered. Looks like there must have been somebody else in the affair besides Roberts, or else Roberts himself has come down here to get hold of it and dispose of it where there is less chance of being spied upon than in Portland.

" However, we shall soon know," he added. " I've got the address of the house where the delivery was made, and we'll go right up and take a look at the person who received it."

He leaned forward and gave an address which Ed failed to overhear, and then as he swung back into the cab they started off uptown.

On the way the two men were naturally busy exchanging conjectures and speculations as to what this new phase of the mystery signified; and it was really not until they had reached their destination that Ed recognized the neighborhood to which they had come.

Then as he glanced out of the window he saw with a start that they were halted in front of the house which was connected with the most unhappy memories of his life—the place where that woman long ago had committed suicide, and so given rise to the scandal which had come so near to wrecking his career.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHERE THE TRUNK WENT.

ROSSITER got out of the cab as usual, and went down into the basement to interview the janitor and see what information could be got out of him. It was one of those old-fashioned brownstone houses—although this one was transformed into apartments—with the entrance to the basement through a door under the stoop; and Rossiter had evidently found the janitor communicative, for he disappeared through this door and did not reappear for several minutes.

Then, while Ed waited in the cab, he noticed a man in the shadow of a doorway across the street making furtive signals to him to come over.

Struck by the idea that this might have something to do with the matter he was investigating, Ed was about to comply; but as he laid his hand on the latch of the cab door to open it the taxi driver spoke to him out of the corner of his mouth.

" I wouldn't," he cautioned. " This is a dark street, and sorta lonely. 'Sides, if I ain't mistaken, there's two other yeggs hiding back of him in the shadow. If that bozo wants to talk to you, let him come over here and do it."

This seemed rather sound advice to Ed, and, concluding to follow it, he beckoned the man on the other side of the street to come over to him.

The fellow seemed reluctant, but when Ed made it plain that Mohammed wasn't going to the mountain he finally yielded and came across the street.

As he sidled up to the open door of the cab, Ed saw that he was a tough looking baby, with a cap slouched over his eyes, and his right hand thrust significantly into his coat pocket.

" Freddie wants to see you?" he growled hoarsely.

" Where is he?" parried Ed.

" Over yonder." The fellow gave a jerk of his head toward that dark patch of shadow over on the other side of the street.

Instantly all of Ed's suspicions of Rossiter, dormant since they had left Portland, revived in full force.

This was a scheme to get him. Probably the trunk had not been taken away from the receiving depot at all. Rossiter had simply said so to lure him to this lonely street, and now had disappeared to give his hired gunmen a chance to work.

" What does Freddie want?" he temporized.

" Somep'n important. He says it 'll be worth your while to talk to him."

Ed saw that the fellow was watching him narrowly from under the brim of his cap, and he watched as narrowly in return.

" Why don't he come over here?" he asked.

" He don't want to. He says you orter come over there."

" Well, you tell him that I've got a game knee, and can't walk very well. That's the reason I don't want to get out of the cab. So if he wants to see me, he'll have to come over."

The man at the door hesitated. Out of the tail of his eye, Ed could see his two confederates slinking across the dark street, supposing that they would be unnoticed while the colloquy was going on. In an-

other moment, all three gorillas would be around the cab, and the shooting would probably commence.

But just then Ed noticed the glance of the man at the door veer off as if to watch the stealthy advance of his companions; and, quick as a flash, he reached out, and gripped the wrist of the gunman in a clasp like steel.

At the same moment, the quick-witted taxi driver threw on his power, and the cab shot away up the street.

The gunman, lifted by the momentum, was easily drawn in through the open door of the cab, and with the application of a little pressure Ed shook the automatic out of his numbed fingers.

The other two in the street sent a brief volley of scattering shots after the cab, but all of them went wild, and the driver, whirling quickly around the next corner, drew out of range.

Ed questioned his prisoner for a few minutes in the hope of extracting from him who had framed the attempted holdup; but the fellow was inordinately clever, or had nothing to tell.

So, keeping his gat, Ed finally kicked him out and told him to beat it.

There was a method in this madness. Ed knew that the released captive would immediately rejoin his pals, and that they would probably resort to the same place to stick up another victim.

Therefore, after the chap had disappeared, Ed directed the taxi driver to take him by a slightly devious route to the station house of the precinct, and made a report of the affair to the captain, with whom he happened to be well acquainted.

Within fifteen minutes the trio had been brought in, to the great jubilation of the cops; for they proved to be a bunch that was badly wanted in several places.

Ed declined to accept any credit for his part in the affair; but asked the captain to accompany him to the house to which Rossiter had taken him.

Doubtless Rossiter was no longer there; but Ed had a curiosity to find out if there was anything in the story he had told, or if it was manufactured entirely from whole cloth.

However, to his surprise when the captain shouldered a way for them into the basement of the house, there was Rossiter still trying to get something out of the phlegmatic Swedish janitor.

"Your sales manager, eh?" There was a flicker of something that might have been amusement in the captain's voice as Ed introduced Rossiter to him.

The two men gazed peculiarly at each other, too, with the manner of people who had met before; but if this were true neither of them referred to it, and after a slight pause they shook hands with no show of restraint.

"The police would have had to be called in anyhow; so I guess it's just as well you brought the captain along." Rossiter turned to Ed with a swift aside.

"Maybe he can do something with this squarehead. I've worn myself to a frazzle trying to get even the simplest sort of an answer from him. He doesn't seem to understand a word of English."

But the captain appeared to encounter no such difficulty. His interrogations, couched in terse New Yorkese, were answered without a moment's hesitation. Wonderful what a spur to the intellect a blue uniform can be!

Yes, the janitor readily admitted; a trunk, similar to the one described, had been delivered at the house that morning.

Who had received it? he was quizzed.

Why, Miss Lincoln, of course. It was for her, the expressman had asked for it.

"Miss Lincoln?" the captain repeated, drawing down his eyebrows. "You've got a party in the house by that name, then?"

"Sure. On de third floor. A furnished apartment. They're new people. Only came in yesterday."

"They?" sharply.

"Yes. There's two of them, the lady and her brother. The lady came first to look at the apartment, and rented it. Then she went away, but after a little while came back with her brother in a cab. He's sick."

"H-m!" The captain pulled frowningly at his lip. "This may be an even deeper game than we figured.

"Listen!" He swung around to the janitor again with swift decision. "I want

you to go up to that apartment and tell them you've got to come in to fix a leak from the icebox that's running through to the floor below. Then, when they start to open the door, you stand aside.

"But if you give even a hint that anybody is with you," he added warningly, "I'll brain you!"

He turned toward Ed and Rossiter.

"Don't need to send over to the station house for anybody, I guess," he said. "The three of us ought to be enough for these fakers, only one man and a woman. Still, it's a chair case; and there's apt to be some shooting. You're heeled, of course?" He glanced at Rossiter.

The latter nodded and lightly slapped his hip pocket.

"And you?" he asked Ed, who for answer showed the automatic he had taken from the gunman.

"All right, then." The captain gave the word. "Have them out, and be ready to rush in right back of me, the instant the door opens. Don't fire unless it is necessary; but don't take any chances, either. Let's go."

Softly the three crept up the stairs behind the clumping footsteps of the janitor, and at the signaled directions of the captain ranged themselves on either side of the doorway of the apartment out of line of vision from the keyhole.

Then at a prompting nudge from the officer, the janitor rang sharply.

There was a delay of a minute or two; but at last a low voice from within asked guardedly—it was scarcely more than a whisper:

"Who's there?"

"Id's me; Oleson. Dere's a leak by de ice-box, w'at Ay got to feex id right avay, Ay tank."

Then he scuttled quickly back out of harm's way, as the door opened, and the captain, jamming his foot into the aperture, thrust it wide before it could be slammed to again.

A young woman stood revealed, who stared with dilating eyes, and gave a low, frightened exclamation at the sight of the police uniform.

"Hands up!" the captain shouted; and as she tremblingly obeyed, would have pushed past her into the apartment.

But Ed sprang in front of him.

"Helen!" he exclaimed incredulously, joyfully. "Helen!"

The Georgia girl at the sight of him drew back with affronted dignity. Her arms dropped to her sides; the terror in her eyes gave way to a blaze of anger.

"You?" She gazed at him icily. "So you are responsible for this police intrusion, are you? Didn't I wire you from Portland, that I never wanted to see or speak to you again?"

CHAPTER XVII.

INTRODUCING "MIKEY FINN."

BUT Ed, after all he had gone through, was not to be so easily put off.

"Helen!" he pleaded brokenly. "Won't you listen to me? Won't you let me explain? If you knew what I have suffered."

For a moment, she seemed about to relent; then her glance hardened again.

"There is no explanation to be offered," she said coldly. "You were not compelled to give me your promise; but you did so, and immediately broke it. That ended everything with me."

"But—" he tried to argue.

She cut him short, though, with an uplifted hand.

"Please!" She frowned. "You may enjoy discussing such private matters in front of an audience; I don't. And there is nothing to discuss between us, I tell you. Absolutely nothing."

Ed realized that what she said about having an audience was true. People had come out of adjoining apartments, and were standing around in the hall, gaping and listening. With the addition of the captain, the janitor, and Rossiter, it made quite a fair-sized gathering.

And yet he could not bring himself meekly to accept his congé and go away, without at least some hope of another interview when he might find her in a less repellent mood.

While he stood irresolute, hesitating how

best to broach this idea, a new recruit to the regiment of curiosity seekers in the hall came hurrying out of a flat across the way, fastening the cords of a hastily-donned bath robe as she appeared.

She was the oldest tenant in the house, and looked it—a sallow, wrinkled old maid, with a false front and an insatiable love of gossip.

"Oh, I know that man," Ed heard her cracked voice rise shrilly as she peered at the group in the apartment foyer. "He looks older, but it's Ed Bell all right. Don't you remember, he was the man in that terrible Bird Stallo murder scandal here seven years ago.

"Most folks believed he'd go to the electric chair for that; but somehow he skinned out of it. Yet here he is now fooling around with another woman, hey? Well, any girl who associates with him ought to get into trouble. He's a bad egg."

"Helen!" Bell tried to drown out that hateful, malicious voice. "Won't you give me even a chance to vindicate myself? Won't you at least let me write?"

She flung up her head indignantly. It was evident to him that she had overheard the old maid's viperish scandal-mongering.

"I wouldn't touch a letter from you with a pair of tongs!" she flared. "Anything you write me will be refused at the door."

The wave of vehemence shook her; and, receding, took its toll of her strength. She could feel herself weakening under the strain of the interview.

"Oh, will you go!" She waved him toward the door with her hands. "This place, indifferent as it is, is my castle. You have no right to storm it with your police escort and annoy me in this way. If you do not leave at once, I shall insist that this officer remove you. Go, I tell you!"

She was plainly on the verge of an hysterical outbreak; but Ed would still have persisted in his futile appeals, if the captain had not dropped a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"She's right, boy," he muttered gruffly. "You're doing nothing here but cause trouble. Come away."

There was no resisting the pressure of that brawny paw. Unwillingly Ed found himself forced out into the hall, and then as the door was slammed and locked behind him, convoyed toward the head of the stairs.

Under its directing guidance, he stumbled blindly down the two flights, babbling a lot of foolishness the while, and so emerged upon the street.

The cooler air outside cleared away the fog from his brain and brought him to himself. He became conscious that the captain was talking to him in a fatherly fashion:

"Better take her at her word, Bell," he said, "and let it end here and now. Of course, her pitching into you doesn't amount to anything. I've always noticed that when a woman pitches into you hardest is just when she's getting ready to kiss and make friends. Probably that's what she'll be up to to-morrow. But—question is: Do you want her?"

"Do I want her?" repeated Ed impassionedly.

"Oh, yes; you think so now, I know. But will you think so when you look at things with your cold, sober senses—after what you've seen to-night?"

"After what I've seen to-night?" Ed looked up at him dazedly.

Then the significance behind the captain's phrase burst upon him suddenly like a bombshell.

A man was up in that apartment with Helen! The same man undoubtedly that she had gone to Portland to meet! What did it mean?

In his amazed joy at seeing Helen alive—almost as if she had come back from the tomb—he had forgotten until this moment all about the mysterious brother. Brother? Helen had told him once that she was an only child.

Stark, raving mad, he turned abruptly, and plunging back through the entrance, was halfway up the first flight before Rossiter and the captain could overtake him, and drag him out to the street again.

"Now, see here; that isn't going to do," the captain laid it into him. "Any more didoes like that, and you'll find yourself at the station house.

