ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

FEB. 9

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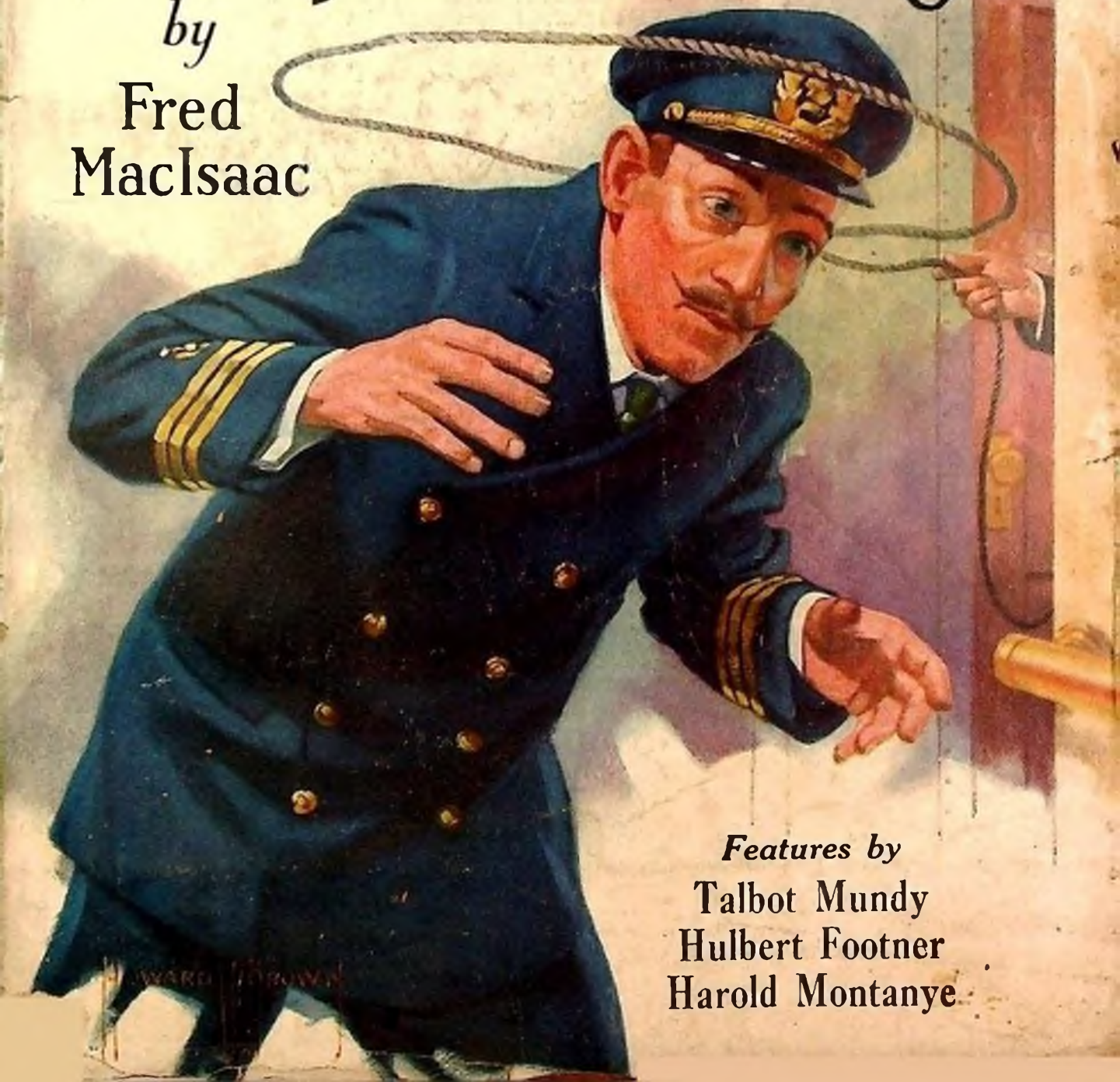
Shipmates with Mystery and Death!

The Spectral Passenger

by Fred MacIsaac



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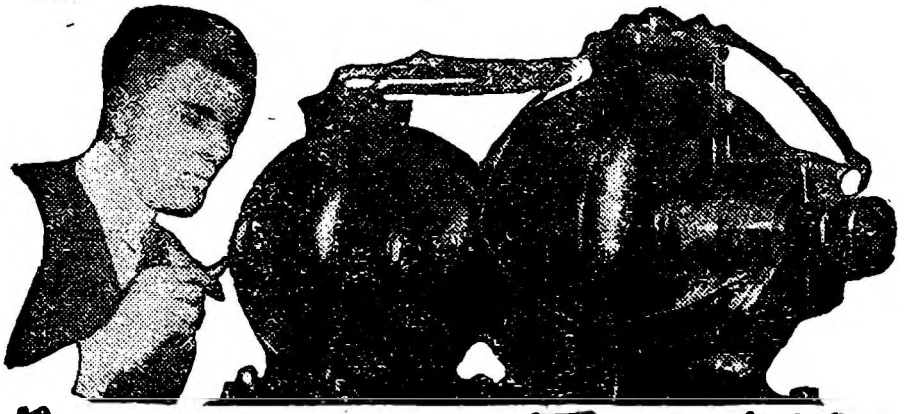

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Entered as second-class matter November 18, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

Last Year's Pay Looks Like Small Change to These Men Today!

Here Are Six Men Who Were Formerly Caught in the Hopeless Treadmill of Low-Pay Jobs. Today Every One of Them Reports Earnings from $4,000 up to $10,000 a Year! Right Now—the Same Opportunity That Changed Their Lives So Completely Is Open to YOU! Don't Fail to Read Every Word of This Vital Message!

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R. B. Hansen, Akron, O., writes that he jumped his earnings from $160 a month to $10,000 a year as a result of reading the amazing book, "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship."

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L. O. Halloman, Roswell, New Mex., was a farmer. He wanted to be a salesman and N. S. T. A. helped him. Now he says his earnings are $700 in one month.

$2,500 Increase

As a pattern-maker, the income of Kingsley Rowland, Audubon, N. J., was limited to $1,500 a year. Now he writes that it is about $4,000, thanks to N. S. T. A.

$7,200 a Year

F. J. Walsh, Springfield, Mass., thanks N. S. T. A. training for his sensational rise from $1,000 a year as a clerk to over $7,200 a year.

$4,800 More

F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn., writes that he raised his pay $4,800 after reading "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship." He credits N.S.T.A. with a great deal of his success

WHEN a man who has been struggling along in a low-pay job suddenly steps out and starts earning real money—$5,000, $7,500 or $10,000 a year, he usually gives his friends quite a shock. It is hard for them to believe that he is the same man they used to know. Take one of the men whose pictures appear on this page—Kingsley Rowland of New Jersey, for example. His pals in the shop where he was working as a pattern-maker laughed at his ambitions to make more money. But he knew what he wanted, and he set about getting it in the shortest possible way. A remarkable free book, "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship," opened his eyes to the opportunities in the selling profession. This book proved that Master Salesmen are *made*, not "born." It told facts and secrets about money-making that were a positive revelation. And best of all, it outlined a simple plan that enables men from all walks of life to quickly reach the top without spending years on the road—without losing a day or a dollar from their present positions!

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National Salesmen's Training Association
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March Issue

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ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 201 | SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1929 | NUMBER 3

Their ears were pierced by a wild and blood-curdling scream

The Spectral Passenger

A secret mission, and a trip for his health: such were Lionel Wing's plans in taking ship for Rio—never suspecting that a human ghoul who battened on death lay waiting for him

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Press Agent," "The Golden Burden," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A CRYPTIC MESSAGE.

IN the body of Lionel Wing a great battle was raging. The body lay inert on a cot bed in a darkened room in a hospital. Beside the bed stood a nurse, a placid, stout, middle-aged woman, who was aware of the mighty struggle inside the still form beneath the white sheet; but she did not permit it to disturb her serenity, for she had been present at many such contests between life and death, and had often seen the gray flag planted on the face of a patient.

Lionel Wing was unaware that the crisis in the battle had arrived, for he was sunk in torpor. If he thought at all, he would have thought himself neutral.

The original germ of his disease had multiplied itself until it was a mighty army, billions strong, which had ravaged him from top to toe and was now waging the deciding battle with the healthy blood corpuscles reënforced by the elements introduced into his body by medicine.

The battle raged long and furiously, no quarter asked or given. The ugly champions of disease hacked and thrust and devoured; the defenders and their medical allies fought with the desperation of despair.

The doctor entered the room on tiptoe, and lifted eyebrows to the nurse, who shook her head sadly. He bent over the patient, bared his side, and jabbed a needle into the wasted body. Immediately myriads of militant but beneficent germs poured into the blood of the battle-racked man. They swirled through the veins and arteries, mortal enemies of the virulent assailants. They came at the high tide of the fight, swelled the thinning ranks of corpuscles, flung themselves upon the almost victorious disease hordes, and now the enemy gave way and took to flight, relentlessly pursued and devoured by the other germs—cannibals all.

The doctor was looking at his watch and studying the face of the human battleground. Half an hour passed, and upon it appeared a change so slight as to be invisible to any but the trained eye of the great specialist. The doctor closed the cover of his old-fashioned timepiece.

"The crisis is past," he said. "I think he is going to live. Follow my instructions to the letter. I shall return in two or three hours."

And so Lionel Wing came back from the valley of the shadow of death into the land of substance, and passed from his trancelike state into a deep and healthful sleep. He was still in danger, but the depleted ranks of blood corpuscles began to multiply; the foreign allies had eaten the last of the disease bugs, but their own loss had been so enormous that the ungrateful corpuscles were able to destroy them in turn and devote themselves to the restoration of their residence, the body of Lionel Wing.

There were weeks of convalescence, a long, languid period where he took no interest in anything except food and sleep, and then a week when he was able to sit up upon pillows and read and think and talk with his nurse and the doctor.

"You need a sea voyage," said the physician. "You have worked too hard, taking no care of yourself. It's a miracle you're alive. Give yourself a chance now to get on your feet before you go back to the grind. Get on a ship bound south, where the warm winds will blow on you as you lie in your deck-chair.

"Take a boat to Rio or Buenos Aires. Three or four weeks at sea will make a new man of you."

"But my business?" he protested.

The doctor smiled.

"What would happen to it if you had died?"

DISCHARGED from the hospital, Lionel Wing made his way to his office, which was located in an old building in a very narrow street not far from the Battery in lower New York.

The elevator man in his shabby uniform—a rusty, superannuated elevator man, such as could no longer find employment in smart office buildings—greeted him in friendly fashion.

"People been looking for me?" Wing asked as he entered.

"The first week or two after you was taken sick, sir, there was an inquiry or so; but nobody has been looking for you lately."

He walked down the corridor of the fourth floor to a door which said

LIONEL WING
Exports and Imports

He unlocked it and entered. The dust lay thick on the floor, the single desk, and the uncovered typewriter. Half a dozen letters were on the mat, having been pushed through the slot on the door; and these he swooped upon. None of them were of any business importance. His had been a one-man business and never very prosperous; recently it had been dwindling so that he would have been compelled to retire sooner or later in any event. The illness made it sooner.

"Well," he said to himself, after tearing up the letters and tossing them in the wastebasket, "nothing to prevent me from making a sea voyage; and when I come back I'll try something besides the commission business."

He opened his desk and began to go over the contents of the pigeonholes, destroying most of the papers as he read them. It was a very depressing business. Wing, on leaving college, had secured a job with a commission merchant who was already on the downward path in business and who did not change his direction despite the energy and efforts of his clerk. When he died intestate, and without any relatives to take over his business, Wing had decided to open up for himself, and easily carried over what few profitable accounts his old employer had left.

However, the day of the small commission broker in imports and exports had passed; and he found it more and more difficult to make both ends meet as the years went by. He knew no other line, and worry had contributed much to his illness. After settling with the doctors and the hospital he found himself with less than a thousand dollars in the world, and an expensive sea voyage in prospect which would consume that tiny balance.

Determining to visit a steamship agency and make inquiries regarding long, cheap steamship trips, he pulled down his rolltop. His office furniture was worthless, his rent overdue, and he might as well turn the stuff over to the agent of the building with his key.

The agent's office was on the same floor, and, upon entering, he found Mr. Hanson, the agent, talking with a dark, heavily built man with a thick black beard.

"Congratulations, Mr. Wing," said the agent, rising. "You look pale and thin, but it must be great to be out and about again."

"Thanks," he replied. "I'm compelled to go out of business, and I'm turning over to you my office and its contents. The doctor says I've got to have a sea voyage, and I'm off to find out which is the longest for the least money."

The bearded man inspected Wing with sudden interest.

"Why don't you go to South America, sir?" he said with a pronounced Latin accent.

"I'm afraid it's beyond my pocketbook," he said with a short laugh. "I have been laid up for nearly two months, and hospitals and doctors are expensive."

The stranger eyed him hard. Wing was an open-faced young man whose integrity was written on his countenance. There was ability evident there too, though his business experience so far would not appear to confirm it.

"It might be arranged," said the man hesitatingly. "Mr. Hanson, please to introduce me."

"Sure. This is Mr. Hernando Sortez, Mr. Wing. He has an office on the ground floor and transacts business with South America."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Sortez; I've seen your sign."

"Well, it might be arranged. Will

you go back to your office, Mr. Wing, and wait for a few moments?"

"Certainly," Wing declared, with a sudden lift of spirits.

Was it possible he was going to receive aid in his extremity? Bowing to Mr. Sortez, he went back to his office and seated himself.

In five minutes the door opened, and the big man came in, smiling through his beard.

"I WISHED to ask some questions about you, sir," he began. "That is why I asked you to wait for me. You have never done business with Brazil, I believe."

"No, sir. Entirely with Central America, Italy and Greece."

"Do you speak Portuguese?"

"I'm sorry, I don't. I understand French and some Spanish."

"It will serve. Mr. Hanson says he knows you since five years. He speaks highly of you, sir."

"Very kind of him," replied Wing with a flush of pleasure.

Sortez took a chair.

"On Saturday next," he began, "the Stella Maris sails for Rio. If you are willing to do me a slight service I will provide you with a round-trip ticket. It is a very little thing."

"I am short of money, and a round-trip ticket to Rio would solve a great problem for me," Wing replied. "What do you wish me to do, sir?"

"There is a friend of mine who lives in Petropolis, which is in the hills a very short distance from Rio de Janeiro," said Sortez in a low tone. "I wish to give him a message. It is to be whispered in his ear. It so happens that the mails and the cables are not to be trusted, for there are those who would distort this message or prevent it from being delivered.

"I was in a quandary, as you Americans say, when you spoke of your sea voyage. Because you have never visited Rio de Janeiro nor have been engaged in business with that country, because you are an honest young man I think you can do this for me."

"Is it at all dangerous, getting to your friend?" Wing asked. "I'm still a bit weak from my illness."

"Not at all. No, sir. You will whisper a few words in his ear, and he will give you one thousand dollars. No one will suspect you. It is easy."

"It sounds so."

"Only you must be sure you deliver it to my friend. I will show you his picture so you may identify him."

He produced from a breast pocket a small photograph, which he passed to Lionel. It presented an elderly man with small bright eyes and a very imposing white mustache. Wing thought he would have no trouble identifying him. He made to pocket it, but Sortez protested.

"No. You must memorize him. It would be bad if his portrait were in your possession."

"Just as you say, sir. What do I tell this gentleman—what's his name and address?"

"Senhor Don Jaime Portala. He resides on the Rua Carlos, Petropolis, and this is what you will say." He leaned forward so close that Wing realized he had eaten garlic at his last meal.

"Let not the sun set till the moon rises."

Wing looked perplexed. "Is that a code?" he demanded.

"No. We have a code, but it has been discovered. He will understand."

The American laughed.

"And for telling him that I get a thousand dollars and a round trip to Rio. Your offer is accepted, sir."

"You will not forget?"

"No; I'll write it down."

"By no means; you must memorize it."

"Well, that's easy."

"*Bien.* Now I will give you the money for your steamer. You must not come into my office; and if you meet me, you do not know me. I came up

to see the agent to renew my lease, so nobody below is aware I have done business with Mr. Lionel Wing."

He rose. "I wish you a pleasant voyage, sir."

CHAPTER II.

ROLLING DOWN TO RIO.

THERE are rapid and luxurious liners rolling south to Rio, but the Stella Maris was an old and shamelessly slow freight steamer with accommodations for about fifty passengers whom she carried from New York to the Brazilian capital for about two-thirds the minimum rate charged by the express boats.

On board this vessel on the following Saturday was Lionel Wing, who lay in a deck-chair wrapped in blankets as the steamer poked her way down the East River and passed the Statue of Liberty.

It was a fine day for the season—just the end of the Indian summer—and the convalescent drew in deep drafts of the east wind which swept up the harbor from the open sea, and realized how sage had been the advice of his physician.

The passengers moved back and forth on the deck in front of him, and he gazed at them with the natural interest of one who expected no other associations for a month or so. It was a short promenade deck, and they passed and repassed him. The Stella Maris was a snub-nosed, squat, one-funnel steamer, her meager passenger quarters located on a high deck amidships, with a deep cargo well fore and aft, and with a high forecastle and stern.

Her masts were short, really derricks; her cargo capacity six thousand tons, and she was less than half full, and so much out of the water that she would roll like a drunkard if the sea became rough.

In his stateroom Wing had found a box of flowers bearing the card of the middle-aged nurse who had pulled him through, and this had so touched him in his weakened condition that he had wept.

He was pale and very thin, but more than one of the women passengers had thrown appreciative glances at the figure in the deck-chair; for Wing was only thirty, and, being blond and curly of hair, possessing a strong straight nose, a firm mouth, and a well-shaped chin, he was unlikely to escape feminine scrutiny.

More than half the passengers were Brazilians, he surmised; dark men with black eyes, some of them with luxuriant jet whiskers; short, overplump women, with round, attractive faces, whitened to absurdity with powder.

There was an American family which interested him especially. The father was very tall, very thin, with a drooping gray mustache and tired-looking blue eyes. He wore a black coat with a cape, and leaned heavily on a cane. The mother had been beautiful, and her face was very sweet, though heavily lined and without a vestige of color. She wore a fur coat, beaver, which was in need of repair. The girl seemed to be about twenty, tall, slight, graceful, and pretty. She had a way of turning her head which reminded him of a robin; her eyes were black and lustrous, her profile perfection. She looked like an intelligent girl, somebody with whom it would be good to talk. She had a delightful laugh; it was musical, free, and inspiring. She walked between her parents, holding to an arm of each, and she apparently was not aware of his presence, although they passed his chair a dozen times.

It seemed to him probable that they would become acquainted since there were so few American passengers on board, and the thought of being confined to a ship for three or four weeks in her company caused him to tingle with satisfaction. He had looked for-

ward to the voyage on the freighter as a tedious experience to be endured in the interest of his health; now he wondered if it would not be a delightful trip.

When a man is young and has leisure he yearns for youthful companionship of the other sex. Wing knew a bit about women, being thirty, and a resident of New York City; but since his college days he had not been in love. It would be wonderful, indeed, to be in love on a steamer sailing over calm azure tropic seas. In the meantime, it was pleasant enough to lie in his comfortable chair and see the girl pass every now and then.

THERE was a blond girl, too, who was attractive; older than the other, better dressed, if he was any judge of what women consider smart costuming; smaller, rounded, and self-possessed to an extraordinary degree. She seemed to be alone, and promenaded briskly, carrying under her left arm a small brown Pekingese who looked out upon the world with the sublime indifference of such animals. She wore a brown English tweed coat with flowing cape which covered all but the grotesque little face of the animal.

Wing saw a beefy American speak to the girl, who ignored him utterly; and saw her ogled by a sprucely dressed and snappy South American, who received the same treatment. If she were alone, he thought, she could have plenty of company should she desire it.

The girl caught his eye upon one of her trips past his chair, stopped and came right over to seat herself in the vacant chair beside him, removing the little dog from beneath her arm and depositing it upon her lap, where it immediately curled up like a brown ball and went to sleep.

"Hello," she said to Lionel Wing. "You've been sick, haven't you?"

"Yes," he admitted. "Is it so obvious?"

"You look kind of pale and peaked. Making a trip for your health?"

He nodded. "Typhoid. I'm getting my strength back rapidly though."

"That's good," she smiled. "Too many mashers on the Boardwalk, so I thought I'd sit alongside of you for awhile and discourage 'em. You don't mind, do you?"

"I'm delighted," Wing assured her. "It's easy to see you're not an invalid."

"No, sir. I'm full of pep and r'aring to go. Ever been to Rio?"

"Never. Have you?"

"Never been on a steamboat before except the Fall River Line and the Albany night boat. This is a terrible old tub, isn't it?"

"Kipling said, 'The liner is a lady,'" he replied, "but I wouldn't consider the Stella Maris in that light."

"More like a scrublady. However, it's cheap, and that's why I'm here. That's why all the others are on board, too, you bet your life."

"I wouldn't be surprised," he admitted. "It certainly is my reason, though I deliberately chose a slow boat to have more time at sea."

"They haven't even got an orchestra. Just a broken down old phonograph in the salon. But we'll manage to make out. I bet you'll be dancing in a few days."

"I'm going to try. May I hope you'll dance with me?"

"Sure. I love to dance. It's my business. I'm going down to Rio to dance in a music hall. Got a six months' contract and good money, too."

"Really? That is splendid, isn't it?"

She grinned. Her grin was very likable, and there was something of the gamin about her, he thought. "Don't know yet. Tell you later. I've been dancing in a cabaret in New York, the Golden Slipper. Ever go there?"

"No. I'm sorry."

"Well, it's kind of a dump. Rio can't be worse. I don't like these brunette gentlemen we have on board. Nearly every one of them has given me the eye already. If I have to be nice to Brazilians I'm going to pick rich ones, and it's a cinch none of these got any dough or he wouldn't be on this boat."

"What kind of an act do you do?" he demanded.

"Toe dancing, Oriental, ballroom, the whole repertory. I sing jazz, too. The girl is gifted."

"I'm sure of it."

"That looks like a nice chicken with momma and poppa," she observed. "I saw her give us a side glance just now. S'pose she thinks we're married because I'm sitting beside you."

"Do you think so?" he asked uneasily. This little dancer was pleasant and friendly, but he hoped the other girl wouldn't think she was his wife.

"I'm going to annex her. Nobody else anywhere near my age on board, and a young girl needs a friend. Mutual protection society."

"She has her parents," he reminded the girl.

"Yes. I thought of that. I'll annex mother too. Say, I bet that gong means lunch, and I'm so hungry I could eat a horse. What's your name?"

"Lionel Wing."

"Isn't that a weird name? Mine's Doris Drexel. Going down to lunch? Need a strong arm to lean on?"

"Oh, I can walk all right. It's kind of you, though. I think I'll sit on deck awhile longer."

"Well, see you again," she chirped as she swung to her feet. "Come on, Dodo; mamma has to put you in her stateroom and you must be careful not to eat any of her shoes."

She strode away and he looked after her with a whimsical smile. She was a friendly little thing, this cabaret singer, and cheerful. He needed cheer too. Of course the other girl would soon find out he was not married to the merry dancer.

CHAPTER III.

THE OCTOPUS MAN.

THE luncheon gong had the result of clearing the deck, and Wing was soon conscious of the urge to eat. He had no difficulty making the dining salon, for he was recovering rapidly from his illness, and only the fact that he was easily fatigued recalled it.

The dining salon of the Stella Maris was a room on the lower deck which seated eighty persons at tables accommodating eight, and he found that the chief steward, a rotund Cockney, had already separated what he considered the goats from the sheep, in other words had put the South Americans on one side of the room and the North Americans and English on the other.

Wing found himself at the purser's table, seated on that officer's right, and in company which was entirely masculine. He caught the eye of the cabaret girl at the table beyond, and saw that she had managed to secure a place with the American family he had admired, the daughter of which had her back to Wing, worse luck.

The purser had not come down and the seat opposite Wing was vacant, but a solid young Middle Westerner sat at his right, two Hebrews, obviously salesmen, were placed beyond, and upon the other side was a short, squat, elderly man with a clean-shaved purplish red face, one of those perpetually traveling Englishmen.

He addressed the steward, this Englishman. He said:

"The soup was very nawsty."

"Right you are, brother," zoomed the chap on Wing's right. "It's awful."

The red-faced man looked at him out of pale blue eyes and disdained to answer. The Middle Westerner turned to Wing.

"Can you beat that?" he asked whimsically. "Bad soup and bum company."

The steward set before Wing a plate of the condemned soup, and he tasted it before replying.

"A good deal like dishwater," he said with a smile.

The occupant of the seat opposite arrived, and arrested the eyes of the New Yorker. Years before, in the aquarium at Naples, Lionel Wing had looked through glass into the countenance of a giant octopus whose great staring eyes and vicious beak and grisly white body had caused a sickening sensation in his stomach. The person opposite affected him in exactly the same way.

His skull was huge and without a vestige of hair, and the skin was drawn tight and was yellowish white. There were two large, deep-set, grayish eyes beneath brows minus hair; a large hooked nose overhanging a slit of a mouth, for the lips were colorless; a long narrow chin, an incredibly thin neck for what it had to support; and very broad shoulders. The man folded his hands on the table, and Wing saw that the fingers were very long, dead white. The nails protruded like a cat's claws, sharpened to a point. The creature might have been young or old or middle-aged or ageless. Wing could not tell; he just didn't seem human. The Westerner nudged Wing.

"Do you see what I see?" he whispered. "My appetite's gone."

Wing nodded. His own desire for food had vanished. He toyed with some tasteless fish, covertly watching the ghoul-like person opposite, who was attacking his soup with relish; and he wondered strangely about the man. The Hebrews, who had been talking and laughing together, had grown silent, and the Englishman's rubicund countenance seemed to have lost some of its color.

And then the newcomer spoke. He looked about and smiled, and his smile was shocking. The narrow slit of a mouth spread like elastic and revealed two sets of long, yellow teeth with a blue band of gum above and below.

"I trust we shall have a very pleasant voyage," he said in a voice like a creaking hinge. His expressionless eyes were fixed on Wing, who tried to return the smile and succeeded only poorly.

"I hope so," he faltered.

"Oh, sure," retorted the Westerner. Under his breath he added: "Like the deuce we will. They took him out of some grave."

The steward had taken away Lionel's fish and replaced it with a strip of grayish roast beef and a single soggy boiled potato, and he found this dish as unpleasant as what had gone before.

"The beef is very bad," said the Englishman confidentially to his steward. "Haven't you got a cook on this rotten tub?"

Wing dared not look at his vis-à-vis, for he had discovered that the man had an attraction of some sort. He had felt the same when he looked at the octopus and when he looked down from the top of the Woolworth tower. Probably it was like the fascination of a snake for birds.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself," he thought. "He's just a poor sick creature without a pint of blood in his body. Probably a decent fellow, too. The only one who took the trouble to make a general remark."

HE stabbed at some India rubber pudding, sipped a few drops of coffee which seemed to have been concocted entirely of chicory, then nodded to the company and left the table. He found that his hunger returned to him when he reached the deck, and he realized that he had eaten practically nothing. That death's head had made poor food seem worse. A moment later the Midlander came on deck and joined him.

"My name's Gifford," he said as he

flopped down beside the New Yorker. "I hail from Des Moines, and I'm going to Rio to sell brushes. What's your line?"

"Nothing. I've been sick and am just taking a voyage."

"You picked out a fine hooker to travel on," grinned Gifford. "I ought to have known there was a catch in it when they told me this tub cost only half the fare on the regular liners. Man, the grub is terrible, and that bird opposite us gives me the willies. Who do you suppose he is?"

"Not half as bad as he looks, no doubt," replied Wing. "My name is Lionel Wing, and I live in New York. Maybe the food will improve or we'll get so hungry we won't mind it."

"I'm surprised you didn't get a seat with that peach you were sitting with on deck," said Gifford. "She looked good to me."

"I'll introduce you," smiled Wing. "I wish now I had asked her to permit me to join her at table. Is there a big market for American brushes in Brazil?"

"Not as big as there will be after I get there," boasted the salesman. "This is my first chance to see the world, and you bet I'm going to deliver for the firm. I've been studying Spanish for months."

The New Yorker laughed. "Why not Portuguese?"

"Heck, Spanish is hard enough."

"Well, they talk Portuguese in Rio, you know."

"Yeh, but there wasn't a Portuguese teacher in Des Moines that I could find. I'll make them understand my Spanish. Hey, Mr. Sprowle."

He shouted to the purser who had come out on deck and that officer came over.

"Who's the living corpse that sits alongside you in the dining room?" Gifford demanded.

Sprowle who was a dapper little man with black eyes and a black mustache shrugged his shoulders.

"I had to take him at my table," he said. "He's been down with us before. He is in business in Rio. Name of Grimaldi."

"He's an awful looker," declared the man from Des Moines.

The purser pulled at his little mustache. "Look here, gentlemen," he said in a low tone. "May I suggest you be careful with that fellow. Be as polite as you can and avoid trouble with him."

"Oho, a fighter?" came from Gifford.

"No," said the purser. "I'll tell you. It sounds queer, but he's unlucky. Things happen to people that cross him."

"What kind of things?" asked Wing curiously.

"Well, last time he came, a man who sat next to him, changed his table. We buried him at sea. Got cholera. We were quarantined for a month at Rio. A year ago a young woman who was traveling with her husband made an insulting remark about him that he happened to overhear. Her husband stabbed her before the voyage was over and killed himself."

"But he could have had nothing to do with that," protested Wing.

"Apparently not. In Rio they say he has the evil eye. A Brazilian who came up with us last voyage told me that a merchant who beat him in a lawsuit in the courts down there hanged himself a week later. He's unlucky, that's all I have to say about him."

"What does he do in Rio?"

"I understand he is a money lender and that he is enormously rich. He's coming on deck. Please bear in mind what I've told you and don't repeat it. I don't want any of his attentions."

The purser walked hastily away.

"I'VE always heard that sailors were superstitious," said Gifford with a laugh which was not merry. "Here he comes."

Mr. Grimaldi, his big head bent on

his breast, his hands behind his back, was promenading in their direction slowly. As he passed he lifted his head and looked at them, and again that quiver of loathing passed over Wing.

"I trust the voyage will be agreeable," he said in his creaking voice.

"Yes, indeed," replied Wing.

"I certainly hope so, sir," declared Gifford. The two young men looked at each other and smiled shamefacedly.

"He's got our goats all right," observed Gifford. "I'm going to be polite to that guy even if what the purser said don't make sense."

"Three weeks of being courteous to that," mourned Wing. "It's a wonder they sell him a ticket on this ship."

"Afraid he'd make it sink if they didn't."

The two young men talked in desultory fashion for ten minutes while the remainder of the passengers drifted out on deck and began to settle themselves in chairs. The sky was gray and the sea was gray, but it was not rough. There was no excuse for the Stella Maris to roll, but unluckily she needed none. She rolled slowly but with determination, and already some of the South Americans were giving evidence of distress.

"Imagine this ferryboat in a real storm, when she does this in a calm sea," said Gifford. "Wing, I'm glad I met you, anyway, but I wish I had taken the big liner. I don't like the feeling I have inside of me."

"Ever been to sea before?"

"Never saw the ocean until I landed in New York. Say, there's a corking girl."

He referred to the young woman who had first awakened Wing's interest, and who was standing by the companionway. Her parents were not with her and in a few seconds she was joined by the cabaret girl.

"I think we're going to have some luck," smiled Wing. "That little blond likes male company and she'll steer her friend this way."

"I wish I felt better," sighed Gifford. "Even the prospect of meeting two peaches doesn't cheer me the way it ought to. Do you suppose I'm going to be seasick?"

"Wouldn't be surprised if it's your first sea voyage. Look! What a nerve!"

The Grimaldi person had come around the deck house and confronted the two girls. He had lifted his cap and made some remark.

"Why, the fellow is a lady-killer," gasped Gifford. "And he's getting away with that stuff." For the young women had answered him politely and a conversation was going on.

A moment later, with a bow to Miss Drexel, the death's head tucked his hand under the elbow of the other girl and led her along the deck talking earnestly.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Wing. "She seems to like him."

"Pretty girl, but punk taste. I prefer the other one," said Gifford.

"Don't be absurd, there is something back of that. Hush."

For the couple were passing and Lionel Wing saw that the girl was deadly pale and her eyes were frightened. Grimaldi was talking in Portuguese, the crackling words of the language made very disagreeable by his peculiar voice.

"She doesn't want to be with him and she is afraid to refuse," he thought.

At that instant the girl cast a side glance toward the two young men, dropped her eyes and suddenly flushed. Wing read it that she was ashamed to be in such company, that the glance implored suspended judgment.

He suppressed an unreasonable impulse to leap to his feet and seize Grimaldi by the collar. The man, despite his pallor was nearly six feet tall and probably stronger than Wing with his five feet ten, and his recent illness to enfeeble him. Besides, he did not know the young woman, nor had he any right to suppose she was not willingly promenading with the brute.

"I'm going to duck down into my cabin," gasped Gifford. Wing glanced at him and saw that his face was getting green and he had all the evidences of a seasick person.

"You'll be all over it in two or three days or less," Wing grinned. "I suppose that bed is the best thing for you."

GIFFORD clambered to his feet and went off unsteadily along the deck. A moment later the Drexel girl appeared before Lionel.

"How would you like to escort me into the smokeroom?" she demanded. "I understand they have unlocked things and that persons who have the price can buy drinks with alcohol in them."

"I don't mind," he smiled.

"I took a peek in there, but it was full of South Americans and I didn't dare go in alone," she explained as he rose and joined her. "I don't really care for a drink, but it's something to do, and rather fun to see them serving without fear of the prohibition men." The smokeroom was a dark narrow den at the rear of the deckhouse with accommodations for only a score at four or five small tables and there were a dozen masculine persons already in the place puffing clouds of smoke. Wing settled the girl in a corner and sat beside her. She wanted a green crème de menthe, and he ordered the same.

"Who is that young lady you were talking with?" he asked. "She's an American, isn't she?"

"Sure. Her name is Wenham and she's traveling with her folks. They live in Rio. Did you see what waltzed up and joined us? A regular bogy man."

"Yes, he sits opposite me in the dining salon, worse luck. His name is Grimaldi."

"Well, he knows the Wenhams. He just took her by the arm and walked her off. If he tried to do that to me I'd take a poke at him."

"Better not," he whispered. Then he told her what the purser had said.

"A jinx, no less," she exclaimed. "Well, he looks the part. I'll be careful not to start anything, but I'm hanged if I let him take up much of my time. Imagine three weeks on this scow! Wasn't the chow terrible?"

"I couldn't eat much of it," he admitted.

"Something fierce. Who was the big hick sitting with you?"

"He's not a hick. He's a brush salesman from Des Moines."

"Hah, that makes him a hick. He looks kind of nice, though. It's the mail order suit of clothes and the colored socks that caught my eye. Say, this green stuff is good. Lucky the chef on this coal barge doesn't get a chance to cook the liquor. Say, that brown man with the whiskers over there has been making signs for me to come over and join him. A lady is going to have a tough time on this boat. I hitched onto the Wenham family and what I drew right away was the Grimaldi curiosity. It's beginning to dawn on me that I may not like Rio if what's on the boat are samples of the population. I don't think you are very strong for me, Lionel, but you'll just have to put up with me unless you can make the brush salesman take me over.

"By the way, what do people call you? Lionel is a terrible name."

He smiled. "At college they called me 'Chuck.'"

"Ah, that's better. What college did you go to?"

"Yale. Out eight years."

"I guess Lionel didn't go so good at Yale. What do you do for a living?"

"I was in the commission business in New York. Want another mint?"

"No-o. Let's get out. We'll be asphyxiated if we don't. The more I see of the Stella Maris the better I like the Fall River Line. Let's sit out on deck and look for whales."

He laughed. "I think you are go-

ing to be a great help on this voyage. Are you always so cheerful?"

She shook her head and her yellow bow waggled humorously.

"I'm just keeping a stiff upper lip. Inside of me I'm scared to death. I'm afraid I've let myself in for something I won't like."

As he followed her toward the exit he observed for the first time two men who sat at a table near the door. The one who faced him eyed him with more than casual interest and suddenly held up his right hand with the middle fingers bent, the thumb and forefinger straightened. He seemed to invite a response. Wing saw that he had a long nose, a pendulous lower lip and a receding chin and possessed a pair of small, greenish eyes and wore a golf cap pulled down to his eyebrows. The fellow was an American but not a prepossessing specimen.

Ignoring the signal, if that was what it was intended to be, he stepped out on deck in the wake of the girl. The second man he had not seen except for a broad back in a brown suit with reddish stripes in it. The incident was immediately forgotten.

The steamer was rolling more and with some reason, for the sea was no longer smooth and white patches of foam flecked its surface here and there. A chill wind was blowing, too, and the last speck of blue sky had vanished.

"Do you think it's going to storm?" asked the girl.

"Wouldn't be surprised if it blew a little."

"It will be very unpleasant on this boat in a storm," she said. "The social hall is a mite of a room with a terrible old piano in it and a phonograph, the smokeroom is dreadful, and my stateroom is musty. If they really want to punish criminals they should not put them in nice comfortable jails, but send them to sea on a ship like this. What does Stella Maris mean?"

He chuckled. "Star of the Sea."

She hooted. "They ought to call it, 'The Old Soak.' I don't see the Wenham girl nor the Jinx. I bet she ditched him and he went downstairs mad. If you ever see him talking to me, come right over and take me away."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN IN THE BERTH.