"Be yourself now," he adjured. "Go

on home and go to bed, and forget about it. A girl like that isn't worth—"

He was interrupted by a burst of laughter.

"Gee, captain! You're funny," gibed Ed. "I'm not thinking what you think, I think at all. And what you think yourself is all wrong. You are as wrong as I was when I had Rossiter's brother all doped out as a trunk murderer.

"Why do you suppose I started upstairs just now?" he asked. "To stage a movie drama of the jealous lover seeking revenge? Not at all. What I wanted was to beg Helen's pardon for not assuring her as soon as I saw her that I knew everything was all right.

"No wonder she gave me the icy stare when I came busting in there like an injured husband with a party of raiders at my heels. A regular 'Hah! I've caught you now!' situation.

"No, captain. You can stuff all that well-rid-of-her tripe in your pipe, and smoke it. She's straight as a minted gold dollar."

"Any way you want to have it," the captain grunted skeptically. "It's nothing to me. But you keep away from there, just the same. Rossiter, I leave it to you to stick around with him to-night, and see that he doesn't get into any more mischief."

"Nice job you're handing me. You don't know this guy, cap." Rossiter grinned. "'Member that old fairy-tale king, that everything he touched turned to gold? Well, Bell here is the same way, only everything he touches turns topsy-turvy, and not at all what it seems.

"That's why I think he's probably O. K. on that funny lay-out upstairs," he added thoughtfully, "and that the young lady is as straight as a new-minted dollar. However, I bet you I know for certain just what it all means by this time to-morrow night."

"Trust you to do that, if anybody can," said the captain over his shoulder as he strolled away, which seemed a rather odd remark for a man to make who had only met Rossiter for the first time that evening.

The sales manager, however, only shrugged, and turned to Ed with his usual flippant manner.

"Getting quite like royalty, aren't you?" he mocked. "Having a special attendant to tag around after you, and see that you don't get into any trouble? Well, where do we go from here, your Majesty? For my part, I could do with a little bite of something to eat."

The suggestion didn't strike Ed at all badly, for the reason that he wanted to get rid of Rossiter, and this seemed an excellent method of doing it.

If they went to a restaurant, Rossiter was certain to fall in with some one he knew—he always did—and so presently Ed could feign sleepiness, and slip away unaccompanied. Otherwise, Rossiter would stick around with him to all hours.

And Ed wanted to be alone, wanted to thresh out this matter of Helen—as was his custom whenever he had a problem to bother him—by wrestling with it as he paced solitary the midnight streets.

But to his disappointment, Rossiter picked out a restaurant that neither of them had ever happened to visit before, and as they glanced about over the diners the only person they spied that they had ever seen before was Binoff, the insurance agent, and he was so busy with a prospect that it was idle of thinking of luring him over to their table.

"Pretty good fish he must have on the hook," commented Rossiter. "I see that the fat whelp is buying champagne, and he wouldn't do that for less than a twenty thousand dollar policy."

This place, as it happened, was one of those semi-exclusive resorts where the Volstead law is violated almost openly. Drinks of various sorts were on nearly every table.

The sight gave Rossiter an idea.

"What's the matter with us having a party?" he said. "If Binoff can buy champagne, so can I."

He called the head waiter over and gave the order, but was sternly rebuffed.

The head waiter assured him with a perfectly straight face, that they served nothing alcoholic of any kind.

"Oh, bunk!" scoffed Rossiter. "You simply don't know us. That fat bimbo over there with the champagne will tell you we are all right."

The waiter glided over to Binoff's table; but when he put the question he looked at Ed and Rossiter with a blank stare, and shook his head, leaning over to add what appeared to be a confidential communication of some sort.

"Well, what do you know about that?" gasped Rossiter. "The big tomato has disowned us. That's his idea of a joke, I suppose."

That they were discredited was only too plain. The head waiter did not come back to their table, and neither did any wine appear.

Instead, six waiters gathered close about where they sat, so as to screen all the other tables in the room, and never was seen such rapid service as they received. A dish was hardly placed in front of them before it was snatched away, and another whisked into its place.

"They're trying to rush us along so as to get rid of us," growled Rossiter under his breath. "Now just for spite, I am going to keep ordering coffee, and sit here all night."

But just then he happened to notice that Ed had grown deadly pale, and was leaning over the table with his head between between his hands.

"What's the matter?" he inquired solicitously.

Ed roused up to give him an accusing stare.

"I guess I'm going the same way as Renault," he panted faintly. "You've got me this time, Rossiter. I never felt so terrible in my life."

"Rot!" Rossiter hurried around the table to his side. "You're not dying. I see what's happened now. That cut-up of a Binoff told 'em we were detectives, and they've slipped a 'Mickey Finn' into your food, so as to get rid of us.

"It makes you deadly sick, but there's really no danger from it. A shot of mustard and warm water will fix you all right.

"Come on." He offered his arm. "Lean on me. I've got to get you over to a drug store."

It was hard to convince Ed, though, that he was not at the point of dissolution. His head was whirling round and round, an icy faintness enveloped him, he could hardly push one foot before the other.

And he was even more certain that he was dying when he got over to the drug store, and the mustard and the warm water began to get in its work. Between that and the Mickey Finn he felt that his internal mechanism was permanently blasted, wrecked, dislocated, and put out of commission.

Rossiter came over to where he sagged limp and exhausted, feeling like a tire tube from which all the air has been expelled.

"You'll do fine now," he said cheerfully. "Still, I won't leave you alone. I'll go over and spend the night with you."

Ed protested that he did not need anybody to spend the night with him; he would rather be alone. But Rossiter refused to listen.

"No," he insisted; "you must have somebody within call. No use trying to prevent me. You're enough recovered now, I guess, to get out to the taxicab, and we'll be starting as soon as I get something the druggist is putting up for me."

A moment or two later the druggist came hurrying back with a small parcel.

"There's your chloroform, Mr. Rossiter," he said.

Ed almost collapsed.

What, he wondered, was Rossiter planning to do with that chloroform?

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE CLOCK STRUCK TWO.

ON reaching his own door, Ed once more made a futile expostulation against Rossiter's remaining with him; but he was too weak and tottery to insist. Indeed, Rossiter had practically to carry him upstairs and put him to bed.

"Never do for you to be left alone." Rossiter shook his head. "You might get up in the night to open the window for air or something; and—*bingo!*—out you'd go, light-headed as you are.

"What you need to get over this bout is a good sleep, and," he added with what seemed to Ed an ominous emphasis, "I'm

going to see that you have it. A sound, uninterrupted sleep."

Ed said nothing; but he thought to himself that sleep was the last thing he would dare to indulge in that night. Weary and unstrung as he was, he determined that his eyes should not close. He would maintain an unremitting vigil.

For he was convinced, in spite of Rossiter's glib arguments, that his sudden illness at the restaurant was a deliberate attempt to duplicate the bumping off of Renault.

All that had saved him, he believed, was a stronger constitution, that, and the charge of guilt he had flung across the table in his agony.

As he saw it, Rossiter had become discouraged at his failure to bring about a plausible accident; Ed was proving too wary or too lucky for him. So, since half a loaf is better than no bread, he had concluded to let the double indemnity slide, and return to his familiar, sure-fire poisoning game.

Criminals are always specialists, Ed remembered. The forger does not commit arson; the burglar does not pick pockets; the man who kills with a knife does not use a pistol.

" Yes, the Mickey Finn story was all a lot of hoey, he told himself. Rossiter had eaten the same food; why had he not been similarly affected? Besides, Ed did not believe a place of such high class would resort to dive methods to get rid of a patron, no matter how unwelcome he might be.

Not the restaurant then, but Rossiter, he was certain, had slipped him the dose; and it was probably the same subtle potion leaving no trace that had done for Renault.

But, unlike Renault, Ed had not at once succumbed, and on top of that, had laid the responsibility for his condition to Rossiter. Some of the waiters must have heard him make the charge. Afraid of possible consequences, Rossiter had hurried him over to the drug store for treatment.

Yet Rossiter undoubtedly knew that Ed would not rest satisfied with that. A man may overlook an attempt upon his life with pistol, knife, or club; but the poisoner no one will forgive.

As soon as Ed was in a condition to pass upon the facts, he would realize that Rossiter must be guilty, and would at once terminate their association.

Therefore, if he was to cash in on the fifty-thousand-dollar policy, or put through his other treacherous schemes, he would have to finish the job to-night. That was the reason for his insistence on staying with Ed and his purchase of the chloroform.

But nothing like that, Ed resolved, was going to happen, if he could avert it.

As soon as Rossiter had returned to the next room and switched off the lights, he reached out quietly to his trousers on a chair beside the bed, and, getting the automatic he had taken from the gunman, slipped it under his pillow.

Then, determined to keep awake at any hazard, he lay staring out into the darkness, watching and listening.

What a fool—what an abject fool—he had been ever to let himself be placed in such jeopardy, he thought. If only he had stuck by his promise to Helen, what a world of trouble he would have saved himself. Through his violation of it, he had lost her, and he might also lose his life.

But if he survived until morning he would free himself from his dangerous predicament, he vowed.

As the first thing, he would raise the money somehow to pay off the syndicate of beneficiaries, and take over the policy on his own account. Then he would communicate with Mrs. Strickland, and get her to intercede with his sweetheart for him.

Possibly when Helen heard all the facts, and also learned that he no longer was under the menace to which she objected, she might consent to renew the engagement.

She would, he believed, unless—unless it might be that she was in love with this man Roberts. And yet the circumstances did not point to Roberts as a lover to his mind. She had been crying and troubled when she went to Portland to meet him.

She had never passed herself off as his wife or sweetheart, but always as a sister. What claim did the fellow have upon her, that induced her to take such chances with her reputation? Who could he be?

Pondering over these things, Ed was yet

intently alert to every sound in the apartment, to the least faint creak of the furniture, to the rustle of the bedclothes whenever Rossiter moved in the adjoining room.

The slow moments dragged by. It must be almost morning, he thought. Then a neighboring church clock struck two. Good Heavens! Had he been in bed only half an hour?

He found his eyes closing in spite of himself, and fought against it, and scolded himself fiercely for the dereliction.

It certainly was difficult, though, to keep from relaxing when you were weak as a sick kitten.

He yawned, and felt himself dozing again. Then as he blinked open his heavy eyes, he roused to a startled, terror-struck wakefulness.

By the dim light that came through the drawn shades from a street lamp outside, he could see Rossiter standing over him with a towel crumpled up in his hand.

To his sharpened ears came the faint sound of a cork being withdrawn from a bottle, and his nostrils caught the sickly sweet odor of chloroform.

He slid his hand quickly up under the pillow and reached for the automatic he had placed there. It was gone!

Of course, he thought with a flash of self-contempt. Rossiter would have been shrewd enough to look for the pistol, and remove it.

And now what was he to do? No one could hear him, let him call for help ever so loud. Powerless to put up a struggle in his weakened state, he was at the man's mercy.

A wave of panic swept over him that held him chained in a paralysis of horror. He tried to move, and could not. He tried to cry out, but his voice stuck in his throat.

Rossiter was bending over him now. The crumpled towel was just above his face. Another second, and it would be pressed down, cutting off his breath. Stronger and more overpowering came the fumes of the chloroform.

With a mighty effort he burst the restraining bonds of the spell that was upon him, and flung himself out at the other side of the bed, shrieking his loudest.

Then the lights suddenly flashed on, and Rossiter appeared rubbing his eyes in the doorway between the two rooms.

"Keep away from me! Keep away!" Ed shouted, cowering at the far side of the bed. "You shan't chloroform me. I'll yell until I raise the house."

"Be yourself, boss! Be yourself!" Rossiter grinned at him. "Nobody's trying to chloroform you. You must have had a nightmare."

"Nightmare?" scoffed Ed. "I haven't been asleep a second. I suspected what you were up to, and would not let myself even doze."

"Is that so?" Rossiter stepped over to the window, and jerking up the shade, let in a flood of daylight which turned the illumination of the electric bulbs to a sickly, yellow pallor.

"It is now seven o'clock," he said, "and to my certain knowledge you've been dead to the world since a little after two."

Ed stared bewildered at the sunlight slanting in at the window; it seemed but a second to him since he had caught himself drowsing off, and had heard the clock strike two.

Then at a sudden thought, he dived across the bed, and pulled away the pillow upon which he had been sleeping.