DECLARING that she was going below to unpack, Miss Drexel left him then. Wing was attacked by pangs of hunger and remembered that luncheon had done very little for his stomach. He went also to his stateroom, which was on the deck below, a small outside room containing old-fashioned berths and few comforts, but which he was fortunate enough to have entirely to himself. He rang for his steward, whom he had not yet seen.

The man proved to be a boy in stature, a wizened, old-young Liverpool product with an accent of the broadest and a total ignorance of the letter "h."

"I'm starving," he told the steward frankly. "I couldn't eat any lunch. Is there anything you can dig up for me?"

The steward grinned, thereby admitting that most of his teeth were gone.

"I fawncy I can find some biscuit and mayhap a trifle o' cold meat, sir. Expect you thought we'd set a table like a transatlantic liner, what?"

"I thought the food would be eatable," he said dismally.

The man cackled. "You oughter see wot they feed us. The chef learned to cook in the blooming army, but you'll get used to it, sir. Everybody does."

"Well, hustle up those biscuits and cold meat."

The fellow returned with a wedge of cold corned beef and three pilot crackers, which reminded Wing that what we call a cracker the British term

biscuits. He concealed his disappointment and fell to. Having assuaged his hunger, he determined to nap for an hour or so, and pushed back the curtains which concealed the lower berth.

The porthole was small, it was a gray day and the stateroom was in semidarkness, but he saw a man lying in his berth, with his face toward the wall.

"It needed only this," he thought. Having sold him a stateroom in which he would be alone they had booked some one in it and the fellow had preempted the lower berth. The man was fully dressed in gray tweeds, and had turned in with his boots on, which made the offense more flagrant. Wing started to wake him, then decided to have it out with the purser.

He found Mr. Sprowle in his cubbyhole of an office at the head of the main staircase, his head buried in a ledger.

"Look here, Mr. Purser," he began angrily. "I was guaranteed that I should be alone in my room, and I find somebody occupying it and asleep in the lower berth."

The purser looked up. "You're Mr. Wing, aren't you? What's the number of your room? Thirty-two?"

He ran his finger down the berthing list and stopped at thirty-two.

"There is nobody in your cabin, sir," he said. "You are alone."

"The deuce there isn't," he denied. "I tell you there is a man asleep there."

"Well, he got into the wrong room by mistake. I'll go down with you and get him out."

He came out of his office and, descending to the lower deck with Wing close behind, he pushed open the door of thirty-two and switched on the light. The man in the lower berth did not stir.

"I beg your pardon," said the purser loudly. No response. He touched him on the shoulder without result, then swung him over on his back and uttered an exclamation of alarm.

The front of the man's coat was soggy with blood and the blanket upon which he lay was soaked with it. His face was dead white. His eyes stared up at them.

"Murdered!" shouted the purser. "My God, the man is dead! Stabbed in the heart!"

Wing felt himself fainting and dropped upon the narrow sofa under the porthole. The purser's finger was pressing the call button, and the steward appeared in the doorway in an instant.

"FETCH the doctor, and ask the captain to come at once if it is possible," said the officer sharply. The steward cast a glance over his shoulder, saw the spectacle in the berth, uttered a frightened whinny, and fled upon his mission.

"How long were you down here?" demanded Sprowle of Lionel Wing.

"Just a few minutes," he stammered.

"Long enough to eat something?" He had seen the remnants of the cold lunch on a plate on the little writing desk.

"Yes," said Wing. "I sent the steward for something because I couldn't eat lunch. I suppose I was here a quarter of an hour."

"And you didn't discover a man in the berth?"

"No. The curtains were closed. I opened them because I intended to turn in for awhile."

"Hum. Seems unlikely."

"Look here—you're not suspecting me?" Wing cried angrily.

"Somebody killed him, and we find him in your cabin. The captain will want to interrogate you."

"Who is the man?"

"I don't know. He's a Brazilian, by the look of him. I can't be expected to know all the South Americans immediately upon sailing. Here's the doctor."

The doctor nearly filled the door-

way. He was a Gargantuan individual, with a big, round, mottled face, evidently a voracious eater and heavy drinker. Save for a fringe of white hair he was as bald as a billiard ball, and he looked upon the scene with heavy, stupid blue eyes.

"Take a look at this man, Dr. Roundsby," said the purser. "Foul play, no doubt."

The doctor touched the man gingerly.

"Dead, all right," he declared. "Still bleeding by the look of him. *Rigor mortis* has not set in, so he hasn't been dead more than a few hours."

"Has he been killed since the ship sailed?" demanded the purser.

"I should say there was no doubt about it. We've been out of the dock four hours or more. Got a knife in the heart, but the weapon is gone."

"What's this?" demanded a harsh voice. "Why did you send for me, Sprowle?"

Sprowle turned and faced the captain, who was a little man with a chest like a pouter pigeon and a grim, sea-beaten face. He wore a heavy brown mustache, upturned and waxed at the ends and carried himself with the dignity of a small person who wishes to appear tall.

"There has been a murder committed in this cabin, Captain Grigsby, sir," said the purser.

"What's that? Murder! And who is the murderer? Who is this man?" His sharp blue eyes penetrated Wing, who flushed despite himself.

"This is my cabin," he said stoutly. "I found this man lying in my berth and went to protest to the purser. I supposed he was asleep."

"Indeed," commented the captain in a tone of great disbelief. "You supposed he was asleep. Who is the victim, Mr. Sprowle?"

"I don't know, sir. He does not belong in this cabin. Mr. Wing is booked in here alone."

"How about this, Dr. Roundsby?" demanded Captain Grigsby.

"Dead as a doornail, sir," replied the doctor, who had a high piping voice, incongruous and almost comic considering his appearance. "Got a knife in his heart."

"Humph. You're under arrest, Mr. Wings, if that's your name. You will not leave your cabin."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Wing angrily. "I'm not going to stay here with a dead man. I demand that you change my stateroom."

"Asking your pardon, captain," said the purser, "Mr. Wing is an American gentleman and recovering from a severe illness. This is a knife job, and the Yankees don't use knives any more than ourselves. I think this fellow is a Brazilian, and it looks like the work of a Latin."

THE captain sucked in his under lip. "Perhaps you're right. You see your situation, Mr. Wing. Until we find out who did this you are suspect. Have you an empty cabin, Mr. Sprowle?"

"Yes, sir, forty-two."

"Well, shift Mr. Wing there."

"And might I suggest that I can hardly get off the ship?" added Wing. "I came on this trip for sea air and I cannot get it locked up."

"I am certain Mr. Wing had nothing to do with it," pleaded the purser.

"Well," said the captain, "I have no wish to be unjust. Will you give me your word, sir, to say nothing of this? We shall keep it quiet, if possible. No sense in terrifying the passengers."

"I shall say nothing," Wing replied. "And I appreciate your consideration."

"Not at all. We wish to please our passengers when possible. Now move Mr. Wing at once, and, Mr. Purser, find out who this dead man may be. Lock up this cabin until I decide what to do."

Shocked and shaken, Wing followed his steward down the passage to his new stateroom and then found it necessary to lay down on his sofa to collect himself.

Death is always harrowing, and violent death encountered so strangely would have affected a man who was not still enfeebled from a very severe illness. That fool of a captain, he thought, so ready to charge him with murder. The suspicion of the purser that he could not have remained a quarter of an hour in his cabin without discovering the dead man! It was the most natural thing in the world not to inspect the berth until he needed to use it; how was he to dream what lay behind the curtains?

Gradually he recovered, but all desire to sleep had gone. This man had lain down to sleep, perhaps, and had been stabbed by some fiend while he slumbered.

The doctor had stated that the killing had taken place after the ship had sailed, which meant that the murderer was still on board. Cheerful prospect! Was he a homicidal lunatic, careless of whom he struck, or was the dead man the victim of some turgid Latin plot, target of a vendetta?

That doctor, of course, was a sublime fool, and his dictum meant nothing. However, it was plausible to think that the blow had been struck on the ship. Wait! Wing had gone directly to his cabin after sailing, opened a bag and taken out a cap and overcoat; and at that time the berth was empty, the curtains pulled back. Upon returning he had assumed that the steward had been in the room and drawn the curtains, if he had assumed anything at all; actually, he just hadn't thought about the matter. However, it proved that the dead man had either entered the stateroom alive and turned into the berth, or had been stabbed elsewhere and carried into the vacant cabin. In either case it bore out the doctor's opinion that the killing had taken place on board and, probably, after sailing. He would supply the purser with this useful information.

The frame of the ship was creaking dismally and the grimy room got on his nerves. He rose, picked up his overcoat and cap and climbed up on deck, where things were little more cheerful. It had begun to rain, and a dozen passengers sat in a row bundled in rugs and steeped in apparent melancholy. Finding his own chair, he saw with satisfaction that he had no neighbors for the moment. If all these people knew what he knew, he thought, their stodgy dispirit would change to alarm. Perhaps one among them was the killer!

CHAPTER V.

THE GHOULISH SPECTATOR.

THE chair deck was protected from wind and rain by glass windows, but it was damp and chill. He had come on this trip for sun and warmth, and he had purchased this, he thought vexedly. Then he had something else to vex him, for Mr. Grimaldi appeared, his scarecrow form wrapped in a long, plaid overcoat, a blue yachting cap on his head, and his gargoyle-like countenance not improved by the costume he wore. He picked his steps along the deck, paused, to Wing's discontent, in front of him, and grinned his grisly grin.

"Alone?" he cackled. "I will sit with you if I may."

Lionel nodded. What could he do? The fellow lowered himself into the next chair and grunted.

"A most unpropitious beginning for a voyage," he said. His English was excellent, and smacked of Oxford rather than New York; but there was a slight foreign intonation about it.

"Yes, it's darned unpleasant."

The man buried his long chin in his collar, and the cap hid his baleful eyes to Wing's satisfaction.

"A mournful sky, a sea which threatens, cold, rain; and below—death," he croaked.

Wing started violently. "What do you mean?" he stammered.

"I am referring to the man who was murdered in your cabin. You must have been appalled."

"How did you know that?" the young man demanded. "The captain wanted it hushed up."

Grimaldi cackled. "Secrets cannot be kept upon a ship. Stewards will talk, and I have traveled on this vessel before, and know the ship's company."

Wing shot a side glance at him. Was this fellow the murderer? That he was a thing of evil his appearance proclaimed. The man's eyes were on him, and his face wore an ironic smirk.

"I promised not to talk about it."

"A knife in the heart," mused Grimaldi. "A sure stroke. The victim was dead before he knew he was stabbed. To drive a stiletto into the heart requires a strong arm and a knowledge of anatomy and considerable practice. Now you are obviously weak from illness, and I doubt if you ever handled a knife. Assuming you had a motive, it still would be impossible for you to slay this man. Yet he is found in your cabin."

"You are well informed," snapped Wing. "I'm glad you are sure I did not do it. Who told you about it?"

"Fifty passengers. Forty-nine are innocent unless the killer had accomplices," continued the strange person. "This man will strike again. Even if he has no other enemy, fear will cause him to kill. Lock your door, Mr. Wing, and beware of dark spots on deck."

"Say, you don't suppose he would have anything against me?"

"He will kill to protect himself from discovery. He may have left a clew and suspects you of finding it. Beware."

"Thanks," he said uneasily. "I shall try to follow your advice."

"The Stella Maris," continued Grimaldi. "This is my fifth voyage on this ship. She is a bad ship—do you know why I choose her?"

"No, certainly not."

The man laid two long, skinny fingers upon his arm.

"Because she is a death ship. Always there is tragedy on board; tragedy and lust and hate. I am a strange man, Mr. Wing. You hate me, perhaps, already; such is my unfortunate personality. Cut off from ordinary pleasures, it amuses me to see humanity unveil its baseness. There will be sport upon this voyage, young man! I shall not find it dull."

"I think you have rather a horrible point of view," stated Wing, unable to swallow his disgust. "I hope the captain lays this murderer by the heels and you will be disappointed in your expectations."

"I shall not be disappointed. I have studied our passengers and find material among them for several savage dramas. In four weeks on a ship there is time for everything. Take my advice and be a spectator, not an actor. You and I shall sit in the orchestra stalls."

THE smile which accompanied this statement was so ghoulish that Wing felt his spine crawling and his flesh quivering with horror. Much as he had been unnerved at the spectacle in his cabin, the conversation alarmed him more. Grimaldi cackled again, then thrust out his long legs and pushed himself upon his feet.

"I have made you loathe me," he said. "Bah, I'm used to that. I always take a confidant upon a voyage, and for this one I have selected you. There is a family named Wenham on board. For a beginning, watch them."

He moved away and, speechless with indignation and alarm, Wing glared after him. The Wenhams were that girl and her parents, the pretty girl he had noticed immediately, and whom he

had been so astonished to see walking with Grimaldi. What did the devil mean in asking him to watch them? Did danger threaten them of which Grimaldi was aware and which he proposed to permit to envelop them for his edification as a spectator?

Had Grimaldi sensed that the American was interested in the girl, and so had chosen Wing to share his box at the grisly play? It was possible. Anything was possible to Satan, and that was who Grimaldi undoubtedly was.

A summons to the captain's cabin interrupted his rather incoherent cogitations, and he answered it gladly. Captain Grigsby's quarters opened directly off the bridge, and proved to be an eight-foot salon with a stateroom at the left and the chart room opening forward. Wing found the skipper in consultation with the purser.

"Sit down, Mr. Wing," said the captain with an appearance of cordiality. "There are a few questions we would like to ask you. Did you ever see the dead man before?"

"No, sir."

"Observe him on the ship at all?"

"I did not."

"Didn't know him ashore?"

"Most certainly not."

"Well, I had to ask those questions. Now, you went to your cabin when you came aboard ship, of course."

"Yes, sir. I did. The cabin was empty. I went down again just as we left the pier to shift to a cap. It was still empty."

"Then why didn't you tell us that before?" roared Grigsby.

"Because you didn't ask me."

"We were all rather perturbed in the cabin, Captain Grigsby, and we didn't ask the questions we should," said the pacific purser.

"That fixes the time of the murder, then," said the captain more agreeably, "at a period subsequent to sailing."

"No," denied Wing. "It settles the time he was placed in my cabin. He might have been stabbed earlier somewhere else. He might even have been brought aboard dead."

"Bah! They couldn't bring a dead man up the gangway at sailing time, past the customs officers and my own men," replied the captain. "Talk sense."

"The thing would be difficult but not impossible," replied Wing, whom the truculence of the skipper made argumentative.

"Rubbish. I assume he was killed in your cabin after sailing. We proceed on that assumption."

"Who was the man, may I ask?"

Sprowle laughed vexedly. "That's the trouble," he admitted. "I can't find out. All our passengers are accounted for. We hoped to keep it a secret, but we must make inquiries among the passengers for identification. Some of them may know him for he probably came aboard to say good-by to a friend."

"The man who knows him may be the one who killed him," said Wing shrewdly. "In which case he will deny it."

"It's confoundedly annoying to have such a thing occur at the start of the voyage," growled the captain. "It will throw a pall over the whole trip, though the voyage was spoiled when that brute Grimaldi came on board."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wing. "I should tell you that fifteen minutes after the discovery I went on deck and Grimaldi came and sat beside me and asked me questions about the murder."

"He knew it?" exclaimed both the captain and purser together.

"He knew almost everything about it. He said that stewards talk."

THE two seamen exchanged glances.

"I wish we could pin it on him," snarled Grigsby. "Of course we can't. He never does anything, the fiend."

"Wonder how he found this out?" mused the purser. "I hope you didn't offend him, Mr. Wing. You know what I told you."

Wing laughed shortly. "Apparently he has taken a fancy to me. He told me that there were the makings of several tragedies among our passengers, and he expected to be very much amused."

Captain Grigsby leaped to his feet and lifted clenched fists in the air. "Damn him!" he cried. "I'd like to put him in irons."

"May I ask who is this man, captain?" asked Wing. "He chills me, and yet he fascinates me somehow."

Grigsby sat down again and looked ashamed of his outburst.

"I think you're all right, Mr. Wing," he said with an attempt at a smile. "I never really suspected you; nevertheless, because we found a murdered man in your cabin, we have to keep you under observation. This filthy Grimaldi has made five voyages on this ship, and each time hell has broken loose. He's a hoodoo, that's what he is, and the worst of it is that he knows it and he is glad of it. The crew is deadly afraid of him. Two men deserted when they saw him come up the gangplank, two stewards who happened to be working with the passengers on the dock. I'd give my right eye to catch him stirring his devil's broth. He's given the ship a bad name. Yet I can't go to our agents and ask them not to book him, because they'd put me ashore as a suspicious fool."

"Do you think he had anything to do with the murder?" asked Wing.

Captain Grigsby shrugged his shoulders. "I wouldn't be surprised if he was responsible for some one wishing to kill the man; but you may be sure that he didn't do it."

Wing was ready to believe this, and he remembered something.

"Do you know Mr. Wenham, sir?" he asked.

"Wenham? He came up with us a few months ago with his family. Nice, quiet sort. He's connected with an American electric company in Rio. What about him?"

"Grimaldi told me to watch the Wenham family; that there was a drama to begin there."

The captain and purser exchanged glances. "Emanuel Sousa is aboard," said the purser. "He paid attentions to the daughter on the voyage up. He's a bad egg in my opinion."

"Right," declared the captain. "Keep your eyes open, Sprowle. That's a nice little filly, the daughter. So old Grimaldi is cooking something there, eh? I'd like to push him overboard."

Sprowle laughed. "The next wave would wash him back on board. Well, Mr. Wing, I hope you are comfortable in your new cabin. We're in a bad fix in regard to identifying this man. He'll have to be buried at sea no later than to-morrow, and we'll get in trouble with the authorities if we drop over an unidentified body.

"Were there no papers on him?" asked Wing.

"Not a thing, and not a cent of money. They went through him, of course. He is apparently a Brazilian, and we shall take in the Brazilian passengers, one by one, to have a look at him."

A steward knocked and entered. "Mr. Grimaldi would like a word with the captain," he said.

Captain Grigsby smothered a curse. "Have him in. You might as well stay, Wing. Seeing you here may bother him."

A MOMENT later the human octopus, as Lionel could not help but regard him, appeared in the doorway, and his fishy eyes immediately comprehended the tableau.

"And how is my old friend, Captain Grigsby?" he asked with his exasperating affability.

"How are you, Mr. Grimaldi?"

smirked the captain while the purser plastered a beaming smile upon his countenance. Wing was rather amused to observe that both officers were afraid of the man.

"Cross-questioning my young friend, Mr. Wing?" asked the newcomer. "You may be assured that he is as innocent of this crime as ourselves."

"Take a seat, Mr. Grimaldi," invited the captain with an air of consideration that was ludicrous under the circumstances. "I am inclined to agree with you, but upon what do you base your opinion?"

"Because he is obviously incapable," said the creature who crossed his skinny legs and folded his clawlike hands over his knee. "You have been unable to identify the murdered man?"