"Looking for your gun?" questioned Rossiter. "It's on the dresser yonder. You see, I came in here about four o'clock to find out why you were grunting and groaning so—you sure must have had some peachy dreams, boss, the way you were carrying on—and I found that the gat had slid down beside your ear. So, for fear that you might blow the top of your head off, I took it, and put it out of harm's way."

Well, maybe so? With the golden glory of morning sunlight in the room to prove the passage of time, he could hardly disavow Rossiter's statement. And yet that vivid vision of a creeping midnight assassin was too real to him to be at once dispelled.

He could not conceal his shrinking fear of Rossiter but scrambling over to the dresser, possessed himself of the automatic; and then backing off to the bed, crouched there Turkish fashion, clutching the gun in

his hand, and watching the other's every movement, ready to repel an attack.

But Rossiter apparently took no note of this hostile attitude. He stretched himself, yawned, and then turned toward the bathroom.

"No use going back to the hay now," he said. "Might as well stay up, I guess, and make a full day of it."

He disappeared into the bath, and a moment later there came from behind the closed door the sound of his none too melodious singing as an accompaniment to the splashing water.

In fifteen minutes he was out again, tubbed and shaved, glowing with fresh vitality, a marked contrast to Ed's sullen, heavy-eyed belligerence.

"I'll be busy outside all morning, boss," he said, while he was dressing, "so I probably won't show up at the office until along in the afternoon. And you'd better do the same thing, or wiser still, stay in bed and take a good rest to-day. That nightmare showed that your nerves must be all on edge."

Ed merely grunted. He had no intention of staying in bed, and his nerves would be all right as soon as this sword of Damocles that kept him continually on the watch was removed from over his head.

Still he was just as well satisfied to hear that Rossiter would not be around the office that morning. He wanted to see as little as possible of his sales manager until he had financed the taking over of the fifty-thousand-dollar policy on his own account.

Then he would call Rossiter and the other members of the staff in, and let them have it straight from the shoulder. If only the fellow would stop fiddling with his necktie now, and go!

At last Rossiter adjusted the refractory tie to his liking, slipped into his coat, set his straw hat jauntily on his head, and with a final, approving glance at himself in the glass, turned toward the door.

"Oh, by the way, boss—" he paused with his hand on the knob, a teasing twinkle in his eye—"if you want the clip for that automatic, you'll find it in the drawer of the dresser. I took it out last night when I found the thing under your ear—just to be on the safe side." Then he was gone.

Ed gave a hasty glance at the pistol in his hand. It was true; the magazine was empty. What an idiot he had been making of himself!

He flung the useless weapon from him, and sliding off the bed, thudded over to the door, and double-locked it in order to make sure that Rossiter could not get back.

Then he set about making his own toilet. He felt flagged, dispirited, all wrong, as if he were entertaining the worst sort of hangover.

He felt weak as a rag, and empty as a vacuum tube; yet he had no appetite, the thought of food turned his stomach. He was sallow, he saw when he looked at himself in the mirror, with circles about his eyes, and down-drawn corners to his mouth.

Glumily he got into his clothes; and then since he felt he ought to try and eat something if only to restore his strength, he staggered out to breakfast. But his grapefruit was flavorless, his cereal mere paste, his toast a burned cinder, and his coffee tasted like lye.

He pushed the unsavory viands from him, and went on down to the office.

Arriving so early, he found no one else about, and nothing for him to do but sit in the stuffy little cubbyhole he had taken over from Varney, and reflect on how miserable he felt.

There, on the desk to bear him company, was the telegram that had come from Helen after his departure for North Conway calling off their engagement, a pleasing reminder of the futility and general craziness of that feverish trip. And he had Rossiter to blame for that, too.

Gradually the other members of the office force filtered in; but they were evidently as grumpy and out of sorts as himself.

With only the curtest of good mornings to each other, or none at all, they dawdled to their desks, with the smoldering rebellion of galley slaves taking their places at the oars.

Blue Monday, with a vengeance!

And things didn't improve as the morning wore on.

Winter, the office manager, brought in a

batch of pressing bills, and a bundle of cancelled contracts. He also had the pleasing intelligence that a general strike of plasterers was reported brewing, which would mean a long delay in finishing that block of buildings outside of Jamaica.

Then a plumber came in who had the contract in his line for the buildings, but owing to some grossly incompetent work had been supplanted by Ed with another man.

He was in a truculent mood, and asserting that he intended to have full payment under his contract, threatened unless the controversy was settled to his liking by the next morning, that he would plaster the block of buildings with mechanics' liens.

On top of that, the bank telephoned over that a couple of checks deposited from customers had been returned, marked "n. g."

Meanwhile, Ed's personal matters were running just about as rockily.

Mrs. Strickland, when he called her up, had readily agreed to act as mediator for him with Helen; but only a little later, she called him back to report that Helen absolutely refused to see her, or even to talk with her over the telephone.

"I don't know what has got into her, Ed," the good lady lamented. "You'd think in her position she'd be only too glad to have a helping hand held out to her.

"But she repels all advances, and seems to have become hard as nails. Such a change from the sweet, considerate girl she always was—I can hardly believe, it is the same Helen."

And his plan to take over the fifty-thousand-dollar policy sagged just about as badly. With the business toppling about his ears, he did not dare take out the amount required for his private use, and his personal account was empty. He had practically wiped it out when he started off on that trip to New Hampshire.

He started telephoning to various friends; but every one on whom he could expect to make a touch for such an amount proved to be either off on vacation or out of town.

Ruefully he pulled open a drawer of the safe where he kept securities not yet due or of non-negotiable character to see if there was anything there on which he could raise immediate money; and right on top he found the engagement ring for Helen which he had put there for safe-keeping when he returned that day from luncheon at the Hotel Poinsett.

He opened the little box and gazed uncertainly a moment at the gleaming stone. But not that! He thrust the temptation away from him, and closing the box, stuffed it back in the drawer.

Nothing else there turned out to be of the least immediate value. He would simply have to let the insurance matter ride for the present, and rest under the thrall of constant fear of attack from Rossiter or the other beneficiaries.

And then, as he sat ruefully contemplating this outlook, there came the final devastating blow of the day.

One of the big supply houses with which he dealt and to whom he owed a heavy account, but which he had hoped to stall along until he got on his feet, pushed for immediate payment. From the tone of the demand, it was evident they had gained an inkling of the shaky condition of Bell & Company, and would brook no delays.

He would have to raise thirty thousand dollars by noon the next day, or go to the wall!

CHAPTER XIX.

THEY BRING ME LUCK.

WOW! Ed reeled under the smack of that push-over.

Thirty thousand dollars! They might as well have asked for the moon. There was just about the same chance of him giving it.

Then his brain cleared. His back straightened up. His flaccid muscles grew tense. The sagged-down feeling he had been carrying all day miraculously left him, and he felt ready to lick his weight in wildcats. An emergency does that to some men.

He turned to Winter who had brought in the bad news, the keen, alert young executive again.

"I am going over to the bank," he said.

"The bank?" Winter spoke hopelessly.

"What on earth have we got to offer as security for a loan?"

"Nothing," agreed Ed. "I'm going to shove my personal note at them, and ask them to lend me thirty thousand dollars on it."

Winter looked so absolutely staggered, that Ed couldn't help laughing outright.

"Yes," he said, "and I don't need an examination in lunacy on account of it, Winter, as you're evidently thinking. It's simply a last throw.

"Listen," he went on. "We've got nothing to offer in the way of security, and we both know that we haven't. And we also know that our own bank is the only place on earth that we stand a show of getting such an amount.

"Then what's the use of wasting time and wearing out our brains, trying to figure some place else to raise the money, when we know in advance it's a dead bird? Instead, as I say, I'm going to slip my lone, lorn signature in under the window, and see how they look at it.

"Fix me up a sixty-day note, will you? And I'll be on my way."

"They'll spit in your eye," said Winter with conviction.

"Probably. But if by some miracle they don't, we're saved. If they do, we go blooie by this time to-morrow. At any rate, we'll know where we stand. We won't have to lie awake to-night wondering about it."

But for all the nonchalance of his tone, he did not approach the desk where sat the big autocrat of the bank without a certain amount of the trepidation of the borrower. His heart was knocking away at his ribs, and he could not keep a tremulous flutter out of his voice.

The autocrat, a big man with bushy brows and the sphinxlike expression of his kind, greeted him courteously, but not warmly. The account of Bell & Company, while regular enough, had been of late no great asset to the institution.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Bell?" he asked.

For answer, Ed laid the note he had prepared and signed down on the desk in front of him.

The autocrat glanced at it, and turned it over. Then for a second a flicker of surprise showed in his impassive countenance.

"Why, this bears no indorsement or security of any kind," he said. "You intended that?"

"Yes, sir." Ed nodded.

The bushy eyebrows of the autocrat drew together forbiddingly.

"You are asking this bank to loan you thirty thousand dollars on your unsecured personal note?"

Again Ed nodded. He was beyond speech by this time.

The note was pushed back toward him.

So it was all over then? Well, it was no more than he had expected.

But, as he started to rise, he became conscious that the banker was speaking to him:

"When do you have to have this money?" he asked.

"T-to-morrow noon at the latest, sir."

"Well, Mr. Bell, if you can get it anywhere else, I'd advise you to do so."

"There is no other place, sir. If there were, I wouldn't be trying a scheme like this."

"And you can give no security?"

"Nothing except my fairly decent business record, and my hopes and ambition to succeed."

"You are not considered a high moral risk with the insurance companies, I understand?"

"That has been corrected, sir." Ed spoke a little hotly. "It was an injustice to put me on the black list, and I proved it to them."

"Indeed?" The autocrat's eyebrows went up slightly. "I had not heard of the correction, but am glad for your sake that it is so."

He paused, and pulled reflectively at his lip.

"Since you can get this money nowhere else, Mr. Bell, I suppose it makes no particular difference whether I refuse you now, or to-morrow morning?"

"Not much, sir."

"Well, don't build any hopes on the delay. Unless I change my mind very decidedly between now and then, I shall certainly refuse. But since you are in a desperate hole, as you say, I am willing

to give you the benefit of thinking it over."

"Thank you, sir."

Ed went back to the office, and saw Winter.

"Well, he wasn't exactly gushing," he reported; "but at least my eye is still unspitted into. We have until to-morrow morning to learn our fate; and if I were to stay here this afternoon wondering what his answer is going to be, I'd be ripe for a padded cell.

"Come on; let's try to put it out of our minds, and go out to the country club and shoot a round of golf."

He had another reason, though, for wanting to leave the office beside the one of which he spoke. Rossiter would be appearing before long; and with his course in regard to the insurance policy still unsettled, Rossiter was the last person he wanted to see.

If by any chance that thirty-thousand-dollar loan was allowed, he vowed to himself that he would certainly hold out enough to take over the policy on his own behalf.

As to the golf proposal, he had made that because he knew it would prove a sure bait to Winter; and he wanted to get the office manager out of the trammels of office routine, and into a more communicative atmosphere in order to question him.

But to his surprise, Winter regretfully declined his invitation.

"Can't," he said. "I've got a match on with another fellow for late this afternoon; and I don't want to get off my form. We are playing for five dollars a hole."

It was not hard to see what was biting him. A thrifty soul, Winter added quite a tidy sum to his yearly income through such matches, not only by the high average of his play, but also by the care he used in selecting his opponents.

Ed, an irregular player and nowhere in Winter's class, seldom bet on his own game; but he felt that it was worth something to him to get the other where he might loosen up on talk, if not on cash.

"Tell you," he urged. "Call off that match with this other palookah, and I'll play you for ten dollars a hole."

After all, he thought, if he was going to be broke to-morrow, he might as well be broke good.

And, as he had expected, Winter jumped at the chance for such easy pickings; and in an expansiveness of spirit at the prospect, did not even have to be questioned to bring up the subject in which Ed was interested.

"Mr. Bell," he said earnestly, as they sat together at the golf course waiting their turn to tee off, "I wish you could arrange some way to relieve us of the burden of carrying that fifty-thousand-dollar policy for you. It was an unfortunate move, as I see it now; for it has created an atmosphere of suspicion on your part that is simply disrupting the office."

"Don't you think I have some excuse for suspicion?" asked Ed dryly.

"That's just it. Anything that happens to you, you put down as an attempt upon your life. Take the plank that fell under you, for instance. Hudson showed me exactly how that happened; and I am satisfied that it was pure accident.

"But he knows that you suspect him, broods over it, and has slumped on his work in consequence. The same is true of Varney and Slade; and even I, instead of devoting my mind to business, catch myself watching you, and wondering if you suspect me.