"We shall, but we haven't yet," admitted the skipper.

Grimaldi smiled sardonically. "You won't; but I shall identify him for you." He enjoyed the sensation this remark created.

"You haven't seen him. He's locked in thirty-two," exclaimed the purser.

"You forget I occupy cabin thirty-six," said Grimaldi. "There is a door of communication which I have taken the liberty of unlocking. I have inspected the victim of this atrocious murder." He mouthed the word "atrocious" as though it was something savory.

"You will be interested to learn that his name is Ramon Montana, a native of Santos, engaged in business in New York as a diamond merchant; and was a second cousin of the president of Brazil."

The effect of this announcement was all he could have wished.

Grigsby's eyes were sticking out of his head, the purser turned pale and only Wing found his voice. His loathing for this man had become stronger than his terror of him and he spoke boldly.

"Since you got into the cabin from stateroom thirty-six," he said, "it's quite possible that this man was murdered in that room and carried into my cabin. You admit you know him, sir. It seems to me that you have a lot to explain."

Sprowle eyed him gratefully for the young man had voiced what it was his own business to demand and he had no desire to charge the sinister Grimaldi with anything.

Grimaldi turned his alarming eyes on Lionel Wing and the American met them steadily. It seemed to him they grew larger and turned from greenish gray to black. Fear clutched him again, but he fought it.

"It is indeed possible that he was killed in thirty-six," said the man in his grating tones. "However, I have been on deck since the ship sailed except when I was in the dining salon, and always in company. I yielded to curiosity in looking upon the face of the dead man and I recognized him because I knew him. To be frank, he owes me much money which I shall lose through his death, and I am naturally eager that the murderer be brought to justice."

"Perhaps you can tell us who killed him, then," observed the captain.

Grimaldi shook his great skull. "I am sorry. There are, however, four persons on board who are acquaintances of his, and he may have come on board to see any or all of them. One of them may have slain him."

"The names?" from Grigsby.

"Should I tell you?" wondered the strange individual. "It will be amusing to see this drama work itself out. The death of this man affects all these others in different ways, and it demands blood."

THE captain's face grew very red and his fingers twitched. Wing thought that he was boiling with hatred and anger, but when he spoke he pleaded.

"Surely, Mr. Grimaldi, you are going to give us all the aid in your power. As captain of this ship I could demand that you supply this information. It's your duty."

Grimaldi's grin was ghastly. "I have no duty," he said. "However, it shall be my pleasure to tell you. As a navigator I respect you, sir, but as a police officer you make me laugh. Who are you to change the course of fate?"

"Who are they?" snapped Grigsby, whose vanity was momentarily stronger than his fear of the man.

"Well, let me see. There is, of course, Emanuel Sousa. Montana was the New York representative of Sousa's father, who lives in Sao Paula. They were good friends, perhaps."

The purser wrote down the name.

"And Philipo Gratz, coffee merchant of Santos. He dined with Montana last night."

"Yes, yes."

"And Felix Issoto, the Portuguese Jew. A jeweler in Rio."

"Yes. I know him," said the purser.

"And Augustus Wenham. Montana called at his hotel two days ago and talked with him for an hour."

"I think you know everything," marveled Sprowle.

"The affairs of others absorb me. I have no life of my own," replied Grimaldi.

"How well did you know this Montana?" asked Wing, forgetting that he was only present on sufferance. He was carried away by the feeling that Grimaldi, more than any of those he had named, was responsible for the crime.

"Well enough," retorted the man. "I know what you think, Mr. Wing, but my alibi is perfect. The captain can have no suspicion of me. Is that not so, Captain Grigsby?"

"Certainly," answered the skipper, too hastily. "And I appreciate your information. You have pulled us out of a bad hole, for we must bury Senhor Montana to-morrow. With five positive identifications we are in a good position to proceed. You say he is the cousin of the president of Brazil?"

"Who will demand the murderer upon our arrival," grinned Grimaldi. "I wonder if you will produce him."

Captain Grigsby rose. "I thank you, Mr. Wing, for coming; and I expect you to keep your own counsel," he warned. "Good afternoon."

Dismissed, Lionel bowed to the three men and went reluctantly out of the cabin. He wondered if they would interrogate Grimaldi further. Undoubtly Montana was killed in stateroom thirty-six and the octopus knew it was going to happen. Perhaps he set the scene and then established his perfect alibi.

Wing did not think the captain and the purser dared push Grimaldi very far, for his influence on them was obvious. While neither was an ignorant man, both had seen enough of Grimaldi's eerie influence to wish to avoid his animus, and they had permitted Wing, a passenger, to ask the questions that might arouse the wrath of the malign individual. Somehow Wing did not care about that, as once out of the presence of the fellow, he was not afraid of him; and the sublime impudence of the man infuriated him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRY OF TERROR.

NIGHT replaced day almost imperceptibly for the day itself had been dark. The ship rolled more and had added a pitch to her repertory of gymnastics, and those seasick passengers who remained on deck sank deeper into the slough of the disease, but Wing suffered no qualms of stomach and found himself impatiently waiting the dinner gong.

It came at last and he was first at table. The steward immediately set before him soup which bore a different name from that which was served at

lunch, but which tasted exactly the same. He was to discover that the Stella Maris impressed her disagreeable personality upon every dish that came from the galley.

Mr. Sprowle, who had donned a spruce blue uniform for dinner, joined him and cast a whimsical glance around the salon.

"You can always depend upon the South Americans to pass out when she rolls a bit," he said, "but I expected better of our people. You and I must entertain Grimaldi alone, by the looks of things."

"You don't include him among our people, I hope," protested Wing. "What is his nationality?"

"Well," said Sprowle, "it's an Italian name. In fact it's the name of the family which ruled the principality of Monaco for centuries, though I doubt if he is related to them. I understand he spent many years in London and New York, but for the past ten years he has lived in Rio."

"You and the captain are scared to death of him," charged Lionel.

Sprowle winced, then grinned shamefacedly. "I am. I admit it. It's my opinion that if Grimaldi decided it would be a good thing for me to die, I would do it pronto; and I'm not eager to get in his bad books. You probably got yourself in very wrong this afternoon."

"It looks to me as though you were willing to let him get away with murder," the American said tartly. "Somebody had to ask those questions."

"I'm glad it wasn't I," confessed the officer. "Here comes Miss Wenham. Evidently the parents have gone under."

"And here comes your jinx," added Wing. "I'd like to meet Miss Wenham. Will you introduce me?"

"Certainly. She will probably be in the salon after dinner. Good evening, Mr. Grimaldi."

There is a certain flower, the narcissus, which to some people is the breath of death; and to Wing, the loathsome creature seemed to waft a narcissus-like perfume as he seated himself. He bowed without smiling.

"I expect we shall have a stormy night," he croaked. "Well, it is to be a stormy voyage."

"Please, Mr. Grimaldi, be a little optimistic," pleaded the purser. "We've had our tragedy, now let's hope for a pleasant time."

Grimaldi smiled. "That was the prelude only," he stated. "The prelude sets the key for the opera. It is to be an Italian opera this time, Mr. Sprowle; a lurid libretto set to music by howling winds and the thunder-god."

"I'll wager you are wrong," replied the purser with a strained smile.

"Mr. Grimaldi is perhaps the composer," snapped Wing.

The oracle favored him with a leer. "On the contrary, a spectator or, since we are discussing opera, perhaps I should say an auditor. I suggest you make the acquaintance of Miss Wenham this evening, Mr. Wing. If you like I shall introduce you."

"Thanks," he said shortly, "I have asked that favor of Mr. Sprowle."

Grimaldi nodded. "You will find her charming and interesting. It's possible you are going to play a rôle in the drama, Mr. Wing. It's too bad because I had reserved a stall for you."

"I'm sure I don't know what you are talking about," replied Lionel with considerable uneasiness.

"You remember an American named Fullerton who came up with us on the last voyage?" asked Grimaldi of the purser.

"Y-es. Tall man about forty, rather reserved."

"Yes," said the specter. "He had a sharp tongue when he did loosen it. I learned that he was killed in a railroad accident a few days ago."

The purser turned pale and stopped spearing his roast pork. "I—I must

ask to be excused. A lot of work to do," he stammered, then swung around in his chair and left the table.

FROM Grimaldi came a rattling sort of cachinnation.

"Our friend is very superstitious," he observed. "Although this Mr. Fullerton died in a wreck between Kansas City and Denver, Mr. Sprowle thinks I had something to do with it. You see, Fullerton had a vicious tongue and he insulted me in the presence of several persons, including the purser."

Wing laid down knife and fork and looked the man in the eye.

"I don't credit you with supernatural powers," he said defiantly. "Apparently it gives you pleasure to frighten people, but you don't alarm me in the least."

Grimaldi looked at him oddly. "No? You haven't known me long. Let me say that up to the present I have only good will toward you despite your evident animosity toward me. The food is really very bad on this ship. I wonder that I travel on it."

He changed the subject abruptly because the Englishman had taken his seat.

That individual nodded, but did not reply. Grimaldi shrugged his big shoulders and began to eat.

"You were very near to death in your recent illness," he said to Wing. "Did you perchance peep over the borderland?"

For some reason Lionel was chilled at the question.

"If I did, I have no recollection of it," he replied hesitatingly. "How did you know I had been so near death?"

"It is written on your face. Now, I have actually looked beyond," he added. "I have heard the music of the spheres."

The Englishman laid down knife and fork.

"I must say, sir, you choose cheerful subjects of conversation," he complained.

Grimaldi turned his alarming countenance full upon the man, whose truculence faded instantly, as he muttered: "I beg your pardon."

"Not at all," said the Italian. "If you will favor us with a subject that pleases you, we shall be delighted to discuss it. By the way, I see our Hebrew friends have changed their table. They will find the food no better elsewhere. And your young friend from the West, Mr. Wing, did he also change his table?"

"No," replied Wing. "He is seasick."

"It's a mystery to me," said the Englishman, "why a pestiferous old canal boat like this is permitted to go to sea."

The ice which forms upon top of a traveling Britisher's affability being broken, the Englishman talked freely. His name was Owen, and he said his business was rubber. He talked directly at Wing, and Grimaldi was content to leave the conversation between them.

After the sorry dinner Lionel went up to the tawdry little salon; and there he saw Miss Wenham, but she was not alone.

Sitting beside her upon the red plush bench which ran around the room was a Brazilian of interesting aspect. He was young, not more than twenty-eight or thirty, good-looking at first glance, and trying very earnestly to amuse her.

Glumly Wing dropped into a corner opposite them. The Brazilian had good features, save that his nose was a trifle too flat and his upper lip too short. His skin was olive and clear, his eyes large and black, but seemed to have a slight cast in them which was only noticeable at times. His forehead was broad and low, and there was a peak of hair in the center. His hair was jet black and glossy, very thick, and curled

too profusely; it looked to Wing as if it almost kinked.

Nobody would deny that there has been a mingling of African and Caucasian in the United States, as the multitude of quadroons and octoroons bears testimony; but it is considered miscegenation, and there is a rigid bar between the pure white and the varying shades of color. Wing knew that the Portuguese in Brazil are much more tolerant of mixed blood than the Americans.

POSSESSING his full share of such prejudice, it angered Wing that this sweet young girl should engage in friendly conversation with a man whom, despite the very faint trace of color evident, he would class as a mulatto. The girl glanced at Wing several times, but made no move to rid herself of her companion. Just then the purser entered and went directly to the couple.

"Senhor Sousa," he said, "I am sorry to interrupt you, but Captain Grigsby wishes to see you upon a matter of importance."

This, then, was Sousa, the friend of Montana; and the business undoubtedly was the matter of identification of the murdered man. Sousa muttered an apology, and the look he cast upon the purser was very unpleasant. However, he rose and left the room, followed by Sprowle.

Now or never! Wing immediately abandoned his corner and crossed to the girl, and, disregarding the scrutiny of three fat Brazilian ladies, bowed to her as he ventured:

"Miss Wenham, may I introduce myself? Mr. Sprowle promised to bring me over. My name is Lionel Wing."

Her face, which was serious in repose, lighted, and her smile thrilled him.

"How do you do, Mr. Wing," she said. "Please sit down and talk to me. Miss Drexel, who sits at our table, has been discussing you. She says you are the only 'live one' on the boat. Isn't she quaint?"

He flushed and grinned. "I'm much obliged to her."

"I am so glad to have another American girl near my own age on board. The poor little thing is seasick. She didn't make dinner."

"You are not, though."

"Oh, no; I'm an old sailor, although both my father and mother always get ill. How do you like the ship?"

He made a grimace. "I expect to die of starvation in a week."

"You poor thing! We have a lot of delicacies in our cabins—potted ham and chicken, and toasties and jelly and such. Suppose we go down, and I'll prepare a lunch for you. My cabin connects with the family's, so it's like inviting you to my home."

"Gosh," he exclaimed, "you are an angel of mercy!"

She arose and took his arm confidentially upon the staircase.

"And I'd just as soon not be there when that man who was talking to me comes back," she said in a low tone.

That thrilled him. "I don't see how you could talk to him. He's a negro, isn't he?"

"Oh, no—a Brazilian. When one lives in South America he gets over our race prejudices. I'm sure Mr. Sousa is ninety-five per cent white."

They were moving down the narrow passage, the rolling of the ship making progress a little difficult, when their ears were pierced by a wild and blood-curdling scream. It rose to a shriek, then broke off abruptly, as though choked off. It was not repeated.

The young people were glued to the deck for a second; the girl's eyes, filled with horror, sought his—and then there came a patter of feet and, out of side passages, excited people began to stream.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Madagascar Gold

By HAROLD MONTANYE
Author of "Caribbean Magic," etc.

Steve and Glenn, late of the Foreign Legion, drank their fun where they found it—and so started a deadly upheaval in the Madagascar jungles

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

A MARSEILLES SPREE.

ONE hundred and sixty pounds of bounding, shoving, resilient human steel pushed its way unceremoniously through the rabble of Arabs and Levantines, Moors and Annamese and other lascars and seamen who chattered and swarmed along the Marseilles water front that summer evening.

Following directly behind that human catapult came a bronzed, clean-limbed giant who was hard put to take advantage of the holes the smaller man was opening.

Once a knife flashed from the sleeve of a lascar as he was hurled out of the smaller man's path. The big fellow in the rear caught the glint of steel in the fading sun. His great hand swooped downward and fastened on a wrist. A quick turn, a howl of pain and the knife went hurtling through the air. The big fellow's booming laughter floated back as the two were swallowed up by the milling mob ahead.

Over and around boxes, bales and sacks, trucks, carts and wagons they made their way. In another five minutes they were clear of the rabble, and were standing before a medieval fort on the water's edge, a fort so ancient that it boasted of a lighthouse tower and a drawbridge.

Together their hands rose in salute. Then their mouths split wide in laughter and they thumbed their noses at Fort St. Jean, that clearing house of the Nineteenth Army Corps of France, the Army of Africa and the Foreign Legion.

They thumbed their noses and they roared with laughter, much to the bewilderment of the barbaric-looking Spahis, blue and yellow tirailleurs, pale blue Chasseurs d'Afrique and the red-and-blue uniformed Zouaves who were going and coming through the gate.

Then the pair were plunging through

Von Brocken tottered for a moment and fell across a chair

the crowd again, their faces comically set, their eyes sparkling with anticipation. One last little spurt and they were before a sidewalk café that bore the name of Pascal's.

Doing a right oblique, they cut through the doorway, through the noise and bustle of the outer room and back to the little bar in the rear.

"Kiss me for the son of five pigs and a camel," said the smaller of the two. "Lafayette, we are here!"

"Gimme all them bottles, Henri," said the big one, "and I'll drink 'em all and then jump up and down until I got a good cocktail mixed up inside me."

"*Oui, mes enfants,*" said Henri, his eyes wide, adding under his breath, "crazy Americains!"

"Crazier'n'ell," said the little one as his face became clouded with doubt.

"Now that I'm here," he said, "I don't know what to take first."

"Cognac," said the big one.

"Cognac," echoed the little fellow. "Then we'll have two more and go outside and get some grub and have two bottles of Cordon Rouge."

"Four bottles," said the big one.

"Whoope-e-e-e!" said the little one, and scoffed his cognac.

A strange pair those two, thrown together four years before in a barrack room of Fort St. Jean, they had fought side by side through the mud of Flanders, through the hell that was 1916, 1917, 1918 for the Legion. They had looked unafraid into the slavering jaws of torture and death a thousand times together. They had fought for life side by side. Their friendship was born of that love and respect and admiration that one brave man has for another. They were friends!

ONE, Glenn Morrow, was the son of an extremely indulgent father whose equally extreme wrath had driven him into the Legion. That wrath, however, had later turned to pride as his black sheep son had washed away the stains of a wild boyhood on the battlefields of France.

The other, Steve Barton, was an orphan, a soldier of fortune, an amiable, baby-faced giant when he was left alone, a two-fisted dynamo when aroused. He had been prospecting for gold in Madagascar when the war came over the horizon. And gold he had found, only to forget it when he landed in Marseilles in 1916 and saw the pitiful plight of France.

After the war they had been discharged at that same Fort St. Jean, and Steve had told Glenn of his hectares of gold-studded land in Madagascar.

A long cable to Glenn's father had brought the necessary financial backing, and they had gone out to Madagascar together. Their efforts had been rewarded, largely rewarded. They had found gold and silver and iron and copper in abundance, and they were on their way back to the States to raise capital, big capital to take the ore out of the mountains.

For three weeks they had impatiently paced the decks of a boat of the Messageries Maritimes as it plodded from Tamatave to Marseilles. They had been looking forward to the time when they could stand before the little bar at Pascal's, a place that would always be dear to them, the last place they had been before they went into the Legion, the first place they had gone when they left it.

They had docked at four o'clock that afternoon. After checking their baggage at the depot of the Paris, Lyons and Marseilles Railroad they had taken a cab to Pascal's. The cab had proved too slow, so they resorted to their legs. A bare two hours remained until they would have to get a train for Paris and their boat train for Cherbourg.

Two hours is not long to satisfy such a craving as they had developed for Pascal's in the past year, so they tried to make the most of it. And not even a prejudiced person could have said that they weren't taking advantage of their opportunity. In truth, they were humming the "Marching Song" of the Legion after only thirty minutes steady drinking.

It was just after they had finished their dinner and several quarts of wine that the trouble started. It came, as usual, in the form of a girl; a girl with large, brown eyes and a form that brought to mind the graceful, lovely lines of a Rodin.

Glenn Morrow was facing the door, so he saw her first. Steve swung around because he saw Glenn staring at her. Then they were on their feet together as Glenn shouted, "Marcelle!"

She looked toward them and her gaze widened. Then recognition lit her eyes and a smile flashed across that lovely face as she held out her hands to them."

"Glenn," she said, "an' ze beeg Steef."

"Stiff is right," said Glenn; and to Steve, "Go away, she's mine."

"In a pig's whiskers," said Steve as they each clutched at a hand.

"Ze crazy Americains, I theenk zey 'ave all gone 'ome," she laughed, her eyes wide.

"We couldn't go home until we found you," Glenn assured her.

"We've been lookin' and prayin' for you," Steve agreed.

"It is a year an' a 'alf since I see you in Paris," she said, her eyes rolling coquettishly.

"At Maxim's, sitting on one of them darn high stools, drinking champagne cocktails," groaned Steve.

"*Oui, oui!*" she squealed. "It is so nice to zee you some more."

"Me, she means," Glenn said to Steve.

"Aw, go soak your head," Steve answered, and he reached for one of Marcelle's hands.

"*Non, non,*" Marcelle squealed. "You mus' tell me where you haf been. I theenk my brave Americains were dead."

"He is," Glenn said. "He was hit on the top of the knob by a piece of shrapnel. He's dead as hell."

"Listen, you little squirt," Steve roared and got up from the table in pretended disgust and went into the bar. The truth of the matter was that the drinks weren't coming fast enough to suit him. Let Glenn tell Marcelle what a hero he had been and where they had been. He wanted a drink, a couple in fact.

AND Glenn told Marcelle. He told her about their discharge from the Legion and their trip to Madagascar. She listened wide-eyed when he told her that they had found a fortune, that they had bought innumerable hectares of land and were going back to the States to get money to mine it. He assured her that it would be like picking pennies out of a collection plate.

He even brought out a roughly sketched map from an inner pocket of his coat and pointed out the approximate location of their land and the location of the land they intended buying when they returned.

He didn't stop to wonder why her eyes were shining so brightly and why her hands were shaking as she studied the map and asked him the pronunciation of some of the towns he had listed. He didn't stop to wonder, because, like many another young man before him, he was led to believe that she was wholly enamored of his charm.

The liquor he had consumed loosened his tongue, the admiration he saw in her eyes tore down his reserve and put skids under his caution. He managed, without being aware of it himself, to give away the secret that Steve Barton had sweated blood to learn, had guarded so jealously for five long years.

When Steve came back to the table they had switched the conversation to other channels, and Glenn was writing down the name of Marcelle's hotel for future information.

"Let's go, fellah," he said, and he touched the tip of Marcelle's chin with one of his big fingers.

As she turned her smiling gaze on him a huge bulk of a man loomed up beside them, a hand caught Steve's wrist and flung his arm aside. A gruff, harsh voice sounded above them.

"Come away from this table. Come away from these swine," it said.

Marcelle's eyes widened and became filled with fear as she heard that voice. Glenn and Steve turned their faces upward and gasped. Then the same words came from their lips and they were on their feet with a bound.

"Von Brocken!" they said, and their lips came together in a hard straight line, the muscles in their cheeks bulged, their eyes became pools of hate.

"Ah, you know ze *capitaine?*" Marcelle said, her voice troubled.

"Yes, we know him," Glenn answered, "and he's the dirtiest, the vilest, the lousiest rat that ever disgraced a Legion uniform!"

Glenn stuttered and stopped and looked appealingly at Marcelle. He wanted her to go away so that he could say the things he wanted to say to the man facing him.

The face of Captain Von Brocken became a deep crimson. He seemed to become twice his former size as he drew air into his enormous barrel chest. He spluttered and choked in his rage.

"Look out," Steve grinned. "He's gonna blow up and bust."

"I'll bust him," Glenn said, his fists clenching. "I'll bust him right smack on his fat nose."

"*Mais non,*" Marcelle wept, "no no! My brave ones must not fight."

"Fight!" Von Brocken sneered. "They wouldn't fight; they don't know how to fight."

"You lie, you slobbering, slave-driving—" Glenn was stuttering again because he couldn't use the words he wanted to use.

And while he stuttered Von Brocken

reached out a hairy hand toward his throat, a hand that had, with a single twist, broken the arm of many a raw recruit of the Legion.

But it didn't reach the throat it sought. It came to rest on the chest of Steve Barton, and Steve's fist came to rest not so lightly on Von Brocken's nose.

Von Brocken went back one, two, three steps, and sat down, his hands clasped to his blood-spraying nose as Glenn ducked under Steve's arm.

"He's mine," Glenn wept. "Let me have him. He reached for me."

"Get out of this," Steve barked. "It's your turn next. I ached for this chance for two long years. It's too good to believe. I'd almost given up hope of fulfilling the ambition of my life. Here's my chance, and I'm gonna break every bone in his dirty body."

He stood there smiling with glee, while Von Brocken got to his feet, his face livid with hate and rage, his mouth a crimson smear. He didn't notice the noise that was all about them as women screamed, men jabbered, and waiters swarmed toward them.

Steve was thinking of those awful days through 1917, when Sergeant-Major Von Brocken became an *adjudant* of the *Premier Etranger*, the First Regiment of the Foreign Legion. He was thinking of the cold brutality and cruelty with which Von Brocken had handed out punishment to those riddled, battle-scarred men of the Legion; and Steve hated him again even as every man of his company had hated and feared him.

STEVE was watching his every move with narrowed eyes as he came toward him, watching to see if he would shoot his hand under his coat and bring it out spewing lead. He had seen him shoot a man down in cold blood under the pretext of mutiny, and Steve did not doubt that Von Brocken would do it now if he could.

Suddenly Von Brocken lunged to the right, his hand circling a wine bottle before Steve could close in. He brought it up aimed for Steve's head. Weaving in, Steve ducked, and the bottle crashed into a cluster of lights behind him. Steve came up with both his arms working like pistons, sinking his hamlike hands wrist deep in Von Brocken's belly. Then he straightened up and put his two hundred pounds behind a right that landed just above the button.

Von Brocken teetered for a moment, spun half around, and fell across a chair as a half dozen gendarmes came swarming in the front door.

"Beat it! Beat it, guy!" Glenn shouted to Steve, who stood crouched above the prostrate Von Brocken.

Above, the roar of the gendarmes and the shrieks and wails of the manager and his waiters rose Von Brocken's voice as they raced for the door.

"I'll get you!" he screamed, his face streaming blood. "I'll get you, and I'll give you a month with your hands and feet tied up in the middle of your back!"

They bowled over a half dozen waiters, crashed through a door that was bolted, plunged through the crowd that was forming around the sidewalk café, and disappeared into the rabble that jabbered along the water front.

They doubled and turned through a half dozen cobblestoned streets until they were sure that they had no one on their trail. Then they settled down to a fast walk toward the railroad station.

They made it with fifteen minutes to spare, and they took that fifteen minutes to acquire a bottle of cognac to celebrate the half dozen terrific smacks that Steve had presented to Von Brocken.

Each took a half dozen hearty pulls from the neck of the bottle.

"That throat-cuttin' slave-driver is a capt'n now," Steve grunted.

"I wonder," Glenn said, "where in

hell Marcelle got mixed up with 'at rat?"

"Dunno," Steve answered, "but she cert'n'y seemed scared to death of him. She went white when he blew in."

They took another drink apiece and fell silent.

"Say," Steve said, and he sat up quickly, "wasn't she mixed up in some sort of a trial—workin' with a bunch of spies or somethin'?"

"Yeah, 'at's right," Glenn said after a moment of thought. "It's kinda hazy now, but I 'member reading about it. She was acquitted, but a coupla guys got their hats pulled over their eyes, and had to take it up against a stone wall."

"She's a fast thinker, that girl," Steve said.

"Yeah," Glenn grunted.

"You didn't say anything 'bout our racket in Madagascar, did you?" Steve asked suddenly.

"Nothin' much," Glenn said, and tried in a half sleepy, half drunken way to remember just what he had said. "Told her we'd been out there. 'Sall, I guess."

"Gotta look out for them babies," Steve mumbled, and flopped his head back against the seat.

They were both too happy in the thought of their wealth to come, too happy over those half dozen cracks at Von Brocken, to think any more about Marcelle as they fell asleep.

But they thought about her six months later, they thought about her more than a little, and they cursed themselves for a pair of stupid half-wits.

CHAPTER II.

OFF THE AFRICAN COAST.

DURING those next six months they saw all of the old friends and old places in the States that had seemed so dear during those three years in the Legion and during the one since their discharge. They had looked forward to seeing them with something acutely akin to an ache during those four years, but when they came in contact with them they seemed to have lost something of their charm.

They seemed so commonplace, so smug and satisfied, so unaware of the other parts of the world. Little they cared for the far places that drew such men as Glenn Morrow and Steve Barton, drew them and held them with a grip that only death could break.

Glenn's father tried to persuade them to let him send a couple of trustworthy mining engineers out to Madagascar to go on with their plans. He offered each of them soft desk jobs at salaries that took their breaths away.

But they refused with a curt shake of the head and a little smile. They did not try to explain to him, because they were sure that he could not understand.

So he gave them to understand that he would stand behind them to the limit, held them in New York as long as he could by a whirlwind round of entertainment; when he could hold them no longer he gave them each a hearty slap on the back, a firm handshake, and pretended that he thought it was about time they stopped loafing.

Two weeks later they found themselves stepping off an express in that same P. L. & M. *gare* they had quitted so speedily some five months before. They learned at the offices of the Messageries Maritimes that they could get first-class passage on the Admiral Pierre three days later.

The interim they spent wandering restlessly about Marseilles, dropping in at Fort St. Jean for old buddies, at Pascal's after they found that they were not recognized, and all the time trying to locate one Captain Von Brocken of the Foreign Legion.

"I'd give a heap to finish up what I started," Steve said, time and again.

"I get first crack this time," Glenn would answer.

Of Marcelle they could learn nothing. She had, according to the concierge of the little hotel where she had been staying, departed four or five months before. And they let it go at that.

There was a motley crowd aboard the Admiral Pierre, a crowd made up of French military and government officials returning to their posts in Indo-China; Dutch planters from Java; an expedition of big-game hunters; salesmen; women of uncertain occupation and destination. A motley crowd to whom the East held little of magic or romance.

Their ship plodded across the Mediterranean, slipped silently through the Suez Canal, and along the slender yellow beaches of the Red Sea. Looking out on the sun-kissed waters, they dreamed of gun-running feluccas and slave-laden dhows, Bedouin raiders and Somali tribesmen. A land of romance and mystery and adventure.

They touched at Djibouti in French Somaliland, Mombasa in the Kenya Colony, and from Zanzibar took a course south by southeast across the Mozambique Channel toward the boiling hot town of Majunga on the west coast of Madagascar.

It was after they had gone ashore at Majunga that they first noticed that hairy, murderous-looking man with a cast in one of his evil eyes.

The steamer was moving out of the harbor, and they stood on deck and mopped at their faces with handkerchiefs that were already wringing wet. Their clothes hung on them in sopping wrinkles as gusts of hot dry air came sweeping out from the mainland like blasts from a furnace door.

"It's hotter than hell, and I don't mean mebbe," Glenn gasped.

STEVE merely grunted, because he had caught a deadly gleam of personal hate in the eyes of a hairy brute standing just inside the saloon passageway. There was something about the man that was vaguely familiar to him.

Steve could not remember having seen him during the voyage from Marseilles, and decided that he must have come aboard at Majunga. He called Glenn's attention to the man after a moment, and Glenn whistled softly and said:

"Ain't he a friendly looking little thing?"

They saw the same man later in the day coming out of a stateroom with a man equally as villainous. There was nothing particularly alarming about that—but the moment they caught sight of Steve and Glenn they separated and pretended not to know one another.

Fifteen minutes later they saw them sitting in the smoking room at different tables. When one of them left he passed directly by the table of the other, and they failed to speak.

Steve and Glenn exchanged glances, and there was a tiny frown between Steve's eyes as he studied the one who remained. He was trying to remember when and where he had seen the man before; and he was wondering just what their racket might be.

During the next twenty-four hours it became evident to both Steve and Glenn that they were constantly under the surveillance of one or the other of those two men.

They were certain of it when they came back from a shore trip at Nossi Be. They found that their clothing, their baggage, even their two bunks had undergone a thorough search. Everything had been replaced, and nothing seemed to be missing; but they knew by the way their things had been stuffed into their steamer trunks that some one had gone through them.

When they were fully satisfied that nothing had been stolen, they sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"Do you suppose it might have been a steward or cabin boy?" Glenn asked.

"No," Steve said shortly. "There

are plenty of things they would take—some of that stuff of yours is worth real money. It was one or both of those two hard-looking birds who have been keeping an eye on us."

"But why?"

"I give up," Steve said. "Let's take a look at the passenger list and see who they are. I'm not so anxious to get smacked on the head and robbed and thrown overboard."

"How will looking at the passenger list stop them?" Glenn said.

"How the hell do I know?" Steve said gruffly.

Nevertheless they examined the passenger list and found them registered under the names of Cabrera and Polopolous. They decided that the wiry, beetle-browed one must be Cabrera, and the man with the cast in one eye Polopolous, a Greek. They decided to return the favor by watching those two gentlemen with equal care.

That evening as the ship rounded Cape Amber and plowed along toward Diego Suarez, Glenn wandered aft and stood watching the faint glow on the horizon where the sun had gone to bed. A gentle, cooling breeze came wafting in from the Indian Ocean. The faint strum of a stringed instrument came floating back from the crew's quarters forward. It was a perfect night, the kind of a night—

Something crept around Glenn's neck and clamped down hard, so hard that his breath was cut off with a sob. He tried to twist, tried to kick out backward. Another arm circled him about the waist, pinning his arms to his sides. A hand came over his shoulder as he sobbed for breath and tried to run a hand into his inner pocket. He leaned forward and got his hands fastened on the taffrail. Then he lifted his body up and kicked back with both feet. They came in contact with the shin bones of a man behind with terrific impact.

A muffled groan and a curse came to his ears and the steel hooks that were fastened about his throat tightened. Again he raised his body and kicked back with all of his strength. The arm about his waist loosened and he tore at those strangling fingers, pried a finger loose and bent it viciously back until the other fingers slowly loosened.

He whirled, half free, and made out two dim forms in the blackness of the night. He brought up a fist and grunted with pleasure as it found a mark. Then he pulled himself free and lashed out with one of his feet. The forms dropped back before him and he tore in with both fists swinging, hitting from every angle, a whirlwind of fists and feet.

Then something caught him on the side of the head. Another glancing blow started him reeling dizzily, and he tried to duck and go backward. A third blow brought him to his knees and he waited unable to ward off the blow that would finish him.

AS he swayed dizzily the sound of running feet came to him and he searched with his hands for the taffrail. Finding it he pulled himself erect and staggered around the after deckhouse to get a glimpse of his assailants.

The only persons in sight were a man and a girl strolling along the main deck, their heads close together, their hands entwined.

Glenn cursed savagely under his breath and made his way forward to his stateroom. He had three bumps that in size would have done honor to the eggs of the proudest of chickens. He touched them tenderly and knew that no one could do that much damage to his skull without a blackjack or a section of lead pipe. His throat was sore to his touch and his head felt as though it might explode and fly in a dozen different directions.

After he had bathed his head in cold water and had stopped the tiny trickle of blood that ran down his face he felt

better and he rummaged through his trunk and took out a .38 double action revolver and stuck it in his coat pocket.

He was almost certain that the two men were Cabrera and Polopolous, but he was less sure what he should do about it. His first impulse was to find them, take them in turn, and beat them to jelly; but the possibility that he might be wrong and would so land in irons held him back. He decided that the first thing to do was to find Steve and get his opinion.

He found him in the smoking room. After he had ordered a brandy and soda and had taken two much needed gulps he remove his hat and displayed the three lumps as he began his story.

Steve's eyes became two points of flashing fire and his lips were tightly locked.

"They were trying to get into my inside pocket, but they didn't make it," Glenn finished.

"The dirty rats," Steve exploded. "They were probably going to rob you and throw you overboard."

"I doubt it," Glenn said quietly. "I don't think they were after money because they must have felt my money belt around my waist. If they had wanted my money they would have gone about it in a different way. They seemed to be after something in my inside pocket. The thing that puzzles me is what it might be."

"What do you carry there?"

In answer Glenn emptied the contents of the pocket on the table. There were two or three old letters, a notebook and a wallet. The wallet was filled with various memoranda, cards, the usual things people carry in a billfold. In the back were a few bank notes of small denomination, and a piece of white paper, ordinary typewriting paper. Glenn looked at the last item in wonder and unfolded it. A little gasp came from his lips and he looked into Steve's eyes with a troubled gaze.

On the piece of paper was a roughly drawn map showing the road from the capital of Madagascar to Ankazabe, and from that point the trail through numerous native villages to their mine. It was one that he had drawn before they went to the States, the one they had shown to his father.

"That's what they're lookin' for, fellah," Steve said, his eyes gleaming.

"But how'n'ell does any one know that it's there?" Glenn asked.

"Maybe they don't," Steve said. "Maybe they're just takin' a chance. I don't see how any one ever found out that we had located valuable land. But if they have, and couldn't find any information in our luggage, they decided to give us each a try." His eyes gleamed savagely.

"I hope they don't forget me," he added meaningly.

"We might go to the captain," Glenn said, reverting to his first idea.

"There's nothing to tell him. He would think you were tight and fell over a line or a stanchion and bumped your head. People don't go around on boats blackjacking the passengers. He wouldn't believe it."

GLENN tore the map in a thousand pieces and they got to their feet and strolled to the deck while he dropped the pieces overboard. They walked around the deck and saw Cabrera and Polopolous deep in conversation behind a lifeboat. They kept on until only a yard separated them; and then Steve spoke.

"You fellows had better be careful how you stand around the rail," he drawled, "or somebody might kick you in the shins and knock you overboard."

"You joke, eh?" Cabrera said, his ugly face breaking into a smirk.

"Joke hell," Glenn answered and his eyes narrowed as Polopolous's hand crept toward his pocket.

"Keep your hands still. I'm nervous and I have a .38 in my pocket. It would be too bad if it went off by accident and shot you through the belly."

Neither of them moved. They were watching the bulge in Glenn's pocket with gleaming eyes. Suddenly Cabrera shifted uneasily on his feet and began to jabber to his companion in Spanish. With a disdainful laugh Glenn whirled on his heel, and he and Steve sauntered away down the deck.

"Mebbe we're wrong," he said, "but if we're right they know we're wise to them even if we don't know what it's all about."

"We got to sit tight and keep our eyes open," Steve said. "If we wait for a break they'll give it away."

Their first "break," as Steve had termed it, came the next afternoon. They were sunning themselves on the starboard boat deck with their backs against the superstructure when they heard a voice coming from around the corner. They didn't pay any attention until they heard the word Malagasy. Then they glanced at one another and stopped talking to listen.

"A dozen machine guns and a few thousand trained natives and we can hold the place for a year," the voice said. "The French can't get soldiers through the bush, with machine guns tearing 'em apart. If the Malagasy leaders had put up any kind of a fight they could have wiped out the French expedition that captured the island. It took the frogs two years to get in from Majunga even then. Just a year, my friend, and we can get what we want and leave the island to the natives."