"Now, as a matter of fact," he went on, "I don't believe there is a man on the staff to whom that insurance money would be temptation enough to do you harm—with possibly one exception."

"You mean?" said Ed quickly.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Winter under his breath. "Speak of the devil—"

For just then Rossiter came breezing up to join them; and ended any chance for further colloquy between them.

"What are you playing for?" he asked, indifferent to the stiffness of their attitude.

"Ten a hole," Winter told him shortly.

"You Shylock!" Rossiter grinned. "But just the same, I'll take you for another ten a hole on the boss. I've got a hunch that this is his lucky day."

They started in then; and it very quickly developed that Winter, the expert, was

away off on his form, while Ed, the dub—perhaps because he confidently expected to lose, and didn't care—was up to top notch.

By the time they had reached the eleventh fairway, Winter had lost five holes, and was almost beside himself. He was getting as nervous as a lad with a slim bankroll taking his girl home in a taxi, and watching the steadily mounting figures on the taximeter. And his stance wasn't helped any by the gibes with which Rossiter kept goading him.

At the next hole, it started to rain; and Winter, eagerly looking for a way to save his loss, attempted to argue that, since they were unable to play the entire eighteen holes, all bets were off. It was of course a silly claim. Under the club rules, on a match of this kind, each hole was regarded as a closed transaction.

Bell pointed this out to him; but he refused to listen, and insisted on his contention. Rossiter came back at him with some rather cutting remarks; and then Ed added something, which while not particularly severe, set the badgered man clear off.

With a howl of rage, he suddenly sprang at Ed, brandishing the heavy club he carried above his head; but before he could strike, Rossiter caught him by the arm, and held him back.

"Here! Here!" Rossiter was laughing. "You don't gyp me like that. What you're up to is plain murder; I want my double indemnity."

Winter subsided. The realization of what he had been about to do brought him to his senses, and after a little further talk, he grudgingly admitted his loss.

But a number of other players had witnessed the altercation, and his infuriated rush; and on the way back to the club house, somebody asked Rossiter what he had meant by his curious remark about not wanting to be gypped.

"Why," he said, "Winter and I are beneficiaries under a fifty-thousand-dollar insurance policy of Bell's; and if Winter had killed him, we might have had trouble in collecting."

"Does Bell carry fifty thousand dollars insurance?" asked the man.

"Fifty thousand?" sniffed Rossiter. "That's only one of his policies. If he were to die by accident, the companies would have to pay out something like four hundred thousand."

The word was passed on, and pretty soon it was being gossiped about the club that Bell carried half a million in insurance. He had never been noticed much before; but now—he could not understand why—Ed found himself a center of attention.

Several influential club members began to act as if they had been overlooking something good, and came up to talk to him and congratulate him on his brilliant playing.

After their change and rub-down, Bell insisted on standing dinner out of his winnings to his two companions, and at the table Winter settled up his bets.

"Oh, by the way," Rossiter broke in, "that reminds me, I have a bit of change for you, too, boss. There was a reward up for those three gunmen you turned in last night, and the captain asked me to slip this to you as your share."

Ed could hardly believe his eyes, when he looked at the check, and saw that it was made out for two thousand dollars.

"Well, that 'll help some." He passed it over to Winter. "If Bell & Company goes bankrupt to-morrow, you can take care of some of the creditors anyhow."

"Nix! Nix!" protested Rossiter. "That's personal earnings, nothing to do with the business. If you take a tip from me, boss, you will use that to take over your fifty-thousand-dollar policy."

And as Winter nodded assent, there seemed nothing else for Ed to do. With a great gulp of relief, he felt that at last the sword of Damocles was removed from over his head.

Just then a telephone call was announced for Rossiter; and, after answering it, he came back with excitement in his face.

"Can I borrow the car you have out here to-day, boss," he said. "I've got to make a rush trip to town. I'll be back in an hour, and I want you to stay here until I come. I may have something important to tell you." Then hardly waiting for Ed's nod of assent, he dashed off.

But it was nearer two hours than one before he showed up again, and as Winter went off to keep an engagement, Ed was left to his own devices.

As he circulated somewhat moodily about the club, an attendant came hurrying up to him, and told him that a gentleman in the dining room wanted to see him. To his surprise, he found that it was the bushy-browed autocrat of the bank, dining alone.

"Sit down. Sit down, Mr. Bell." He waved genially to a seat on the other side of the table. "I want to have a talk with you. My son who has just left me says it is being told around the club that you carry insurance approximating half a million dollars. Is that so?"

"A quarter of a million is more like it," smiled Ed.

"Well, that isn't a bad figure for a young man. And I'm mighty glad to hear it. Frankly, it has changed my attitude in regard to you.

"As I told you this morning, I intended to refuse that note of yours; but when a man provides himself with that much insurance, after having once been rated as a bad moral risk, there must be a lot to him.

"I have been looking into your affairs, too, and I have no doubt that with your energy and a little help to tide you over your present difficulties, you will come through with flying colors.

"So," he concluded, "if you come around in the morning with your note and a fifty-thousand-dollar insurance policy assigned to us to cover us in case of your death, there will be no trouble about your getting the money. You don't mind making the bank your beneficiary, do you?"

Ed naturally told him he did not. He wasn't afraid that this bushy-browed angel would lie awake at night, hatching schemes to bump him off.

But he had hardly got through thanking his financial rescuer, and trying to adjust his thoughts to such a wonderful stroke of good fortune, when Rossiter came dashing in, and thrust a note into his hands.

Ed's heart gave a series of flip-flops, as he tore it open and saw Helen's handwriting inside:

> My Dearest:
>
> I told you I would not touch a letter from you with a pair of tongs, and I wouldn't. Instead, I would seize it in my two hands, and cover it with kisses. But I would much rather see you, and I am asking Mr. Rossiter to bring you to me.
>
> He has been so fine, and has cleared up everything so wonderfully. And don't bother about what that hateful old maid in the hall said. I knew all that stuff before I ever became engaged to you.
>
> Awaiting you breathlessly,
>
> Helen.

Did Ed go? The old roadster never hit up such a pace in its career as he urged it to on that drive to town. Regardless of cops, and traffic signals, and risks of smash-up, he went whizzing along like an ambulance. Somehow, he got through without being "pinched," or breaking his neck.

On the way Rossiter told him the story.

"It's very simple, when you come to get at it," he said. "The whole explanation lies in the fact that this so-called Roberts is really her brother."

"But she told me she had no brother," interrupted Ed.

"She didn't know she had. He was a black sheep, and supposed to be dead. But he was living all right under another name, and happening to see her at North Conway, he got into communication with her, using my kid brother as a go-between."

"Oh, I see," said Ed. "That's how he came to get into it."

"Yes; and that's all he had to do with it. He was merely the messenger boy. You see, this Roberts, or Lincoln, to call him by his right name, was lying low, and didn't dare show himself, or give any clew to his hangout.

"He was wanted badly for the murder of a revenue officer. So Helen had to go to all this subterfuge to hold her interview with him. She found him in bad shape, wounded from a battle with the officers.

"The wound broke out afresh while she was with him in his room at that Cumberland Avenue lodging house, and they had hard work to check the hemorrhage. That's where all the blood came from.

"Well, they talked things over, and decided that he would be safer in New York, and that she would have to go along and look after him. But she was afraid that you would trace her; so she sent the telegram breaking the engagement."

"How did she know about the fifty-thousand-dollar policy?" Ed again broke in.

"From Binoff. He had sent her a note to tell her that the change had been arranged, making her beneficiary of the two ten-thousand-dollar policies, and he added that Mr. Bell had also taken out a fifty-thousand-dollar policy, and made his office staff the beneficiaries.

"Well," Rossiter went on, "that's all there is to it. When we came in there with the police last night, she thought we were after her brother, and was up in arms.

"I dropped right then to the true facts of the case; but it took me a good part of to-day to dig out just who Roberts could be, and what he was wanted for. But he isn't wanted at all. Another man was arrested yesterday for the murder.

"So they're going to ship him off down to his home in Georgia," he said with a shrug. "But, if you should ask me, boss, I don't think it will be for long. If I ever saw it written in a guy's face, he is booked for the long trip."

"But how did you come to find out all about this?" questioned Ed.

For answer, Rossiter turned back the lapel of his vest, and showed the badge of a United States Secret Service agent.

"I was put into your office to watch you, boss," he laughed. "You were more or less associated with some people who were pulling a raw deal, and we thought maybe we could get at them through you.

"But it didn't take me long to find out that you were clean as a hound's tooth. I'm turning in my shield to-morrow, and staying on with you. No getting rid of your Old Man of the Sea."

"Thank God for that," said Ed.

They were in town by this time, and he whirled up to his office.

"Just a minute," he said. "Something here I've got to get." When he came out again, the little box containing the engagement ring was in his vest pocket.

"All right!" he cried. "Let's go. But don't fail to remind me in the morning to call up Binoff, will you, Rossiter? I want to apply for a hundred-thousand-dollar policy. I think they bring me luck."

THE END

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CINEMAGIC

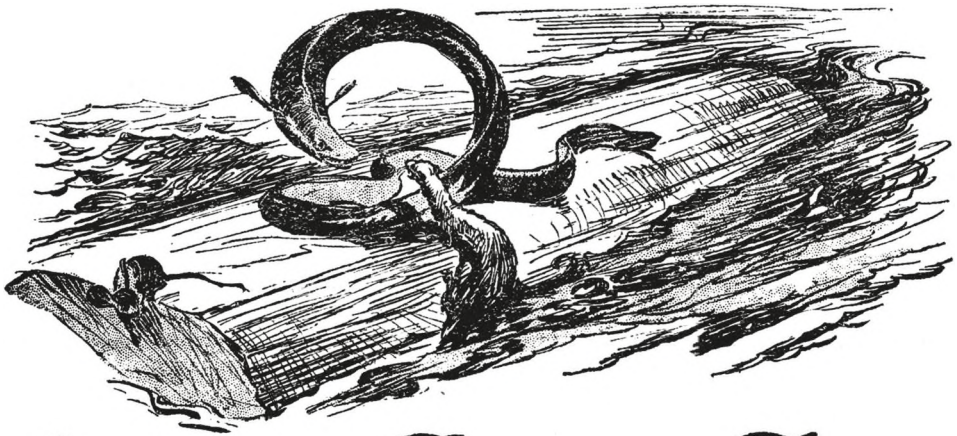
ALL your ancient magics—genies, imps, and jinns
Popping out of bottles when you pulled the cork—
Cannot be compared to movie reels in tins
Flashing fairy filmplays, 'Frisco to New York!

In a comfy armchair—center, on the aisle—
I can sit enchanted, true contentment's gage;
Humdrum daily problems vanish for the while
As I watch the actors on the shadow stage.

Do I yearn for South Seas? Crave my eyes the odd?
Laughter? Sadness?—all these mirrors of my mood?
Cinemagic wafts me to my Land-o'-Nod—
Time flies by unnoticed—no gray thoughts intrude!

Daytime leaves me dreary. Life has passed me by;
Yet night finds me eager, makes my pulses dance.
I am one of millions—millions such as I—
Thrilling to the screen's vicarious Romance!

Robert Leslie Bellem.



For a Rainy Day

By F. ST. MARS

THERE had come a rippling streak of red and a pattering in the cathedral silence and twilight of the spruce fir-wood, and something had gone up a tree. When the danger was past, whatever it was, and there was nothing to show a mere human being what it was, the red, wavy streak came out along a low-hung bough, and developed himself into a very delightful squirrel, somewhat overawed by an enormous, bushy tail, and with eyes shining like stars—brighter even than those other stars twinkling between the grained tree boles, which were the eyes of roe deer, daintier than fairies.

The squirrel sat upon his haunches to eat a nut, which he held in his fore paws, and he had bitten a very neat hole in the soft end, when he broke off to use hard language at a vision pink, black, white, and sky-blue dodging across a lost sunbar. The vision stopped, and turned into a jay, who abused the squirrel back in his own voice, and word for word, with a bit over for keeps, and so marvelously imitated that the squirrel was frightened, dropped the nut and huried away.

" Not a sparrow," it has been said, " falls in vain," and not a nut either, to judge by what followed. Scarcely had the nut landed with a soft plop upon the scented needle carpet, all fretted and patterned with the sun's shifting, twisted copper nets, than a tiny little beast, reddish, too—truly every creature seemed to be ruddy here, the roe deer, also—no longer than a mouse, but overawed by its big head instead of its tail, as with the squirrel, a very wedge of a tiny beastie, in fact, slipped from nowhere special and examined the nut.

He was a red, or bank-vole, Mr. Glareolus on Sundays, or, according to his registration card, *Microtus Glareolus*. His nearest relations were the field-vole, who sometimes take the form of a plague, and the water-vole, who is usually slandered as the water-rat.

Most people took him on guess and called him a field-mouse, which he most certainly was not, for no genuine, guaranteed mouse is nearly all head and shoulders and little else, except whiskers—of course, plenty of whiskers—as he was.

Mr. Glareolus, who had come from nowhere, without a word, skipped up to that nut and touched it—only touched it, mind

you—with his nose; but it was as if he had touched off the opening apparatus of arena gates, very tiny arena gates, it is true.

Instantly other bank-voles, to the number of nine, springing equally from nowhere special—and it is wonderful how in such places the earth may be literally riddled with unnoticed holes—rushed up and fell upon him. To be more precise, they fell upon that nut, but since nine square muzzles cannot, obviously, negotiate one nut in one and the same instant, and since Glareolus objected very strongly, meeting them on his hind legs, and with glistening front teeth like chisels, things happened.

There was, I can tell you, one big fight for that one big nut. It was rather a surprising fight, because everybody fought everybody else, even his own wife, or somebody else's, his own brother, or mother, and his worst rival indiscriminately, dodging, racing round and round, hopping over each other, when there was no other way of avoiding collision, and squeaking all together.

In fact, between them, though so little, they managed to kick up quite a fair-sized riot, all among the leaves and the pine needles, only, because of their being just like the color of anything around them, the fighters were almost invisible a yard or two away.

Finally the battle stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and everybody stood absolutely still, and stared, rigid. Only their square, funny cleft noses moved, "working" incessantly, analyzing every scent upon the air for danger—and they were danger experts, too. But the reason of the call-off had nothing to do with danger, for a wonder. Some one had run away with the nut!

Then they all vanished suddenly; just a rustle—and they were gone! And they left none behind, that was the puzzle.

There ought to have been dead and wounded after such a furious fight. There were none of the former, and I doubt if there were any of the latter, for the simple reason that they were always going to, but never did quite, come to grips; they kept just out of reach of each other, looking for an opening which nobody gave.

A yard away, behind the buttress of a tree hole, the cause of all the riot, Glareolus to wit, was sitting upon his haunches, calmly negotiating the nut. But halfway through he discovered that the others were coming out of their holes again, and promptly hid his prize by digging a shallow hole, putting the nut in, and scraping leaves and twigs over it.

Then he went away to wash his face, which he did very prettily, passing his little pink, handlike forepaws over his face and ears. He always washed like that after a feed—not before, some other fellow might rob him else—for he was very scrupulous in his habits, was Mr. Glareolus, a faddist on hygiene, one might say.

He felt quite happy in that he had got a drop on the whole lot of other bank-voles, so to speak; but he would not have felt so happy if he had known that at that moment a little female bank-vole, having carefully sniffed out his trail, was busily and delightedly engaged in unearthing his treasure rather more easily than he had earthed it up.

But it didn't matter very much, for one has a suspicion that by that time Glareolus himself had, with his customary inconsequence, quite forgotten where on earth he had put that nut, anyway.

Glareolus was indeed busily concerned at that time in solving the problem of how to reach next spring as a live vole instead of as a dead one. It may sound easy; in reality it was difficult. And upon his actions now depended very much his chance of success.

There is no grumbling over a policy of "too late" in the wild. If you are too late, then you die before you have any time to grumble. Chances are that without something quite extra in smartness, and more than a modicum of luck, you die anyway—but no matter.

As the sun burst itself out in a furnace of fiery crimson, and the starlings began to arrive from far distant fields in sweeping phalanxes, to roost in the woods for the night, and the daddy-long-legs commenced to get up from the grass and gad about, and the robbins sang, perched, one here, one there, redder than ever in the red sun's

glare, Glareolus, in the shape of a blunt nose, "working," of course, as it always was, and a pair of indescribably bright eyes, appeared at the mouth of his hole—one of his holes; he had many—under the tree roots, to sample the world for danger before venturing out—upon his plans.

It was characteristic of him that he made quite certain there was no waiting death upon the ground to waylay him before he trusted his wedge head into the open. He thought nothing about the air. This was why a jay, getting ready to go to sleep up above, dropped lightly—for a jay—beside him, and stared horribly.

Glareolus was on the edge of a steep bank at the time, but there was no hole near; at least, no hole that he could reach quicker than the jay's beak could reach him. Not, mark you, that the gaudy gentleman jay actually declared war; he only looked it.

The bank-vole cringed, and the action overbalanced him so that he rolled halfway down the slope in consequence, before being pulled up by a friendly holly root.

The jay was after him in a flash, and pulled hold of his rather short tail.

Then the bank-vole squealed, wriggled a bit, rolled twice over, and under—all in one motion and one second. He had merely gone into the hole he had been aiming for all the time, but the act looked like magic.

Coming out of another hole ten minutes later, Glareolus, after making quite sure that the jay had really gone—he could hear him "arguing against the silence" away in the heart of the wood—continued his journey to the cornfield unbroken by any further delay than one pause to let a snake go by, and another to go past a trapped rat, grinning horribly.

The cornfield had been cut, but was "up on its legs"—i. e., in stacks—and was inhabited, apparently, only by two bats and a corncrake. The latter did not "crake," but stood looking disconsolately at the bare stubble that had lately been his tall, golden home.

Nobody spoke, and the moon, very full in the face and yellow as a guinea, who sat on the top of a stack, said that all was safe. Wherefore, the bank-vole rustled—for the life of him he could not help rustling, though he cursed the noise—across to a stack, and mighty pleased he was to get there, for he hated the open on principle, being kin to the mouse people enough for that.

Once in the stack, he gathered up full as many fallen grains as he could carry—five—and fled back home. He dropped one grain on the way—it slipped out of the corner of his mouth—and very studiously stopped to pick it up, an action which, being in the open, nearly cost him his life.

There was no sound, nothing, only the vision of a spotty-winged shape, all head and claws, the whole not much larger than a cricket ball, if you except the wings, descending upon him. He did not know the vision, for the little owl—introduced some years ago—was a new form of death in those parts, but he squealed and fled. The little owl's character he took for granted.

He reached the hedge, half crazy with fear, and ran clean between the legs of a rat, who was coming out. He upset the rat, and fled on, while the rat bit at his tail. The next instant the rat was biting at the dust, or anything else it could reach, with the little owl on top of it.

The bank-vole had a nice little chamber, hollowed out in one of his tunnels, all ready for the corn. He could not keep that secret, and had to share it with his wives—unless some of them were his daughters—who knew of it, even if he did not know that they knew. And in this chamber he put his corn—just dropped it—and raced back for more.

Hurry with him was chronic, but now he seemed even more in a hurry than usual. Perhaps he feared that some one else would get the corn before him; and in this he was wise to some extent, for when he got back to the stack he found another vole there. He defeated that worthy in a short, "bluff" fight of two rounds, grabbed up six grains of corn—it was the sparrows and the chaffinches, the greenfinches, and the rest of 'em who had scattered more than they robbed—and flew back home again as fast as he could hop.

It was a trying game, this laying up of a store for the winter. The vole dropped two of his five grains twice, and had to fight a short-tailed field-vole once with his mouth full, before he got his corn under cover and returned for more.

In all he carried one hundred and seventy grains in half an hour, making only five pauses; once, as has been said, to argue with the field-vole, twice to eat a grain, and twice to wash his face. Moreover, each grain was personally tested, and doubtful ones opened, and, if found bad, thrown out.

After that he went to the stream for a drink. He drank with his eyes behind him, ready to bound in any given direction at any given moment, and after the drink he sat at the lapping edge of the moon-silvered water to make his toilet. This was a religion with him; beginning with a careful face wash with well licked pink paws, a back comb and parting, a wash of his immaculate white waistcoat, his legs, and finally his tail.

It took him three minutes, this important business of a wash and brush-up—long enough for a weasel to stalk him, which is precisely what it did do, under cover of a wind squall and temporary retirement of the moon.

When the moon came out again, the weasel made her rush from under cover of a cluster of bronze-white and yellow-black leaves.

It was a lightning dash. There seemed to be no time for the vole to act, much less think—no more than a snap of a finger, certainly. Yet, in that fraction of time he had seen his danger, noted the best way of escape, and taken it—as far out into the stream as he could leap.

The weasel, a little amazed—you could tell that by her pause—leaped, too, farther out than the bank-vole—too far out. The current was stronger farther out, and, whereas the vole turned back even as her splash sounded ahead of him the weasel was carried on some way before she could reverse her direction. Then she landed and grimly took up the trail where the vole had gone ashore.

Racing up the bank, the vole darted under the low spruce fir boughs, and into his own hole, or rather, into that portion of the maze of bank-vole tunnels and shafts, high roads, and byroads, which undermined the soft ground, which he had set apart for his own use—as long as he could hold it!

In his hurry and fear he did not notice, I think, the uncanny, dead silence and desolation that brooded adown the tunnels, which at that hour should have been busy with life, for it was then that bank-vole society mostly takes the air.

With his fur all on end he raced for his chamber—his own special, neatly hollowed-out little chamber, lined and padded with shredded grass.

Here he was accustomed to spend his hours of sleep during the day for the most part, and here, too, others of his family came for their siestas; for there is not much privacy in bank-vole society, living, as they do, in such close colonies, and spending most of the time they have free from sleep cleaning and feeding, in digging, partly, presumably, against escape, partly for cover, but partly for the fun of the thing, it almost seems.

As he found his relations there—his wives, or truly, as has been said, some of them may have been his daughters, instead, but no matter. No male relations were there; he would not tolerate them. They were lying variously about in picturesque attitudes, and all, apparently, peacefully and calmly asleep; not one stirred at his coming.

And he—he sat on his haunches. His fur, already sitting on end, stood on end, and he squeaked with horror at the awful sight before him.

There was no need to ask what was up. He knew death when he saw it, had played fast and loose himself with death too often all his little life, had seen too many others die not to recognize death when he stood in its presence. Besides, there was evidence enough.

His wife lay on her face with the back of her neck all crimson, that is his official wife; another, a friend we will call her out of respect for Mr. Glareolus's feelings, also lay on her face, with a red stain trick-

ling out from the back of her neck; another crouched, as if about to jump, but she had jumped into the next world, and the carmine tinged the back of her neck, too; and another sat all hunched in a corner, rigid, with her pink "hands" folded up as if praying, and she had a sinister crimson collar.

She was dead. They were all dead, and all killed in the same manner, by the same hand, it would seem, or the same jaws, rather.

And Mr. Glareolus knew, aye, the poor, amazed little beastie knew. That terrible neck-stain was the trade-mark of the weasel, even the same who was on his trail now. As a matter of fact, a whole gang of them had been there and hunted the burrows through, and not a living thing remained after their passage, save only plenty of dead.

It was the clean stab of the dagger-sharp canines at the base of the skull that marked them; no other of the bank-voles' enemies murders in precisely that way, except the stoat, the weasel's own cousin, and the tunnels were too small for him to come that way.

Mr. Glareolus turned upon his tail and fled off up a side-tunnel with a frozen heart, his breath coming in gasps; and half a minute after he had taken his departure, the weasel, relentlessly on his track, came into his private apartment to look for him.

Mr. Glareolus, nearly blind with fear, tore on and on, along interminable passages, all driven by bank-voles, stumbling drunkenly over a corpse here and there, and with the shrieks of the dying in various side-passages ringing in his ears, till he came to one of those main high-roads, or, rather, high-tunnels, that run the length of almost every hedge along the countryside, and seems to be the joint property of almost every little four-footed thing small enough to use the same.

Who keeps these subterranean turnpikes clean and in repair no man knoweth, but they are always scrupulously swept out, and smooth with the passage of thousands of tiny feet and the polish of hundreds of little bodies.

Along this gallery the bank-vole tore like a thing demented, colliding once with a frantic wood-mouse, hunting for her babies, she would never find again alive, and once with a mole, who gibbered with rage, and promptly dived underground, as if he knew the weasel was coming, which perhaps he did; and once with a fat, pig-snouted, velvet-coated shrew, who squealed with anger in a shrill and shrewish manner, but broke off to bolt in silence at the sound of footsteps coming far along the tunnel.

You could hear them, hollow and drumming—for tunnels magnify sound and carry it far, as in the subway tubes.

The bank-vole heard it, too—and knew. Fear told him. It was his deadly enemy, the weasel.