"Not so loud, you fool!" another voice cut in and the conversation died away to a series of whispers that they could not hear.

Motioning to Glenn to follow, Steve stole around the superstructure until they were able to see the men who were talking. Cabrera and Polopolous!

Glenn and Steve went to their stateroom and tried to put the various pieces of the jig-saw together. But nothing would fit. The more they puzzled the more puzzled they became, and finally they stalked into the smoking room, their heads whirling with the strange conundrum that confronted them.

For the next twenty-four hours, until the boat dropped anchor in the harbor at Tamatave they kept their ears open. But nothing further occurred.

The next morning they saw Cabrera and Polopolous board the same train they were taking for Antananarivo, and they took pains to separate themselves as far as possible from them.

In Antananarivo they went to the same hotel they had always patronized and secured rooms side by side. After dinner they strolled through the savannah and listened to the din of a native band. On the way back to their hotel they kept in the center of the street and carefully examined the shadows of every alley and side street.

THEY hadn't seen Cabrera and Polopolous since that morning, but they were taking no chances. Without mentioning it, both had the idea that they were being shadowed constantly, and they were beginning to see a light to the mystery that had surrounded them for the past few days.

Going directly to their rooms each took the precaution of slipping a gun under his pillow, and made sure that his door was securely locked.

Glenn lit a cigarette and began to go over the happenings of the past few days. He hadn't got very far when the cigarette burned his fingers and he found himself yawning, fighting to keep his eyes open. Ten minutes later nature won the battle and he fell into a sound sleep.

When he awakened, the room was pitch black, so black that he could not distinguish a single object. It was silent, and something about that silence brought the hair up along the base of his scalp. It was a feeling that he couldn't explain, but he knew that there was some one else in the room. He could feel a presence and he had an almost overwhelming desire to leap out of bed and make a dive for the light.

But he didn't. He continued to breathe regularly and deeply, and slid his hand up under his pillow until the tips of his fingers touched the butt of his revolver.

The feel of his gun gave him the sense of security again and that tight, terrible feeling along his scalp began to disappear. He smiled to himself. Nerves! He was beginning to let the events of the past few days and the oppressive heat do things to him. Steve would laugh when he told him in the morning.

Then he heard the faintest rustle, so faint that it was almost imperceptible. Something brushed along the end of the bed, a board squeaked. A thin stream of moonlight came creeping diagonally across the window sill and he could see the dim outline of a man's body at each side of the bed.

Suddenly a stream of light from a torch struck the bed and moved upward along his body. He half closed his eyes and saw a hand appear from the opposite side of the bed, a hand that held a curved dagger a bare two inches above his heart.

He could see a third figure moving silently across the room. How many more there were, he had no idea, but he sensed that the room was alive with them. He knew that to make the slightest move would mean instant death. He relaxed and watched through nearly closed eyelids. The stream of light came to rest on the center of his body and a hand began to fumble with his money belt.

He knew that he must do something now. He couldn't make up his mind which way to lunge, which would be the safer. But he tensed his muscles so slowly and so tightly that it was agony.

Springing, he kicked the hand that held the light and sent it spinning across the room as he lunged to the floor. His fingers closed around his revolver as he jumped. He heard a man grunt, and he heard the knife swoop down and tear through the bedding behind him.

He glued himself to the floor and listened for the slightest sound. He didn't want to shoot unless he had to, because it would give away his position.

A minute, two, went by and he could feel the cold perspiration creeping out on his body. He shifted his position ever so little and the butt of his gun gently tapped the floor. Something whisked through the air, struck the bed above his head and fell to the floor with a metallic clatter.

Silence. Stark, terrible silence. He wanted to shout, to leap up and close with them, anything rather than that awful feeling that they were creeping toward him, edging in to sink a knife through his throat. The sear of steel would be the first thing he knew. A half dozen of them against one, and they could move with incredible speed and stealth.

He began to worm his way along, a fraction of an inch at a time. A board creaked in a corner of the room and he trained his gun waiting for another sound.

Then a deafening roar sounded in the next room, in Steve's room. The first shot was quickly followed by two more. He could hear the soft *pat-pat* of bare feet in the hallway outside his door. Voices sprang up, chattering in Malagasy. He came half erect and started across the room toward the door. The stream of moonlight disappeared from across the window sill and he could see a dim form outlined against the night. Then he heard Steve's voice calling outside the door, heard him pounding furiously as he moved toward it.

Hands and arms suddenly closed in on him from all sides. Bands of steel circled his wrists and pushed his gun downward as he pulled the trigger. A hand covered his mouth with an evil-smelling rag as his arms were twisted behind his back. He kicked out and

drove a man away from him. One arm came free and he cracked a neck with one powerful twist.

But they were all over him now, beating him down, smothering him. Half a dozen hands sought his throat, found it. The rag over his mouth and nose had a sweet odor that sickened him.

Steve's shouts and crashings on the door became fainter and fainter to his ears as his desperate struggles diminished. Everything began to swing in a mad circle. He could feel himself being lifted into the air, and he seemed to float away into space as the world fell away from him.

CHAPTER III.

A DEADLY SCHEME.

WHEN Steve burst through the door three minutes later with an automatic in his hand and half a dozen native hotel attendants behind him, the room looked as though it had been struck by a miniature hurricane.

Clothes, shoes, all kinds of wearing apparel were flung in every direction. Chairs were broken, a mirror shattered, tables overturned. In two places Steve found little pools of blood, and he swore softly between his clenched teeth.

A rope ladder that hung out of the window from hooks caught under the sill told the story of how Glenn's assailants had got in and out of the room. The ladder dangled to a sloping roof ten feet below, from which there was a clear drop of another ten feet to the courtyard.

By the time Steve had found the light, taken a quick survey of the room and jumped to the open window no sound was audible below. It had only been a matter of a few minutes since he had heard some one opening the door to his room. He had waited until he thought the door was half open then he reached for his automatic and poured three shots into the dark. He had heard a stifled scream and the door had banged shut before he could get to his feet. When he rushed into the hall it was to find it dark and empty except for the few hotel attendants who had been aroused by the shots and were tearing up the stairs toward him.

They had heard the terrific muffled scuffling as Glenn fought back and forth across the room, and then that one shot just before they broke through the door. They had expected to find Glenn dead or seriously wounded. When they didn't find him at all, Steve went berserk with rage and the natives glanced furtively about the room and edged toward the broken door.

They didn't attempt to do anything more than jabber as Steve swung over the window sill and went down the ladder. They made no attempt to follow him. Perhaps they knew how futile his effort would be.

When he landed on the roof and then dropped off to the ground below he expected to be attacked by half a dozen natives. He stood crouched for a matter of thirty seconds listening for the faintest sound before he began a careful circuit of the little courtyard.

The whole attack had taken so little time and had been executed so perfectly that he was still dazed and unable to figure just what he ought to do.

As he made his way cautiously around the velvet black courtyard, he was cursing through clenched teeth at the natives in the room above. Why didn't they put on some lights, get the police, do something?

One circuit of the yard convinced him that Glenn was not there and he made a bolt for the single gate that led to an alleyway. He sped through it with the cobblestones bruising his bare feet, and ran down the alleyway in one direction, then doubled back in the opposite. A mangy, slinking dog was the only thing he encountered as he cursingly stumbled along.

Glenn had disappeared as completely as though a hole had opened in the earth and swallowed him up. It was incredible and terrifying. If there was only something, some key to work by, some clew that would lead him in the right direction.

He was suddenly aware what a figure he cut, running through the streets in pyjamas, waving an automatic. The Frenchman who ran the hotel came running up with two native policemen.

No one had seen a group of men. According to the two policemen, nobody could have come out of that alleyway without being seen by one or the other of them. They had heard the shots and had run into the hotel, it developed.

"That's when they got through you," Steve said bitterly.

The police put a dragnet around the block, searching each house thoroughly; but when the dawn came they had accomplished exactly nothing.

Glenn had disappeared from the face of the earth, and there wasn't a trace or a clew that the police cared to consider at all logical. Steve told them of the previous attack on Glenn and they searched the registers of Antananarivo hotels for Cabrera and Polopolous without result. He didn't dare to tell them why he believed the attack had been made because he knew that a hundred thousand men, perhaps a greater number, would go trekking up into the mountains if they knew that there was enough gold there to make it worth their while.

Steve suspected that the police were suspicious that the whole thing was a hoax or a quarrel of foreigners that didn't really concern them. They advised him to go to the American consul, and there he finally went.

HE found Consul Dudley Mason to be a sympathetic, bluff man of about fifty-five who wore a military mustache such as the French affect.

Steve started in from the beginning and put all of his cards on the table. He began with his prospecting before the war and their further prospecting after the war. He told of their trip to the States for capital and the things that had occurred since then, including their experiences with Cabrera and Polopolous and the conversation he had overheard between those two.

And when he had finished, Dudley Mason slowly relaxed and slid back into his chair as his breath whistled through his pursed lips. After a moment he got to his feet and paced back and forth across the roof for a matter of ten minutes. Finally he stopped before Steve.

"This is a mighty serious thing," he said, "more serious than the disappearance of your friend." Steve remained silent.

"You say your friend tore up the map he was carrying?" Mason asked after a moment.

"Yes, sir."

"That's the reason for their kidnaping him. They probably went through his things and when they couldn't find it they decided to take him with them and force the location of the mine from him."

"A hell of a chance they'll have," Steve said firmly.

Dudley Mason stopped pacing the floor and there was a curious expression in his eyes as he stood before Steve again.

"These natives have terrible ways of making a man talk," he said simply.

"What puzzles me," Steve said, "is how these men knew that Glenn had a map or that we had found gold."

"Oh, most of the officials and all of the natives know that there are a great many valuable minerals on the island," Mason said. "The French have been afraid to take it because of the effect it would have on the natives. Afraid, and unable. The serious part of this thing is that these men are planning to train or have trained the na-

tives to fight for them. The natives are superstitious and revengeful. They hate the French in spite of their apparent docility. They tried to poison most of the French officials during the war because the French drafted them for service. Ever since the French took the island and banished Queen Ranavalonka to Algiers, the natives have been planning to retake it. There are only a few troops here—eight or ten thousand—and three-quarters of them are native militia. It wouldn't be hard for the blacks to get control if they had guns and ammunition and struck quickly with real leaders."

"Well," Steve said, "if these men have established a stronghold here and they have any general idea where our mine is, that is where their base would be. And that is where they would take Glenn."

"The government will help you," Mason said grimly. "It surprises me that the French secret service hasn't got wind of this if there is anything like a revolt behind it. They keep in touch with those things always—they have to. I will go to the governor-general immediately and lay the whole thing before him."

"In the meantime," Steve said, "I reckon I'll get our old guide, Betseke, and go on up into the interior. I'll keep my mouth shut and if I find anything out I'll hot-foot it back here or send Betseke. Maybe Glenn needs me badly; and if he does I can't wait for the French to unwind their red tape and get into action. It takes 'em too long."

"They'll get into action fast enough," Mason said. "You'd better stay here and we'll see if the secret service can't do something about your friend. It's my job to protect American interests and I don't want you to go up there and get yourself killed. It will only make more trouble."

Steve grinned.

"I promise you I won't make any more trouble if I'm killed," he said. "I'm going to shove off for Ankazabe within a couple of hours. As soon as I can get my equipment together and get a Betsileo burden-bearer to carry it."

"But my dear young man," the consul began, then stopped abruptly. Something in the fearless, determined set of Steve's chin brought an expression of admiration to his eyes and he threw up his hands with a gesture of resignation, a half smile playing on his lips.

"All right," he said. "Now get out of here and be sure to send your man back if you run into trouble or get any information."

"Right, sir," Steve said as he took the hand that Dudley Mason extended. "And I'd appreciate it, sir, if you'd not tell the governor-general that we've found any valuable minerals."

Dudley Mason smiled and said, "I'll try not to."

Steve thanked him and hurried out to the car that was waiting for him.

WHEN Glenn Morrow regained consciousness the first thing that came to his ears was the far-away beating of drums and the chant of human voices. He opened his eyes and gazed about him.

When they became accustomed to the light he perceived that he was lying on a hard wooden cot in a high-thatched hut. The room had a narrow door at one end and a barred window at the other. Before the door sat a nearly naked native with a rifle across his knees. That was all Glenn saw with his first glance because he had to close his eyes from the pain that racked him in every muscle and joint. He ran his tongue over his hot lips and groaned as some one daubed at his temples.

When he opened his eyes again it was nearly dark. Rude gum flares threw grotesque shadows dancing about the room. Peering intently he could see that the native with the rifle, or another one, was still sitting cross-legged before the doorway.

"Hey," he called weakly. The guard turned his head, his features impassive. Glenn made a motion with his arm to indicate that he wanted water. After a moment of indecision the guard got to his feet and poured him a gourdful. He consumed it in great gulps and asked for more. When he had finished it he laid back with his eyes wandering about the room. It was bare except for a rude table beside his bed and a fire-pot near the door.

The distant beating of tom-toms came to his ears again and the wild cries of hundreds of human voices swelling to a frenzy, then falling away to a staccato chant. The glow from many fires lit the heavens outside the narrow door and twisted the long rows of thatched huts into fantastic shapes.

The guard at the door suddenly got to his feet and came to attention. The questions that were racing through Glenn's mind were entirely forgotten as the form of a man in a glittering uniform loomed in the doorway, crossed the room and stood above him, a soft, sneering laugh coming from his lips. Across his chest were pinned half a dozen decorations. His massive shoulders seemed to droop beneath the weight of the braid and gold buttons of his uniform.

"Well, you bug-eating, shivering she-ass," that sneering voice snarled, intermixing strange Arab oaths with his French, "you swine, how do you like this?"

Glenn's eyes popped open together with his mouth as he stared up into those cruel, pig-eyes above him. Finally he managed to speak, but it was only a whispered gasp.

"Von Brocken!" he said and blinked his eyes as though he couldn't believe what he saw.

"Yes, Von Brocken, you beautiful son of American swine," he sneered. "General Von Brocken!"

"General!" Glenn laughed. He'd be damned if he would let that pig taunt him. "General! Why, you're nothing but that cur Von Brocken, a lousy slave-driving *sous-officier.*"

Von Brocken's face went purple, his eyes bulged and his hand went to the automatic that was strapped about his waist. For a minute Glenn thought that this would be his last. Then Von Brocken shook his great head as though to get control of himself and laughed.

"I'll teach you, you swine," he said. "I'll teach you, when you've told me what I want to know." Glenn remained silent studying the face of the man above him.

"And I'll give you a chance to save your life."

Glenn remained silent.

"I want to know where your mine is, Morrow."

SO that was it. Glenn had supposed at first that Von Brocken had been transferred to duty in Madagascar. Now it all came flashing back through his mind and he laughed. That evening at Pascal's when he had been drunk and his tongue had been too loose. He had talked to Marcelle and she had told Von Brocken. That was how they knew about that map in his pocket. He couldn't remember showing it to her, but he must have done it. He closed his eyes and cursed himself in a way that would have done credit to the man who stood above him.

"You showed Marcelle, my Marcelle, you swine—you showed her a map of the location of your mine. She couldn't remember the exact location, but I raised money and came out here to investigate. What I found made me resign my commission in the army, and I got money and men to help me. I found a kingdom here for the taking. The natives need only leaders. I have made soldiers of them. They have pretended to the French that they are Christians, but they hate the French and all their ways. They are superstitious and they believe that I have come back from the Vazimba, the

mysterious warrior race that once dwelt on the island. I am to be their king!"

The beating of the tom-toms increased in volume and the voices became a blood-curdling chant.

"Even now they are smearing the gravestones of their dead Vazimba with blood and fat and rum. They believe that I can give them back the island—"

Glenn threw back his head and laughed until he had to stop from pain. The man was not only a dangerous brute, he was a maniac.

"When the French come up here with a few 75's and a regiment of *legionnaires,*" Glenn snapped, "your natives won't stop running until they reach the Mozambique Channel."

"But they won't come up, you pariah dog of the gutter," Von Brocken roared, his eyes blazing. "What are a few thousand French swine against a million natives? The native militia are ready to join us. I have machine guns that I brought up the Betziboka, machine guns and rifles enough for an army. We will take the naval base at Diego Suarez and capture enough ammunition and guns to last until we can make more. Antananarivo will fall at the first shot. The native villages will turn into our army posts overnight. We will cut the cable across the Mozambique Channel, the only way they can communicate with the outside world, and in twenty-four hours we will have the island."

Von Brocken laughed, his evil eyes points of fire. Glenn watched him fascinated.

"I and half a dozen of my men will get the gold, and the natives can have the island when we are ready to go. And you, you swine, I ought to pin you on the wall with a pair of bayonets through your hands for the native women to work on; but I will give you a chance. My men got you and drugged you the other night. I can get the governor-general of the island the same way if I want to—and will, when I get ready. You have been a soldier, if a damn poor one. I will give you a chance to command one of my regiments and you will become rich—if you lead us to your mine. I have found a little gold. There is more than enough of it here, but I can't waste time hunting. You know where it is."

"And if I don't accept?" Glenn asked coolly.

"I'll make you talk," Von Brocken snarled. "I'll make you talk by teaching you a few tricks I learned from the Tuaregs. They know how to torture, those Arabs. And after you've talked I'll turn you over to that rabble out there. They know how to carve out your tongue and take off your ears and your lips and your hands and your feet, and still let you live."

Something cold and terrible circled Glenn's heart and left him sick and weak. He had heard old *legionnaires* tell of the "tricks" the Tuaregs practiced on their captives and it turned him cold with terror.

CHAPTER IV.

AMBUSH.

IT was late in the afternoon of the day of Steve's talk with the American consul that he left Antananarivo in a little rented French car. In the front seat beside him was Betseke, an olive-skinned giant of over six feet, lean, wiry, and possessed of intelligent eyes. His *lamba* fell about his body in graceful folds. Over his shoulder was slung a Lebel rifle. Strapped about his waist was an ammunition belt and another to which was attached a broad sword.

In the back of the car was the Betsileo carrier attired only in breech-clout and turban. His body was a mass of rippling, bulging muscles. Stowed in around him was Steve's equipment, a Sprinfield rifle and several boxes of ammunition.

Steve took the wheel, threw the car in gear and they went shooting through the narrow streets headed for the treeless, windswept uplands.

The police had been unable to learn anything more about Glenn's disappearance and Steve had been unwilling to tell them the things that he had told Dudley Mason. He preferred to take a chance on playing a lone hand rather than turn over to the native police the secret he had guarded so jealously.

They passed through the center of the thatched hut town of Ankazabe at undiminished speed, amid the howls and cries of the natives. After another hour's run they stopped in a small native village and secured the services of four carriers with a *filanzana*.

In a half hour Steve was being carried swiftly over a trail that led toward the jungle that loomed at the foot of the purple mountains to the west.