Now, up to now Glareolus had put up something very respectable in the matter of speed. But from that point he moved as we move in a nightmare, when some unknown power dogs our laboring feet as we flee from imagined terror. Something clogged the bank-vole's movements. Call it fear, hypnotism, fatigue, sheer silliness, or panic, or what you will, the fact remains that the power is unknown.

Also it was real. It was a fact. The vole crawled along. His speed would have disgraced the mole he "had had words" with a moment ago.

He got along, mark you; there was speed, but not the speed he was capable of normally, and all elasticity was gone out of him.

He labored in his breath. His eyes started. All the clean-cut, knife-sharp agility, spring, vim, and snap that mark the actions of the little hunted folk as a rule had vanished. Thus will you see a mouse behave when a cat has caught it—the victim, apparently, of a trance.

The bank-vole left the tunnels and came above ground. The cool night air, playing upon his bluff, fat face, seemed to revive him a little.

He increased his speed. His hind legs did not drag so obviously. A little brightness crept into the glassy, set eyes. But the pursuing weasel was very close to him now.

Life! It was a funny old thing. It drove

the bank-vole to speed he had never accomplished before, even in his dream, you know; it hurled him up into a bush as if he had been flipped up from a spring, and down again—the weasel rustling behind—like a dropped stone; it made him show a suddenly acquired brotherly affection for a male field-vole he met—whom he would at any other time assuredly have fought—and run alongside him for some distance, in the desperate endeavor to foul his trail with his cousin's, and, failing that—for the weasel unraveled the tangled scent and had a nose above these things—it sent him, leaping headlong far out clear of the bank, into a hubbling, racing, boiling, chuckling stream at flood.

The weasel was only fourteen inches behind him when he did this mad thing, and the weasel was seeing red, so that she neither stopped nor hesitated, but hurled herself into the miniature rapids like a little mahogany devil.

Mr. Glareolus had vanished, sucked down into a smooth, swift, oily race, and traveling at great speed, whirling round and round, battling, struggling, gasping, sneezing, and already in almost as great terror of the waters as he had been of the weasel.

The weasel vanished, too, fighting for her life, overpowered in an instant and drawn down, and up, down, and up, in a horrible manner; but she was not in terror. Terror is not much in weasels's line as a rule. But she was angry. Also it cooled her blood. She was not "seeing red" any longer.

Then she saw stars. She had hit against, or been hit by a whirling log, and a heavier beast might have been badly injured by that bone-smashing blow. But she weighed less than two ounces, and every grain of that was as hard as nails.

She struck fast as any burr to the log with all her claws, and struggled, clambering wildly upward, even though nearly stunned, till she reached the top, or that side which was the top at that moment; and there she clung, as drowning men cling to a raft, helpless for a time, but not hopeless.

Whether she felt any surprise in discovering that she was not alone, that another small, sodden, thin, black-brown object of a beast was already crouching there upon the log beside her, I know not, nor whether at that time she even saw it, or recognized it, if she did. "It," however, happened to be Mr. Glareolus.

There is nothing to prove that he saw, or, at any rate, recognized her either. He just clung. She just clung. And it was all they could do to cling.

And the log slid down-stream at fine speed, broadside on, and inclined to turn over at any moment. If it did not hit anything, there was some little hope of retaining those who had boarded it. And never verily did any craft carry through the night a more unhappy, lugubrious-looking crew.

They had no idea that a big storm in the distant hills had made the stream overflow its banks. They knew only that they desired ardently to find those banks, and could only find an old, rotten log. Still, any port in a storm, even with your worst enemy to share it.

After a bit the bank-vole woke up a little, got back some of his senses, and crawled along the log, warily exploring his raft.

He almost touched the weasel, and recoiled as if he had come in contact with a live wire, jerked into frozen horror.

The weasel snarled wickedly, and might have done more than snarl if the log had not at that moment chosen to spin like a top, and so nearly precipitated the pair of them into the water that they had to hang on with all their claws and half their teeth.

At the same moment they heard a roaring in their ears.

It was as dark as pitch, the moon having ducked behind a thundercloud that blotted all things out like ink.

The roaring increased, growing louder at every instant filled the night. Something was going to happen soon, both beasts felt sure of it.

Then suddenly they were aware that a body was moving the log—a live body. Wood talks more than any inanimate substance I know, and talks clearly at times.

Lay your body and your ear to wood, and you can feel, as well as hear, all sorts of things that are going on. Thus those two enemies upon the raft could feel the push and scrape of something working at the wood.

Then the moon came out full from behind a big cloudbank.

And Glareolus looked, and saw in the palest white, treacherous half-light, a wet and green wall, shiny and horribly dank, except where it was bedecked with rare fairy ferns sliding by. And on the other side he saw only water, moonlit, silvered, whirling, swirling, hurrying water. Then he looked overside, and stiffened from head to heel.

His fur slowly ruffed up and stood on end like the fur of a beast in great pain or ill. His eyes dilated, his body seemed to shrivel up.

He found himself looking, at six-inch range, into the horrible, glassy, staring white eyes of a wet and enormous eel—an eel that could not have been less than five feet long; a female eel bound for the sea, and the uttermost, profound, stagnant depths of the sea at that.

Heaven knows where she came from, but we know where she was going to—the pitch-dark, freezing, measureless depths of the ocean, the birthplace and the tomb of her race.

For one moment Glareolus had a vision of the weasel, arch-backed, flat-eared, her thin upper lip curled back, her lancet-sharp fangs gleaming, her face set in a fiendish grin.

Then the light went out, and the bank-vole shivered all over as the log wallowed and rolled shudderingly in the gurgling waters.

The eel was trying to turn the whole thing over to get at close quarters its living freight.

Mr. Glareolus heard the weasel begin to gibber and swear like a little red-hot devil, heard the sudden swift, traplike clash of her fangs as she bit, and the scrape of her claws; heard a tremendous, terrifying swirl in the waters, and saw, ghostlike, a pale, phosphorescent gleam as the eel writhed her white belly somewhere in the gloom overside. Then the bank-vole collapsed with sheer terror as the log hit something with a jar and a bang, and half split, whirling round and nearly turning over as it did so.

For one brief, awful moment, a ghastly, cold, squirming body pressed and wriggled against him, the weasel screamed like a fiend in torment, and all went out in an inky, dripping, thundering, roaring blackness, deep as the blackness of a well, and an unbearable turmoil engulfed them utterly.

And Glareolus, who had been within touching distance of death many dozens of times in his life felt that this was really the end.

It was, however, no end, for when he next had sense to realize anything at all, he was still on the log. Then he looked around upon a still pool of silver water, towering alders guarding it. The log was no longer adrift upon rough waters, but aground among water raffle. In other words, they had come through the mill, the wheel of which was lifted for repairs. Had they come by that route any other night almost, they would have been past any repair.

They, I say, but there was no they, only Mr. Glareolus, very much at large. The weasel had gone—into the mystery of the night, the depths of the waters, or the maw of the eel. I know not, and neither did the bank-vole know. The weasel was gone, anyway, and Glareolus skipped ashore gayly upon the plate-like leaves of the water-lilies, and promptly ran up against an enormous wheat-rick of a thousand-and-one bushels.

That is to say, he beheld before him the solving of his problem of providing for a rainy day. Thousands of times more stored food for the winter than he could have ever collected in his life, and with it shelter, and warmth, and safety beyond imagination of bank-voles.

No wonder he squeaked with joy as he rustled cheekily and cozily into his new and glorious home. And for all I know, he is there to this day.

THE END

The Polecat

By LAURANCE M. HARE

SAMUEL BLYNN was officially an attorney at law. In Kenola, however, he was better known as the Polecat. He reveled in and profited by his unsavory reputation.

As he glanced at the headlines in the Kenola *Daily Times* on this particular morning, he raised his eyebrows in a slight gesture of surprise, but he was not in the least abashed. Rather, he rubbed his claw-like hands energetically as he read:

MILTON HENDERSON A SUICIDE

Found Dead in Bed After Reading Note Left by Granddaughter

No Clew as to Girl's Whereabouts

Note Hints at Blackmail, Involving Local Attorney

The Polecat read on down the page, skimming through details of his late client's life, which he already knew by heart, until he came to Mary Henderson's note. He read this searchingly, an expression of diabolical cunning on his shrunken face:

DEAR GRANDFATHER:

I will not disobey you by marrying the man I love, but neither will I let you choose for my husband a man whom I hate as you do—Samuel Blynn. You have already shattered my happiness, but you shall not force me to bind myself for life to that unprincipled polecat who is blackmailing you. How can you be so cruel? You call it love and say that unless I marry him, he will make disclosures that would ruin my standing in society, my respectability and make me an outcast. Must I suffer for the wrongs you have committed? Don't you know I would rather be loved in disgrace, your disgrace, than be abused and tortured at the hands of Blynn?

What a coward you are, grandfather, to let him bleed you as he is doing. I believe you must be insane, and between the two of you, my very life is in danger. If you will not even allow me the protection of the only friend I have, a man whose name I refuse to mention in connection with Samuel Blynn, it is no longer safe for me here, and I am going away. You shall never hear of me again.

Do not try to follow, for I have planned

it all for months and shall erase my trail completely. Forgive me, grandfather, as I forgive you. (Signed) MARY.

The Polecat scowled as he laid the paper aside. Like all greedy men, he had not been satisfied to let well enough alone, and now he had overplayed his hand.

By demanding Mary Henderson for his wife, he had brought to public light his hold on Milton Henderson, a venerated citizen of Kenola, notwithstanding that this veneration had cost the old man a vast fortune.

Blynn had not counted on the deadliness of the female, but with characteristic dispatch, he set about to counteract, as best he could, the havoc Mary had wrought with his plans. First, he wrote for the press a denial of all the allegations contained in the girl's note. But knowing well that his denial would be taken with a grain of salt by the public mind, he further challenged her statements and substantiated his own case by filing suit against the girl for libel.

He considered this a perfectly safe bet, as the girl would know nothing of her grandfather's suicide nor the publication of her note, and was, in all probability, in hiding at some distant place. He felt sure it would never come to a show-down, because he believed her fully capable, in her desperation, of completely hiding her tracks from any pursuer.

But in the event that she did appear to defend her suit, he would find some expedient to deal with the emergency. In the meantime, he had more urgent things to do.

Roger Howe was the only other person in Kenola to whom the Henderson tragedy was of any particular concern, but he read the account of it in the paper with vitally different emotions than did the Polecat. The death of Milton Henderson meant nothing to him, but the disappearance of Mary did.

In his little wall paper shop and sample room at the rear of a humble dwelling off the main street, he sat on a bench with a clipping of Mary's note in his hand. There was a glassy, lifeless expression in his gray eyes, and his strong young shoulders drooped disconsolately.

The empty faintness at the pit of his stomach was as though his vital organs had been torn out, leaving but an empty, lifeless torso.

Roger was a paperhanger because his father before him had been one, and because he could earn a dollar an hour for his labor besides a not insignificant profit on the paper he sold.

His income from this carried him comfortably through the slack periods of winter and summer, allowing him to puzzle out the mysteries of interior decorating and architecture by which he hoped some day to make his fortune.

How he and Mary had planned and dreamed! But all that was gone now. The clipping in his hand seemed like a message from the dead. Even the thought of continuing in his pursuit of success and riches seemed irreverent.

It would be hard to say whether he blamed most for this tragedy the dead man or the Polecat. Of one thing he was sure: the former had made restitution in full, and it was up to him to demand like restitution from Blynn.

Tortured as he was with the uncertainty of Mary's whereabouts and welfare, he dared not seek her out for fear of opening her trail to Blynn and bringing on her a worse fate than she might encounter among strangers. Before he could search for her, to tell her of what had occurred and offer himself to her, he must first take care of the Polecat in any way he could.

II.

THAT wily individual sat glaring at his desk blotter, his insignificant carcass almost lost in his big chair, his mind in a quandary. So sure had he been of his absolute control over Henderson that he had never counted on the turn events had taken. It hampered his campaign more seriously than he had at first realized.

He was positive the old man had died intestate and he was equally positive that, so far as anybody knew, he had died insolvent. This was not a pleasant thought to Mr. Blynn, though he had extracted a fortune from Henderson by blackmail. He wanted more—and some Satanic instinct

told him there was more somewhere—cold, hard dollars, if he could only find them.

It was a foregone conclusion that the Henderson homestead would be sold at public auction to satisfy creditors. Accordingly, Mr. Blynn made a decision. Having made it, he allowed the law to take its course.

When the sheriff's office, in the course of time, advertised the proposed sale, the Polecat published an announcement in the newspaper: For the sake of his late client's memory, whose untimely death was a real loss to the community, Mr. Blynn was negotiating with the authorities for the purchase at private sale of the entire Henderson estate intact.

He hoped thus to be able to avoid dragging that grand old man's private affairs through the mire of public curiosity and gossip. The public thought this was a fine, manly thing to do and it helped immensely in counteracting the disparaging remarks cast at the lawyer in Mary Henderson's note.

Roger Howe did not swallow the sugar-coated pill which the Polecat had just fed to the citizens of Kenola. He knew the man too well even to taste it, and his suffering was too acute to be deceived by it.

He knew the Polecat had a trick up his sleeve, but he had no inkling of what it was unless—yes, that must be it—he figured there might be something in that house that would indicate where Mary had gone.

"If I could only get in there!" he mused.

At first, he thought of breaking in, then a better idea presented itself.

Immediately after the purchase of the estate had been completed, Roger made a visit to the Polecat's office.

It may be remarked here that the latter knew nothing of the relations between Mary and Roger, was even ignorant that a man named Howe existed. He knew only that Mary was in love with another man than himself, as she had declared in the farewell note to her grandfather. Therefore, it was as a hustling young business man that Roger presented himself to the attorney.

"Good morning, Mr. Blynn," he began with a brisk smile which cost him considerable will power. "I'm Roger Howe, the paperhanger. I read the notice in this morning's paper of your purchase of the Henderson house, and I've come to make a bid for refinishing the interior before you move in, or possibly you bought it as an investment, in which case you will surely want it done over."

"No," Blynn replied. "I plan to occupy the house myself, but I haven't given much thought to refinishing it. In fact, I wasn't aware that it needed it. I suppose you are thoroughly acquainted with the house?"

"There's a sting in that question," Roger cautioned himself. "Better go easy, old boy. Don't know too much."

To the Polecat, he said:

"I've been there several times to do some minor repairs. I don't know much about the place, but my general impression is that the wall coverings are old and out-of-date. You will, of course, want things fresh when you move in. I've a very complete line of samples, sir, and I can make you a very fair offer. I think my regular customers, some of whom you may know, will tell you of the quality of my work."

Blynn did not reply immediately. He sat back in his chair, screwed his parchment-like features into a horrible expression, and fixed on Roger a gaze that was meant to penetrate to his innermost thought.

Evidently he was satisfied with this scrutiny, for presently his face relaxed, but still he did not speak. He was thinking.

Once again his greed had almost caused him to stumble. He had been so anxious to move into the house so that he could search at his leisure, that he had given no thought to repairs or decorations. He realized now that it would look exceedingly queer to anybody who might take an interest in the matter, if he moved in without having had anything altered.

"Well," he decided, "you've got a good line of salve, young man. If your work is as good, maybe we can do business. Suppose we go over the place together some time to decide what's to be done."

Roger Howe tried hard to hide his anxiety.

"I shall be glad to accompany you," he said, "whenever it is convenient. Will you be free this afternoon?"

"Well, I'm pretty busy right now," Blynn countered.

"But, Mr. Blynn, it will take some time for your material to arrive after you've decided on what you want done, and I imagine the job itself will take quite awhile.

"Probably I won't have it finished before a couple of months anyway. Besides, I won't be able to give you such prompt attention later on, because this is just the season when everybody wants his work done at once."

"Oh, all right," Blynn conceded irritably. "Meet me here about three o'clock and we'll go over there."

Roger was jubilant as he walked back to his shop. Not only had he found a way of gaining legal entrance to the house, but in no other way would he have been in so favorable a position to watch the Polecat's movements. Also, his theory that Blynn intended to occupy the house, was corroborated.

Roger could find out one explanation to this—that Blynn felt sure of finding something there that was immensely valuable to him.

Why else would a bachelor want to give up a perfectly modern, comfortable and convenient house for an old, run-down estate much larger than he needed and which must have cost him considerable money?

"If I could only find Mary!" Roger thought. "But I must be satisfied with the progress I am making, and wait. Wait! When she may be sick or in need of money or protection. Oh, Lord, why must it be this way?"

He pulled himself together sufficiently to accompany the Polecat to the house that afternoon, and there, for more than an hour, they moved from room to room, measuring, figuring and planning. Roger was almost mad with the thought that by all the laws of justice, he and Mary should be doing this very thing together.

The net result of this tour was an assignment to repaper the living room, dining room and library, and, on the upper floor, the two chambers that had been occupied by the Hendersons.

Under the circumstances, nothing could have pleased Roger Howe more, for he was sure that if there was anything in the house that he wanted, it would surely be in one or the other of the last mentioned rooms.

"Now," he said to Mr. Blynn, as they parted at a street corner, "if you will give me a latchkey I'll start right to work in the morning, because all the old paper will have to be torn off and there are quite a lot of holes in the plaster to be patched. I can do all that while I'm waiting for the paper to come."

A little reluctantly, he thought, the Polecat handed over the key to a side entrance with a warning that if anything should turn up missing he would hold Roger responsible for the loss.

"Bear in mind, young man, that I have an inventory of everything the house contains."

"Oh, I assure you, sir, that everything will be perfectly safe."

Roger Howe smiled graciously and then hurried off down the street, muttering about people who judged others by themselves.

"There'll be something missing, all right, Mr. Polecat," Roger assured himself, "but it won't be anything that's in the inventory."

III.

ROGER was really very busy at this season of the year, but he was so anxious to search the house for some trace of Mary that he decided to do the preliminary work immediately, and let his other jobs go for a few days, then he could finish them while he waited for the paper for Blynn's house. To facilitate matters, he took with him the next morning a young man whom he was breaking in as a helper.

It never occurred to Roger as he carted his ladders and tools to the house the next morning that he would find nothing there to guide him in his search for Mary. Sure-

ly there must be something, some letter in a remote corner, that would give him a clew.

He put his helper to work in the dining room, then hustled his own ladder and tools upstairs and started immediately on Mary's bedroom. First he moved all the furniture to an adjoining chamber, a piece at a time. As he dismantled the bed he searched carefully the pillows, linen, and mattress, giving particular attention to the latter for a secret recess. He found nothing.

Next he searched the bureau and dressing table, ransacking all the drawers, shaking out all the things they contained. When this failed to yield results, he tipped the chairs up and looked underneath their seats. Still there was nothing.

Finally, when he had made a thorough examination of all the pictures and photographs hung about the walls, there was nothing left in the room but the rug. His heart palpitated with apprehension as he started rolling it up, hoping at every moment to discover an envelope, fearing that he would be disappointed. He was.

He was trembling nervously as he started madly on the other room, and perspiration stood out upon his face, not so much from exertion as at the thought that the Polecat had beaten him to it. The result in this room was the same.

Stripped of its furnishings, he stood staring at the bleak walls, hope dying in his heart, despair written on his face.

Automatically, from long habit, his eyes wandered about the room, searching for holes in the plaster and loose paper. Suddenly they became fixed on a blank wall—the wall where Milton Henderson's bed had stood. Was it writing he saw? It was.

He crossed the room rapidly and examined it closely. A crude arrow pointed diagonally to the upper corner of a chimney. Under it was written, "Follow the arrow," the last word trailing off into a dim nothingness as though the writer had become exhausted with the effort.

"The last conscious act of Milton Henderson," Roger decided as he ran to the next room and returned with the stepladder, which he set up before the chimney.

He mounted it and ran his fingers over the surface of the wall until they encountered a slight hump which he knew from experience to be a metal plate covering an unused stovepipe hole. A peculiarity in the way the paper had been applied attracted his attention.

Instead of a single strip of paper covering the chimney from floor to ceiling, it had been cut to leave the hole open. Then, evidently at a later date, for the paper was newer, somebody had inserted the plate in the hole and pasted over it a round piece of paper of the same pattern as that which covered the rest of the room, matching the patterns carefully so that a casual observer would not detect the alteration.

Roger pried the plate loose with his putty knife, and there in the chimney hole, covered with soot and rust, was a small, oblong metal box. He took it out and carried it to the window.

Lifting the cover, for the box was not locked, he found within a package of bank notes. On top of them lay a small, folded paper.

Roger picked up the paper first and read it:

To Whoever Finds This Box:

The money contained herein is what remains of a once huge fortune. Samuel Blynn has the rest. If this is found by him, let him take it and be d——d. But if, by chance, it should fall into the hands of a friend, let him deliver it to my granddaughter, Mary Henderson, whom God has taken from me as a penalty for my sins. You will find her, or be able to locate her, through Mrs. Gladys Benton, residing at 1074 Juniper Street, Chicago. If you are a friend, you can find Mary. If you are a foe, you cannot. I shall not try to locate her or persuade her to return, because, in the first place, there is nothing but this for her to return to, and if Blynn made her take him with it, it would not be worth while.

I die without making a will, because there is nothing to will. So far as the world knows, I die insolvent. But the money in this box was intrusted to my care by Mary Henderson's mother, and though I have had to borrow sums larger than herein contained to feed that bloodsucker, Blynn, yet I have kept this intact. The last and only thing I can do in this world, is try to get it to its lawful owner. If Blynn finds it, as I fear he will, there is no hope that it will ever

get further than his pocket. But I can only pray that some more gracious soul beats him to it. MILTON HENDERSON.

Putting the letter away in his pocket, Roger counted the money. There were fifty one-thousand-dollar bills. Trembling with excitement, he gathered them up in his hand, rose to his feet, and was about to deposit them in his pocket, when he became suddenly conscious of the fact that he was not alone.

In the doorway, with a small automatic pistol in his hand, stood the Polecat. Roger stared at him.

"Thank you," said Blynn ironically, "for finding this money for me. I'll take it now if you don't mind."

Roger Howe stood like a cornered animal.

"But I do mind," he shouted grimly. "Come and take it.'

Blynn waved his pistol significantly, but Roger only shook his head. Sparring for time, he said:

"That isn't a good way to get it. It wouldn't do you any good, Blynn, if you killed me for it."

This made little or no impression, and the Polecat advanced slowly across the room.

"I know of a better way," Roger continued.

"How?" asked the lawyer.

"If you will withdraw your charge of libel against Mary Henderson. I will give it to you without violence—if not, you'll have to fight for it, and there's just a chance that I might win."

The lawyer hesitated. Roger urged him on.

"Fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money, Polecat, and this is an easy way to get it."

Just at that moment there came a voice from the door. It was Roger's helper, who, totally unconscious of what was going on, wanted to know where there was a hammer.

Blynn wheeled about in his tracks. Before he realized that he had left Roger uncovered, the latter sprang for the gun. It was not a difficult matter to wrest it from the Polecat's unsuspecting grip. The lawyer turned again and stared into the muzzle of his own weapon.

"I never suspected such luck as this," said Roger. "At last I've got you just where you belong. Now, if you'll just step into the next room here and sit down at the writing desk, I'll give you a little lesson in penmanship."

Blynn had no alternative. A secretary stood among the other furniture, and Blynn sat down before it.

"You'll find some paper in the drawer there," Roger directed. "Take this pen and write what I tell you, or by the Lord Harry, your dried-up little carcass won't be worth a five-cent bottle of glue to patch it together."

Samuel Blynn must be given credit for one thing. He knew when it was time to quit.

Taking the pen in his hand, he wrote without hesitation the confession which Roger dictated, and when it was finished he signed his name to it.

Roger's helper was called in to witness the signature.

It was a document, couched in legal phraseology, confessing that Samuel Blynn had for years been blackmailing Milton Henderson; had received vast sums of money from this operation. He also confessed to the truth of the statements in Mary Henderson's note, regarding him, and formally withdrew his suit against her for libel.

When it was finished, Roger Howe folded it carefully and put it in his pocket.

"And now," he said, "I regret to inform you, Mr. Blynn, that I will be so engrossed from now on as to make it impossible for me to finish the work on this house which I started out to do. You will have to get somebody else to finish it. I take the greatest pleasure in bidding you good-by forever."

Fifteen minutes later the following telegram was on its way to Chicago:

Don't worry, Mary darling. Coming on next train. Have great news for you.
ROGER.

THE END

THE READER'S VIEWPOINT

JOHN HOPPER, author of " Recognition " in this issue, is a member of the graduating class at the United States Military Academy and one of the editors of the *Pointer*. And speaking of West Point, our readers may be interested in learning that Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift, whose stories they have liked so much, married Lieutenant Kenneth F. March, a last year's graduate, and is now the happy mother of the class baby. This means that young Harry V. March gets the silver cup awarded to the first boy born to a graduate. Each year the napkin rings used by the class in the mess hall are melted to make this cup. All of which leads up to the bugle call mentioned in the enthusiastic indorsement of " Land of the Free " printed below.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

I am not in the habit of giving editors my opinion of stories contained in their magazines, but Charles Alden Seltzer's story, " Land of the Free," is so good, as a story and as a patriotic document that I cannot help taking off my hat to him, and wishing that every American and every foreigner could read it.