At dusk they pitched a tent beside what remained of a crumbling native village. After a meal of strange native foods Steve crept into his tent, placed his rifle and automatic beside him and fell into a heavy slumber.

Up before dawn, they were within the protection of the first rim of the jungle before the sun had risen high in the heavens. When the jungle became so thick that the *filanzana* carriers could not longer go forward, Steve dismounted, ordered them to await his return, and pushed on afoot with Betseke leading the way.

As they climbed steadily upward, the jungle belt became broken with outcroppings of rock that assumed weird and fantastic forms. Skirting the very edges of sheer cliffs they could see giant waterfalls plunging into the valleys below, hissing and snarling like streams of molten metal.

As they neared the rim of the plateau ahead the bush gave way to giant bowlders and at Steve's command Betseke became more cautious, moving forward with the grace of a panther.

Suddenly a voice rang out and challenged them in Malagasy. Their eyes darted in every direction, searching every rock and crag above them, but no human thing stirred in that mass of rocks. Then came the crack of a rifle and a bullet whistled over their heads.

With one accord they dived for the protection of a giant bowlder. A fusillade of bullets chipped the rocks about them and they edged around to locate the spot of fire. Something moved in the rocks above and Betseke brought that something upright with a single shot. He shot the man again as he whirled and fell.

"Fancy stuff," Steve grunted, his eyes full of admiration.

A rifle spat three times to the left and Steve shattered an elbow that had been exposed.

As the fire above diminished Betseke wormed his way along the ground and disappeared from sight. Steve fired at ten-second intervals unless one of the natives exposed themselves.

In a moment Betseke crept back into view and his lips were smiling.

"All around, sare," he said and his hand swept in a half circle. "Into trap have we come."

"Can we slip back?" Steve asked.

"When come night," Betseke replied and his rifle tore off the top of a man's head as it came up over the rocks for a scant two seconds.

SUDDENLY a bedlam of sound broke out above them and they saw a dozen yellow forms come hurtling over the rocks. Each of the defenders accounted for a man before the charging forms took to cover again. At the next advance Steve missed his chance, but Betseke brought down a man who remained dangling over a rock, a bullet through his heart.

Then they came on again, charging into the face of that fire as though life was their cheapest possession. Steve dropped his rifle after he had stopped one man and drew his automatic. A

form landed almost on his shoulders and he tore a hole through the man's stomach, another closed in from the front and he pulled the trigger twice. The muffled report and the smell of burning skin sickened him. Arms closed about his body as he caught a glimpse of Betseke breaking heads with the butt of his rifle.

An arm encircled Steve's head and bent it back until he thought his neck must crack. He got his teeth in it and it was torn away with a wail of pain. A knife plunged through the flesh of his shoulder and he felt the blood running down his side.

Then he realized that the hands that were dragging him down were gone. Betseke was pulling him to his feet and pointing to the rim of the plateau.

"Come on, sare," he said, and he whirled Steve around and pushed him toward the trail. Hugging the shadows, crawling on their stomachs in the protection of the thickening dusk, they made the first rim of the bush and plunged through it.

Cutting off the regular trail Betseke led the way to a trail that was scarcely wide enough to permit of their passing. Before they had reached the upper rim of the jungle, night had fallen and they had no fear of those far-distant cries and the occasional crack of a rifle.

Following a winding course in and out of ravines, through the thickest jungle they soon left all sound of their pursuers behind; but Steve was staggering from loss of blood when they came to the spot where they had left the *filanzana*. The four bearers were stretched out on the ground asleep.

Betseke whipped them into action after he had dressed the wound in Steve's shoulder, and they set a terrific pace down the mountainside.

Steve, knowing that his worst fears were realized, and recognizing against his will that it was foolhardy to try to go on alone, told Betseke that they would go down and await the action of the governor. If there was no sign of French troops in the morning, he would send Betseke back to Dudley Mason.

As the first rays of the morning sun climbed over the hills to the east they could see the low-thatched huts of Ankazabe in the distance. And while they gazed toward it they saw a thin line of dust that rose lazily upward, a line that Steve knew could rise only above a column of marching men. In his mind he could hear the quick staccato voice of a corporal counting the marching time.

Steve ordered the carriers to halt and he got to the ground and waited for that line to come forward until he could see the light blue of their uniforms and the sun glistening on their bayonets.

Then a little body of horsemen detached itself from the oncoming column and came galloping toward them in a cloud of dust. Steve came to attention and saluted as they halted. A major returned his salute and gazed inquiringly at the bandage about his shoulder.

"Just a little skirmish with an outpost," he explained.

They burst into a torrent of French and he tried in turn to answer their questions. Finally, he silenced them and told them, in the best French he could command, what lay ahead of them.

When he had finished, their eyes were wide with incredulous wonder and he asked them how many men they had brought.

"I don't know how many there are over the rim of that plateau," Steve said, "but from the horde I saw pouring over the edge, they are well-equipped, trained, and willing to fight."

MAJOR RENAUD, the officer in command, explained that they had a company of French infantry, two of Malagasy Tirailleurs, and a machine gun detachment. The

major smiled and said that he was sure that they wouldn't even have to fight.

"You're going to get the surprise of your life there, sir," Steve said. "They're just aching for a fight."

"The secret service has had wind of this uprising for some time," Major Renaud said, "but they haven't considered it of enough importance to bother about."

"Maybe they know," Steve said. "I hope they all run like hell, because they're sitting on my property!"

The column of troops had drawn up parallel to the little group of officers and had fallen out of ranks for a rest, the men throwing themselves on the ground.

Major Renaud wrote a hurried message and dispatched it to the governor-general and then ordered an advance in skirmish line. A bugle sounded and went reverberating off into the jungle.

En avant! Marche! Another peal of the bugle and the resonant sound of marching feet. Weariness dropped from Steve like a mantle and he swung into the saddle of the horse they had furnished him, his eyes shining, his heart beating like a trip-hammer.

Late in the afternoon scouts were sent ahead to reconnoiter. The advance guard cautiously penetrated the first rim of jungle to find only the narrowness of the trail to slow up their progress. The company of infantry followed in behind the advance guard by twos, then the machine gunners, and last the Tirailleurs. The trail was bordered on each side by a dense ravine making a surprise attack from anywhere but the front next to impossible.

Nevertheless Steve began to feel a certain uneasiness at the way Major Renaud took his men forward, his advance guard just behind his scouts, the main body almost on the heels of his guard. Steve knew his tactics as every man who has served three years in the Legion knows them. But when he voiced his fears to Major Renaud, Renaud laughed and shrugged his shoulders and said that he did not expect any opposition.

It was the second time he had said it, and it made Steve mad.

"You'll run your men into a trap," he said half angrily.

"My scouts will take care of that," the major answered, and he went on with a story he was telling a lieutenant by his side.

The crash of rifle fire and the *put-put-put* of a machine gun cut the major's story short and brought an incredulous, horrified expression to his face.

The advance guard came crashing back around a bend in the narrow trail —what was left of the advance guard. Two more machine guns cut in from each side of the trail and riddled the broken ranks as they came tearing back. Some forty men lay where they had fallen, half of them dead, the other half doubled up with bullets through their bellies. The screams of the wounded mingled with the hideous howls of the natives ahead.

Bullets whipped through the trees and cut down a half dozen more of the huddled infantry. Then Major Renaud found his breath and ordered his men down the sides of the ravine.

Steve slipped down beside Betseke and fired a half dozen shots into the jungle ahead while Major Renaud and his aids stormed up and down the line organizing the men for an advance.

"They'll be cut down like rats if they try to go up that trail," Steve muttered, but he kept his thoughts to himself. Let Renaud have a taste of those machine guns. It would take some of the polish off his boots and, perhaps, make him a soldier.

Major Renaud ordered the survivors of the advance guard back with the main body of troops for a general attack, and Steve swore softly to himself.

He saw that first wave of men go around that turn in the trail and he saw them stop in their tracks, piling up, screaming, cursing, as a hail of bullets

caught them in a cross-fire. A lieutenant who had in some miraculous way escaped the fire waved them on.

"*En avant, mes enfants, en avant!*" he cried and was struck by half a dozen bullets that fairly lifted him from his feet.

A sergeant leaped into the breach ahead of the next wave, but they were mowed down while they tried to clamber over the bodies of their dead companions.

CHAPTER V.

JUNGLE STRATEGY.

MAJOR RENAUD, seeing at last that it was impossible to advance beyond that piled-up mass of torn humanity, ordered his troops to fall back.

It was then that Steve went to him again.

"I think, sir," he said, "that my guide could lead a portion of your men through the jungle to flank them, or to advance to the top while your men are fighting their way through."

Major Renaud glared and snarled a few words of French.

"If you will give us fifty men, or sixty, I think we can lead them to the top, sir," he pleaded again. The Frenchman swung on his heel and started to walk away. Then he bawled an order calling one of his lieutenants to his side.

"Lieutenant Cordier will follow you with fifty men," he said to Steve. "You will proceed directly to the top, where we will join you after I have taught these dogs ahead a lesson. If we have not reached the top by the time you are there, and if you are able to, come back down this trail and flank those machine guns."

Lieutenant Cordier saluted and, following Steve and Betseke, he ordered his detachment back down the trail. After a mile they cut through what appeared to be impassable jungle and then a narrow track opened up like a chasm and they began a steady ascent through jungle so thick that it afforded a perfect protection.

From the right and below them came the steady crash of rifle fire and the incessant drumming of machine guns. Steve shook his head and swore softly to himself. He knew that unless Major Renaud cut through the jungle and flanked those machine guns they could never pass that bend in the trail.

When Betseke neared the upper rim of the jungle and slipped into the bush, he slowed down their advance until, at times, they were barely creeping. Above them rose the mass of bowlders over which they must clamber before they could reach the main plateau. These offered what seemed to be an almost impregnable defense, unless they could slip by and reach the rim with a surprise attack.

All hope of that quickly vanished as the men spread out and tried to slip beyond the first line of bowlders. From a half dozen places on the incline came the *tat-tat-tat* of machine guns. A whistling sleet of death poured down on them and halted them in their tracks. Steve saw men falling all about him, saw some of them rise up and fire a last shot as bullets cut them to ribbons.

As he dropped in behind a mass of rocks where some thirty men were huddled he saw Lieutenant Cordier go down with his head literally torn from his shoulders by a hail of lead.

Sweating, cursing, some laughing grimly, the men settled down to what seemed a hopeless task. Sharpshooters picked off four of that brave little band as they settled down to selling their lives dearly.

Seeing an outcropping of rock ahead that would offer them better protection, Steve cried out that he would lead them. Three more men had been picked off, and annihilation was only a matter of time where they were. Farther up they might hold out for

hours, or at least until darkness gave them a chance to retreat.

At first they looked at him in incredulous wonder, shaking their heads, swearing at him suspiciously.

Then Steve remembered the way Von Brocken, the sergeant-major of his old company, had cursed and fairly beaten the men over the top with the fury of his orders and the fury of his fighting.

He took a page from the training of Von Brocken, and he drew his automatic and got to his feet. He walked back and forth among those men, calling them all the gutter French that went to make up Von Brocken's vocabulary. Then he threw back his head and laughed as he pointed out the swine who manned the guns above them.

The men began to laugh with him as he swaggered back and forth exposing himself to the murderous fire from above, shrieking defiance. He had touched the right spot in these Frenchmen, for a Frenchman always loves a magnificent gesture. *Élan*, they call it.

"*En avant, mes enfants, en avant!*" he shrieked. "Up, damn you. *Aux armes! Allez!*"

"*Allons!*" they roared back at him, and they followed him up over those rocks, bent half-double, their voices screaming defiance.

Taking their foes by surprise, they had reached their objective before the gunners above could go into action. A sheet of lead swept over their heads and flattened itself on the rocks about them. The firing died away, and the men about Steve settled down to picking off an exposed hand, elbow or head.

ONLY one machine gun seemed to be in action above them as Steve stuck his head around a corner of a rock, and that machine gun was firing into the other guns and the natives, instead of aiming at Steve's position. Unable to believe his eyes, Steve pushed the cap of an infantryman around the top of the rocks. Only a single rifle bullet pinged at it. As he stuck his head around again he saw that hundreds of the natives that had been crouching in the rocks above, bent on annihilating the French troops, were now scampering over the rocks toward the rim of the plateau. The machine gun above was cutting them down as they tried to escape.

Steve's companions were crowding around him, their eyes wide, watching that strange drama above them. They knew that Major Renaud had not been able to cut his way through. It must be that two or three men who had skirted that ambuscade on the trail below had come up on the other side through the jungle.

Steve rallied the little band around him again, and his voice rang out again.

"Forward! *En avant!*" he screamed and clambered over the rocks.

"*En avant!*" came the frenzied answer, and they followed him. Only desultory firing greeted their advance. They found three dead gunners huddled around the first machine gun. Four about the next. Gathering up the machine guns, they advanced steadily until they were near the top, when Steve led the men in behind a cluster of rocks.

He was a little afraid of that machine gun above, because he didn't know what action it might take after the natives above had been disposed of. Perhaps it was only a personal mutiny in the ranks of the natives, and after the natives had been disposed of they would turn the gun back on the French.

After placing their captured machine guns in such a position that they could fight off an attack from any side, Steve placed a handkerchief on a rifle and pushed it up over the rocks. After a moment a white rag appeared over the rim of rocks above, and Steve ordered his men to advance.

The sight that met his eyes as he neared that rim of rocks was one that brought joy to his heart, and he knew why he had led that advance, why he refused to turn back and admit defeat.

Crouched behind that machine gun was Glenn, his face covered with grime, his shirt gone, his lips spread wide in a happy grin.

STEVE clambered over the edge with a shout, and the two men clasped hands, just as a thousand black forms appeared on the rim of the plateau. Glenn pointed, and at once sighted along the barrel of the machine gun he straddled. As Steve followed his line of fire, his mouth dropped open and he choked for breath.

Coming toward him, an automatic in each hand, his bull voice roaring orders, was Von Brocken, the very man whose tactics Steve had used to bulldoze those Frenchmen up over the rocks.

For a moment Steve stood like a man in a trance. Then he was down behind one of the machine guns pouring lead into that oncoming horde. For an instant the line wavered and stopped, then came steadily on again.

Men fell all about Von Brocken, screaming horribly as they died, but he came on, passing through that slashing gale of lead as though he bore a charmed life. And then, while Steve marveled at the insane bravery of the man, he saw his two guns shoot into the air, saw him swing half around and pitch forward on his face.

Seeing their leader go down, the courageous band of Sakalava and Hovas hesitated. Those in front were mowed down by the merciless fire of the machine guns. Suddenly the whole line of blacks dropped their rifles and went streaming back over the rim of the plateau, their courage gone.

Taking advantage of the retreat, Steve and Glenn led their little band to the brow of the hill. There they set up their machine guns again and swept the plateau until not a black could be seen.

It was then that Steve turned to Glenn with a happy grin on his face.

"Well, where in hell did you come from?" he wanted to know as they clasped hands again.

Glenn waved to the row of thatched huts that spread out on the plateau.

"The last place before I got down here was the arsenal," he chuckled. "It was all Von Brocken's doings," he explained. "My fault, too, Steve. I babbled to Marcelle that night in Pascal's, and she told him. He was trying to seize the island, and was going to make me come across with the location of our mine. The man was insane—too much desert and too much Legion."

Steve nodded understandingly, and Glenn went on:

"Those were his cutthroats who jumped me in my room. I woke up here, with Von Brocken promising me a little entertainment in the line of torture if I didn't come across. You see, Marcelle told him about that map. That was what they were trying to get, and when they couldn't get it they took me instead.

"Then, when I heard the fighting to-day," he grinned, "I really had to take a hand. So I kicked one of Von Brocken's lieutenants in the stomach, took his uniform, and went over to the arsenal to borrow a machine gun. After the battle was well started I slipped in here and cut loose on 'em. Bright boy, eh?"

"Well, I'll be—"

Betseke touched Steve on the shoulder.

"Go down trail, shall we, sare?" he asked.

"Hell, yes!" Steve said. "I forgot all about that frog down there. He was trying to get up the trail with three or four machine guns holding it. We'll go down and give the boy a hand."

Glenn grinned happily.

As they started over the rocks Bet-

seke stopped them and pulled them back to safety as a howling mob of Malagasy Tirailleurs and French Infantry came charging up over the bowlders, their rifles belching lead and flame.

Steve stopped the firing by hoisting Glenn's shirt on a rifle and pushing a couple of French Infantrymen up for their comrades to see. It was too bad that Major Renaud was so far behind his first line of troops that he could not hear the cheer that floated back over the plateau in the wake of his retreating enemy!

THAT evening the plateau which had so recently been swarming with the army of General Von Brocken was dotted with the camp fires of Malagasy Tirailleurs and French Infantry.

And General Von Brocken, along with the half dozen ex-*legionnaires* who had aided him in his insurrection, and a countless number of Malagasy and French soldiers, was stretched out in the sleep from which no soldier hears the blare of reveille.

Steve and Glenn stopped beside one of the fires and listened to a folk song that was being chanted by a happy Tirailleur.

A bugle sounded across the stillness of the night, and the men shuffled to their feet and unstacked their arms. The reflection of the fire glistened on their bayonets as they moved away. The howl of an aye-aye came floating back from a distance.

Glenn and Steve watched the fires fade away to dying embers, and there was a smile of contentment on their faces.

They turned and made their way slowly back toward the hut where they would spend the night—a hut that stood on their property. They stood for a moment looking off toward the high towering mountain that frowned above them. And suddenly Steve threw back his head and laughed, that same infectious laugh that had made those Frenchmen follow him up over those rocks that afternoon.

Glenn looked at him questioningly, and there was a smile on his lips.

Steve pointed a hand and laughed again.

"Thar's gold in them thar hills, fellah," he said, and followed Glenn up the ladder.

THE END.

The Treasure of Porto Bello

THE people of Porto Bello believe that a large part of the loot of Panama is buried under the ruins of the old fortifications, and it is a fact that gold and silver have been found there.

The walls of the forts, which are built on both sides of the bay, are of solid blocks of masonry ten or twelve feet thick and untouched by time; huge guns of ancient pattern lie scattered on the concrete floors within, and the dungeons below swarm with bats, rats and lizards. It would take years to hunt for the treasure in or beneath these dungeons, and would be costly.

The old road to Panama over which Morgan and his freebooters marched, still winds across the high hills back of the town, but its cobblestones are covered six inches deep with dirt.

On the top of the highest hill on the left between tall trees a rope ladder leads up to a "crow's nest" in the branches, first built there by Morgan's men to watch for Spanish ships.

Minna Irving.

Halifax caught Jacques by the sword-wrist

Ho For London Town!