It is the best story he ever composed—a bugle call to America and Americans; a powerful appeal for liberty, tolerance, justice and peace!

It is a Western story of the best class, free from the ridiculousness of the average story of the impossible West. C. H. C.

DALLAS, TEXAS.

Last summer while traveling I met a friend. I still like that friend. It is the ARGOSY. I am a great reader and went over to another camper's cottage to see if I could borrow anything to read. She gave me a magazine. It was the ARGOSY. Beginning in it was the story, " Horsemen Against the Moon." I sure did like that and became so interested in it that I continued buying copies.

The best story the ARGOSY has ever printed is " The Mark of the Moccasin," by Kenneth Perkins. That was a sure enough mystery tale, and I don't think I will ever forget it.

Those war stories, " Battle Sight," " War Spawn," and " Thundering Dawns " were all good. I liked " Thundering Dawns " best.

" The Devil's Saddle," by Perkins, was real good. Some of my favorites are " Silent Jerry," " The Land of the Free," " The Crucible," " On to Florida," " The War Chief," and " The Wrong Side of Fifth Avenue."

I am for a moderate number of Western stories, 'cause once in awhile I like to read about the West as it used to be. More mystery tales, more adventure, more romance, more war stories, that's my slogan. M. B.

SEATTLE, WASH.

I am a regular reader of your magazine for the reason that the stories are always clean and still red-blooded with plenty of thrills. You are to be congratulated for it in this day of sex-complexes and kindred rot.

You asked for an opinion on " An Old Hat." Seems to me *Jenks* would better have kept still about his wife setting the house on fire and somehow found out how much the insurance was and how much the loss to *Daly* was and then *Jenks* and his wife have worked to get this money and then reimburse both anonymously. The way you have it, it's cheating the insurance company.

I am glad to see a story by Burroughs, and also enjoyed a whole lot Garret Smith's " I've Come to Stay," which I have just finished reading. Why don't we get more by these two writers? K. F. J.

WILLISTON, N. D.

Have just finished " Land of the Free," by Charles Alden Seltzer. It is a wonderful story, and won't you please ask Mr. Seltzer not to wait so long before giving us another? I remember " Mystery Land " and " Channing Comes Through." They were fine. I like Mr. Seltzer's stories very much.

" Moonglow," by C. F. Coe, was fine. I am a Southerner, and I was homesick while reading it. " Alkali " was another fine story, and I liked " The Rider o' Spook Hollow " very much.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for years, and like all of the stories. But please do not omit the Westerns. You can't please every one, so leave the ARGOSY as it is.

Can't we have another story by Charles Neville Buck? His " Flight to the Hills " was a fine story, and I wish we could have another like it. " The War Chief," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, is fine.

Just a word for the Reader's Viewpoint. I read every letter before reading a story, and I hope that you continue this page, as it adds much to the magazine.

A satisfied reader,
MRS. V. H.

PANHANDLE, TEXAS.

If I may be allowed the pleasure, will make my bow to the Reader's Viewpoint. Have been reading the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY for some time, and must say that I like the stories better than those in the higher priced magazines. Am enjoying " War Chief " and " Forged Faces," but must disagree with Mr. Wilstach, in regard to love. He

states: "In real life, I believe, seldom will a man continue to love without hope . . . Love must see the chance of being reciprocated or the emotion dies, as the flame of a candle expires in a vacuum." I know better, for I have had the experience.

I very seldom read first person stories, but there is something about "Forged Faces" that grips. Possibly it is in his vivid portrayal of character. I enjoy Westerns, the kind written by men who know the West and its people.

A. F. B.

CLEVELAND, OHIO.

Why is it that movies taken from stories run in the ARGOSY are mostly all flunks? "Flight to the Hills" as a story was great. As a movie it was simply rotten. "Canon of Light" was all right in a way, but the story had the picture beat a mile. The only film which I remember seeing that followed the plot of the story closely was "Where Was I?" by Franklin. The movie hero was *Reginald Denny*. I surely enjoyed that picture. Almost burst laughing.

By the way, Mr. Editor, was it the ARGOSY which first printed that tale, the "Curse of Capistranto," by Johnston McCulley? (Yes, it was, or rather the *All-Story*.)

As to the discussion about how many Westerns to run per issue, keep the ARGOSY as it now is. It suits me to a T. I read about one of your readers not liking Kenneth Perkins's stories about "hombre," *et cetera*. That's all the bunk. Perkins is a good writer, and he has a style all his own. I somehow look forward to his "hombre," *et cetera*.

I guess it is enough for me to say that I, too, would walk a mile for the ARGOSY if it cost fifty cents instead of ten cents.

A.

MABELVALE, ARK.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for the last four years and consider it one of the best magazines on the market. I like the Western stories best, and if it is not asking too much I should like to see Charles Alden Seltzer's "Drag Harlan" appear again in the ARGOSY

J. B.

IRVINGTON, N. J.

You are inviting readers to tell when and how they happened to buy their first copy of the ARGOSY. I bought mine about three years ago, having noticed a story by Edgar Rice Burroughs pictured on the cover, and I have been a steady reader of your magazine ever since.

Mr. Burroughs is my favorite author, and I have read every one of his stories, those that have run in the ARGOSY and those published in book form. His story, "The War Chief," now running in your magazine, is excellent, but tell him to give us a more unusual story. Other authors write of the American Indian, and give us just as real and interesting characters as Burroughs; keep him to the Mars, the Tarzan, and his own fascinating type of story. Let him leave the Indian for some other writer.

About Westerns, keep just the number you have now. No more and no less. Why not some business stories? Or stories of horses? "The Pot of Pansies" in this issue is enjoyable. Hulbert Footner gets better with every escapade of his famous character—*Mme. Storey*. And by all means continue the Reader's Viewpoint.

H. E. W., JR.

GROTON, CONN.

Connecticut doesn't seem to have much to say in regard to the different subjects under discussion in the Viewpoint, so if you don't mind, I'll say a few words. Having read the ARGOSY ever since I can remember, there isn't anything more to be said in favor of it. No better stories for any class of men, women and even youngsters could be bought for any price than in the ARGOSY.

Before now I have had in my jeans just one dime. Did I buy a small pack of smokes, a sandwich, or an ARGOSY? Thousands of miles from my home, a whole night and day until pay day, nothing to eat, or smoke, but I spent that dime for an ARGOSY and lived on the real life as found on its pages.

I could strangle some of your critics who attempt to knock our magazine. Let them travel and see if they can see such things as names of streets, *et cetera*, when, to write stories, one must live in an inspired and romantic realm.

I have read the ARGOSY in such localities as England, British Columbia, Alberta, in the Yukon, in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and now Connecticut, and if there isn't an ARGOSY in heaven I won't stay there.

Keep up the good work, Mr. Editor; don't let anybody kid you at all.

L. R.

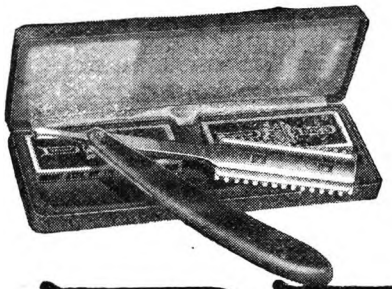
P. S.—It is a deliberate falsehood to say "There ain't no Santa Claus," as long as the ARGOSY is delivered for a dime! Good luck.

CHARLESTOWN, MASS.

I have been a reader of your ARGOSY since the days of the *Cavalier, Railroad Man's Magazine, All-Story, et cetera*, and I have not missed a copy. I like all your authors, and the fact that I never miss a copy puts me as a good judge of ARGOSY. A year ago I met with an injury to my spine and have been in three hospitals; seeing the authors discussed in the Reader's Viewpoint I made a canvass among the patients of the three hospitals who were all ARGOSY readers and I am sending you the results. (Question) If you could change the ARGOSY to suit yourself would you cut out all the Western stories? One hundred and eighty-three, yes; seventy-two, all but one a copy; fourteen, no, print more of them.

I talked with two hundred and sixty men and women in all classes of life. In closing will say you are doing fine as you are. I read all your stories; have no favorites. Wishing you and authors success, also my deepest tribute to the late Mr. Munsey, whom I met while in the U. S. N.

T. F. O'B.



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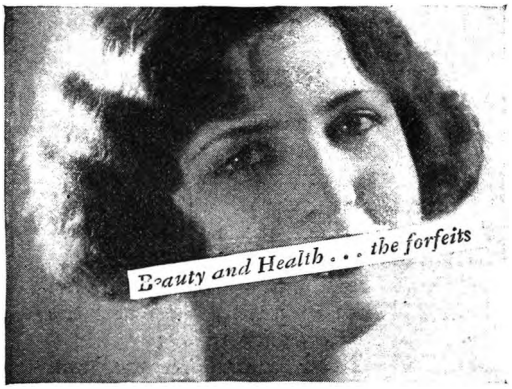

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"After demonstration I find there were over eleven hundred nails and spikes in one tire."
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400 Punctures in Four Tires Without a Leak.

"Have punctured all four of my tires at least four hundred times and they still stand up."
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"While driving my car through snow at 20° below zero, one of my Air-Stop treated tires picked up a big nail. I pulled the nail and Air-Stop sealed puncture."
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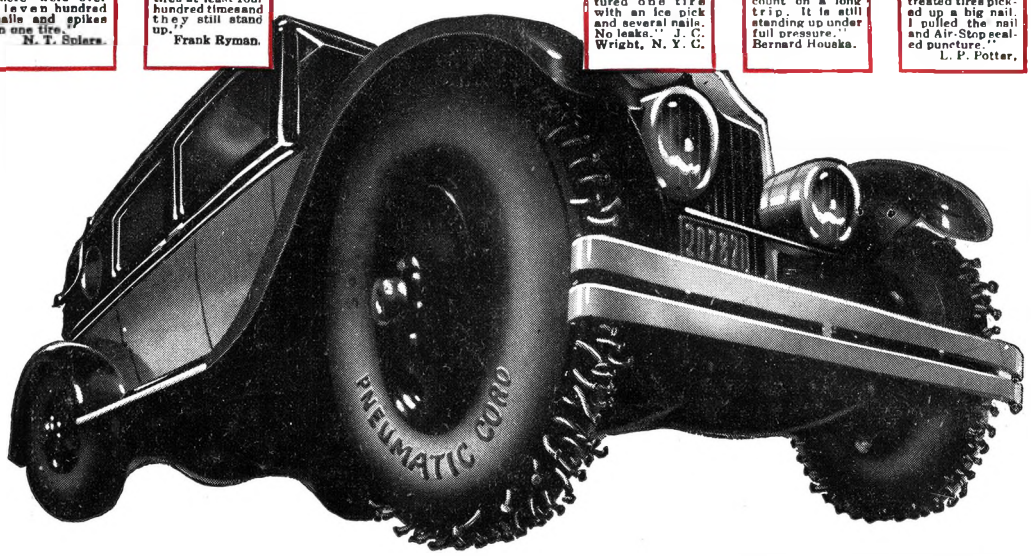

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Car owners—now you are free at last from the worst nuisance of owning a car—changing punctured tires. Now your punctures can be sealed automatically, as they occur, without removing the tire from the wheel. Save time yanking at tight rims and bolts. Prevent spoiled trips or dirty hands and clothes. It seals nail holes, slow leaks, valve leaks, porous tubes, etc., instantly. Over 1,000,000 car owners now protect their tires with Air-Stop. You can test Air-Stop at manufacturers' risk. Mail coupon.

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No More Changing Tires

Think what a wonderful relief this invention means to car owners! No more changing tires and patching tubes on hot, dusty roads—in blazing sun, drenching rains on dark nights or in freezing snow-storms. Women can now drive without fear of puncture accidents. And in addition to the convenience, think of the economy.

So quickly does Air-Stop prove its story that Air-Stop representatives demonstrate its wonderful service by driving nails into their own tires and letting car owners see the truth with their own eyes! That is why this is such a wonderful money-making opportunity for ambitious men in their full or spare time. That is why we can dare to send you a sample can of Air-Stop and lose the cost of the preparation if you say that it doesn't work.

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