With ready sword and bold wit, Will Halifax plunges into a plot that is threatening Queen Elizabeth's throne

By TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "When Trails Were New," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WILLIAM HALIFAX, son of the late Sir Harry, rides toward London in the year 1585, seeking fame and fortune at the court of Queen Elizabeth. His father had died in a mysterious fight with two men of the Earl of Leicester, Lord Lieutenant for the county; and Tony Pepperday, a lowly bailiff, had bought up liens on all the Halifax property, foreclosing on it. Pepperday had then forbidden the marriage—which he had formerly sought—of his stepdaughter, Mildred, with Will Halifax.

So, with Mildred's kisses and encouragement, and owning only the horse he rides, Will starts out. On the way he falls in with a merry and wondrous clever fellow, one Will Shakespeare, of Stratford; and soon the two are close companions. Shakespeare is running away from his wife, Ann Hathaway, who is past her prime and shrewish; and he and Halifax have sundry adventures.

They are held up by a highwayman, but Halifax disarms the man, and finding it is Jeremy Crutch—whom his father had once befriended and even saved from hanging—he upbraids him, and makes him trade his fine horse for Shakespeare's sorry nag. Crutch, beg-

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ging for his liberty, gives Will Halifax a gimcrack, a little green figurine inside a box, which he had taken from Joshua Stiles, a London merchant, who seemed to set great store by it.

In London they lodge with Roger Tunby, a merchant who had often visited Sir Harry. Tunby offers, with suspicious eagerness, to get Will a berth on a merchant ship; and Halifax shrewdly suspects that Tunby either has some scheme to conceal from him, or else owed his father some money. He delays his decision on the offer. The next morning he fares forth to see London, and perhaps encompass a certain mission of his own. On his way he becomes embroiled in a street fight, where the apprentices, with their cry of "Clubs! Clubs!" have swarmed out of the shops to punish a horseman who had struck one of their number.

CHAPTER IV (*Continued*).

OF THE MEETING WITH BENJAMIN BERDEN, AND THE OPPORTUNITY THAT CAME OF IT.

HE on the horse, who was the cause of the riot, made shift to gallop through their midst. Faith, he sent a dozen of the angry 'prentices down like ninepins, but he might have spared himself some drubbing had he put another face on it.

They dragged him off his horse and cudgeled him until he lay stunned, whereafter they held him under a pump and soused him back to consciousness, with his high boots full of water and his fine clothes muddied, mocking him for one of the Spanish ambassador's men, and telling him his master and his master's king to boot were like to be hanging ere long with the other quartered Jesuits on London Bridge.

Yet they were merry rogues, right eager to be friendly in their own way, not intolerant, but liking not at all stiff manners in a stranger. They who had made a sort of prisoner of me had vented their spleen on the horseman, and were well contented when I gave them money to buy ale.

Indeed, when I asked where the house of Joshua Stiles might be, they sent one of their number to escort me. He was named Jack Giles—a stocky, bull-necked lad in a yellow jerkin that matched his freckles, and a flat, green cap that seemed to have been used for many purposes. He told me on the way that he would break his bonds of 'prenticeship come summer and try fortune, venturing against the Dons at sea, or else on land in the war in Flanders, whichever opportunity should turn up first.

The place where Joshua Stiles did business was a great house built of brick, containing offices of more than a dozen merchants, close to the new Exchange that had been built by Sir Thomas Gresham.

The house had a yard in its midst, in which scores of messengers and porters, and some sailors, warmed themselves at sea-coal fires that burned in iron pots. The snow, gray and somber with soot, had been piled up in heaps that did not melt because so little sun came into the yard, but the firelight shone on the snow handsomely.

A pompous jackanapes in livery stood at the entrance gate and asked my business, seeming to take it ill that I was guided by a city 'prentice and not followed by a servant of my own, nor not on horseback; and while I pondered whether to bestow a largesse on the churl to change his humor I felt my cloak pulled from behind.

Merry, but I did not want to see Will Shakespeare then! There he stood, as pleased to find me as if I owed him money. His old-fashioned country suit looked shabby, and I wanted to ruffle it handsomely, not show myself to an important stranger for the first time in a bumpkin's company. I stepped back to the street to learn what brought him, masking my displeasure.

"Willy," he said, smiling, "Roger Tunby takes it ill that you should leave his house all raw, uncounseled and alone. He fears that you may fall among trim-witted fellows who will spoil you of that finery! He bade me follow you, and, if I would keep his good will, not to return without you. Marry, but he set no limit to the venture."

"How so?" I demanded, not exactly comprehending, though I read the mischief in his eyes and by the rood it softened my ill-humor.

"Why, as day in search of night, and night of day, let mutual pursuit not cease until we meet in gloaming at our host's door," he retorted.

I could see that he had news for me, but he proposed to tell it in his own way, mocking my impatience with an air of having all eternity to browse in.

"Let us steal a march on destiny," said he, "and for the moment be the fortune's favorites that hope accredits us. Insane ambition was the bane of Lucifer, but we're not angels, Will. We'll both go looking for Will Halifax—yourself the genius of what he shall be, looking for the runagate that is, to make a man of him—and I, the counsellor, contributing such ill advice as Satan uses to keep homing souls from heaven!"

IT was half an hour before I had the story from him. I had hardly left old Roger Tunby's house that morning, it appeared, before the common carrier drew rein with letters out of Warwickshire, which Tunby bore into the closet at the shop's rear with an air of secrecy. That left Will free to exchange a word or two of gossip with the carrier, who told him that one letter was from Tony Pepperday.

Remembering that Tony was my Mildred's lawful guardian who, by unhappy chance and monstrous, misliked me, Will plied the carrier with questions. And it seemed that the carrier, like many other folk, well understood what I knew not at all—that Roger Tunby wanted Mildred for his own son, Edward, knowing what a comfortable dowry she should have, and Roger being also involved with Tony Pepperday in dealings that might otherwise turn to his disadvantage.

"Quoth the carrier," said Will, "the devil himself would need a long spoon should he sup with either of them."

I took comfort in the thought that Edward Tunby was as far away as I could wish him, and I smiled to think of Roger Tunby's promise to help me to a venture far away.

"Can they marry a couple when the one is abroad and the other unwilling?" I asked Will.

"Nay," said he, "but ships come home and absence has a way of ending in the course of time. As for the maid's unwillingness, they say it is a woman's heritage to change her mind. You are not so puritanical, I take it, that design might forge no scandal for your Mildred's ears?"

For that speech I cursed him—albeit something gently, for I loved the man, although he could think of more ingenious disasters in a moment than the devil might invent in half a lifetime, and he aggravated discontent by watching for the outcome like a groundling standing in the pit at a play. Yet he was the friendliest of observers; he amused himself like Puck, without a spice of malice.

"I have heard," said he, "that this man Joshua Stiles, whom you seek, is after the Spanish fashion, more solemn than wise. Nay, I know no more than rumor—what the 'prentices have told me."

I did not want Will with me when I should meet Stiles, but neither did I wish to lack his friendship, so I thought of a way to be presently rid of him and at the same time to advantage both of us. I bade him bring the horses and to meet me where we stood as soon as might be, saying I would let him ride my roan. For I thought if he

should ride the mare again so soon he might forget that I had bought her from him.

Then I bade that churl in livery at the gate to conduct me forthwith to Joshua Stiles's presence, he insolently answering that I might cool my humor in the yard along with the other petitioners until it should please his honor to send for me.

And while we bandied words so loudly that the porters left the fires to come and watch us, Joshua Stiles himself came fuming through a doorway, pompous and important, to discover what the scandal might be. All they in the yard saluted him with a "good morning, Master Stiles," but he took no notice, and I judged his temper reasonably well.

HE was a hard-faced man with a pointed gray beard, tall and muscular, his hair nigh whiter than his starched ruff. From under shaggy brows his pale blue eyes looked old with worry, although alertness glimmered in their depths, and he had a way of standing with both hands on his hips and his paunch thrust out, that he may have thought lent him importance. He was very richly dressed.

"How now, sirrah?" he demanded in his harsh voice. "You mistake this for a fish wharf? Shall I order you thrown in the Clink for a disturber of the peace?"

I answered soberly that I had news for him. He asked, what news? I replied, such news as he might not wish bruited about too widely.

He demanded to know whence I came and whether my name was entered on the Lord Mayor's list of strangers in the City; to which I answered, he himself might write such informations as he pleased when he had heard what I would tell him privily. Whereat he stood a moment fingering the gold chain that he wore around his neck, and I judged him but a sheep in a wolf skin.

"Come," he said, leading the way.

I followed him into a room wherein a bright fire burned in an iron grate and two clerks wrote at a table. There were documents in racks and boxes.

"Now then, sirrah. To the point, and briefly!" he commanded. But I said nothing, looking sidewise at the clerks and from the clerks again to him.

So he dismissed them from the room and took his stand, with hands on hips again and his back to the fire, leaving me in the window light. I took care he should read some self-assurance on my face.

When we had tried to stare each other out of countenance, I asked him whether he had lost aught on the road from Bristol lately; whereat he put his hand to his beard and hesitated in a way that put me thoroughly on guard against him. There was a great square keyhole in the door that led into the next room; I would have wagered a clerk was listening.

"What have you of mine?" he demanded.

But I was not so country-raw as all that.

"I know," I said, "a man who found a red box with a green stone figure in it. I can get the thing if I can find its proper owner."

"Will you sell it?" he demanded. "How much?"

"No," said I. "For shall I sell you what is not mine? But I am minded that it might be such a talisman as sets its finder on the road to fortune."

"It will lead you on the road to Tyburn Tree!" he answered. "If you have my property, surrender it before I have you clapped in fetters!"

BUT though he was reputed rich, and an alderman to boot, it crossed my mind that he might have more will than ability to execute such malice. Dangerous dogs, thought I, bite first and bark about it afterward. So I said I was mistaken, having heard the

owner of the gimcrack was a civil enough gentleman.

"Whereas you, sir," I added, "seem somewhat lacking in that particular. I will take my information to the Lord Mayor, who will know what should be done."

I knew I had him then. He was in six minds, all at once. Plainly he mistook me for a spy of some sort, and I doubted not that there was good cause why he should be watched.

"I have a toothache and the chill air frets me, shortening my temper," he said at last. "I should have perceived you are of gentle breeding, and I beg you to forget my hasty rudeness, that offends me more than it did you."

He made me a bow with good grace, but I could see that he had further fetches in his head. However, God has provided to send curst cows short horns, and he practiced lamely.

"I suspect the toy of which you speak is mine," he said, "and, truth to tell, I will be glad to get it back without such bruiting of my foolish fondness for the thing as might stir ridicule. If you will bring it to my house in Spitalfields, to-night at eight o' the clock, I will be at leisure to discuss what influence I can exert in your behalf."

To put a better face on it, he questioned me about my name and parentage, pretending he had known my father, Sir Harry. But he affected no interest in how I might have chanced on knowledge of the gimcrack; and what with thinking that an honest man should have questioned me on that point exceeding narrowly, and ascertaining very readily that he lied about having known my father, I set less value on his present protest of goodwill than on his former spite.

Nevertheless, I let him hold me there in conversation, he turning over in his mind, I did not doubt, the while he talked, alternatives for my discomfiture.

It was an hour, and he summoned by his clerk to the Exchange, before he took my arm and walked with me to the gate, where already Will Shakespeare sat on my horse Robin, holding the led mare.

I thought that Joshua Stiles looked curiously at the mare, almost as if he recognized her for the highwayman's, and then at me, but he made no comment, acknowledging my bow and walking off between his clerk and a lackey who cloaked him. I thought he whispered to the lackey, but it might have been that the man was only waiting on him fussily.

WILL and I rode westward, for it was time that the walking in Paul's should begin, of which I had heard my father tell so often: how all the favorites at court who had the queen's ear could be seen there promenading, as well as all those who wished to seem important or who sought an opportunity to press their suits by getting word with some one of influence.

Avoiding Cheapside, lest one of Roger Tunby's 'prentices should recognize us, we had turned along a street near by the river when a circumstance befell that ushered me on to the stage of great events, though through a back door, as it were.

There began a clamor of all the church bells and a din of shouting—then a surge of people out of by lanes toward Cheapside. Women leaned from upper windows. I thought haply Queen Elizabeth herself was coming, which, if it were so, was a sight that neither Will nor I would have missed, not though we lacked a meal for looking—although Will told me he had seen her once at Kenilworth what time the Earl of Leicester entertained her with unnumbered strange conceits. But Will was young then.

So we turned up a lane into Cheapside and waited, realizing presently that all that clamor of bells was something other than a festival. For dignity

we forebore questioning, but we were puzzled by the crowd's behavior, which seemed to me expectant rather of a good bear-baiting than the passage of the queen's grace.

Presently, from the City, came a great roar our way, increasing until it almost drowned the clangor of the bells. Then I saw a group of horsemen and, behind them, yeomen from the Tower in bright red liveries with black hats—bearded, handsome fellows armed with halberds, forcing the crowd to either side to make a passage through the midst.

Then followed he who was the instigator of the whole commotion. Came an old gray horse that drew a hurdle, whereon lay a man so tied by legs and wrists that he could only raise himself a little on his elbows. He was clothed in sacking, and his arms and the calves of his legs were blue with the cold—a middle-aged man who, I thought, might look right gently bred in other circumstances.

Never had I seen a man so howled at and so execrated; nor never have I seen a poor wretch so resentful of the fate that he had brought down on himself, nor more undignified in his attempt to win the people to his way of thinking. Many and many a man I have seen die, some of whom were caitiffs, but none have I seen that feared his death and clamored his complaints as that one did.

He would raise himself until the cords cut deep into his arms, and cry out that he called on God to hold Queen Elizabeth guilty of his blood.

For a moment the crowd would listen. Then it drowned his cries under a roar of mockery and execration, so that you would think he would know how little use it was to make appeal to them. But he cried out the more; and all the while he kept glancing over his shoulder at the executioners who walked behind him dressed in black, wearing black masks, the one carrying a hempen rope and the other the great quartering knife with its edge toward the culprit.

Behind the executioners were other yeomen of the guard to keep the crowd from harming the poor wretch; and indeed, I think, if it had not been for the yeomen and their halberds there would have been no work left for the executioner to do, so savage was the crowd's mood.

There were some who threw stones and vegetables, although not many, having scant time to procure the ammunition. One yeoman was struck by a stone and left the ranks to punish him who threw it; not discovering the man, he struck another with his halberd and so shrewdly that the rest took warning of the broken head.

THE procession passed and I looked for some one to tell me who was the poor wretch who rode the hurdle. There was a dark-faced fellow almost at my saddle-bow—a man with clever-looking, hazel eyes, clean-shaved, dressed well in a dark green suit that might be some nobleman's livery, although it bore no insignia. He seemed right eager to address me, so I looked the other way to test his eagerness, and presently he touched my knee.

"I saw you having speech with Joshua Stiles, the alderman," he said. "Will you troll the bowl with me awhile in yonder tavern? We will drink a fathom-health or two to Good Queen Bess."

He took my mare's reins, smiling confidently when I bade him let go.

"I am Benjamin Berden," he said, "in the service of Mr. Secretary Walsingham."

He might have been speaking falsely, but he claimed high influence, so I held my tongue and followed him into the tavern, leaving Will to mind the horses; but the lad Jack Giles had followed us and took the reins from Will, who was nothing loth to bear us company.

So we three took seats at a table in a corner and were served with ale and cheese by a wench who took such interest in Will that she spilled ale on my cloak.

Berden seemed in no haste to unfold his business. He told us that the wretch we saw drawn on a hurdle was Dr. Parry of the queen's household, and a member of the Parliament now sitting.

He had been convicted of plotting against the queen's life, having agreed with one Neville, a relative of the Earl of Westmoreland, to blow her up in bed with gunpowder. But Neville had betrayed the plot, and Parry had confessed under threat of torture; whereat, such indignation had there been in Parliament that Sir Thomas Lucy had proposed a bill to authorize a form of execution worse than that provided by the statutes.

But Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh and a few others protesting, word of it had reached the queen's ears, so that she herself prevented it by a message to Parliament, declaring that the present penalties were ample—as indeed whoever witnesseth can testify.

"But there are many who think otherwise," said Berden, "since, if the queen were killed she would leave no heir of her body to rule the realm. The Scottish queen—aye, and the King of Spain, and the Duke of Guise, would surely contrive to lay this kingdom low under the Pope's heel, of which we had aplenty in Queen Mary's reign."

But I thought that a dreadful death could hardly terrify a man of courage, and Will Shakespeare added that whatever Sir Thomas Lucy might invent would be a poxy method to procure unquietness, since wisdom does not brew itself in fool's heads. We were like to have begun an argument, Will having no love for Sir Thomas Lucy, who had put him in the stocks more than once for killing deer; but Berden stayed that, coming to the point at last:

"What know you of Joshua Stiles?" he asked me.

I TOLD him I thought the alderman a sheep's head in a wolf's shift. One word led to another and at last, divining that this Berden was a man whose confidences might prove useful to me, I related to him how the gimcrack in its red box came into my hands, and how Joshua Stiles coveted the thing, it being doubtless his.

Berden asked to clap eye on the gimcrack, but I was minded to discover first what underlay his interest. So he asked, would I show it to a secretary of Sir Francis Walsingham?

"Aye," I answered, "if he will present me to Sir Francis afterward, since I lack present means of having access to the queen's grace."

"You aim high," said Berden. But he thought awhile, and presently he put me to a deal of questioning about my parentage and doings, until I had told him, even, that the Earl of Leicester was unlikely to espouse my cause at court—although I told him nothing of my father's death.

It tickled him, I thought, that I should speak unkindly of the Earl of Leicester, but he warned me of the danger of discussing such high personages.

"There are spies," he told me, "whichever way a man turns. Spies for the French and Spanish embassies, and for the Scottish queen, and for the Privy Council—aye, and for the queen herself, if only the truth were known; so that what a man says privily this morning may be bruited in the queen's ears in the afternoon."

I said I doubted it, to make him say more, although I believed him well enough. He tapped the table with a finger and looked keenly at me, screwing up his hazel eyes until they were liker a cat's in sunlight than a man's.

"I myself am a spy for Sir Francis Walsingham," he said. "I will stand your friend before Sir Francis if you

will do the like by me. He recks too little yet of my discretion. I could summon guards and hale you to him, but he might reward me or he might blame, and I better like the thought of bringing you before Lord Burghley, who is liker to employ you. By the same good service to yourself I fasten two strings to my own bow. It is better to serve two masters, though the Good Book says we shall not, than to starve on the ingratitude of one."

He told me then a long tale of his doings: how his father was a preacher of the new religion who had fled from England when Queen Mary married the Spanish king and no man's life was safe who refused to acknowledge the Pope. How, consequently, he himself had learned Italian and French and German in Geneva, not returning to his own land until she whom men call Bloody Mary died, with Calais written on her heart—for so they tell—and her sister our great Elizabeth came out of durance to be queen, at which time Berden was a boy of fourteen years.

HE told how he became a servant to Sir Francis Walsingham, with whom he lived in Paris at the embassy, and how Sir Francis had employed him chiefly to spy on the Spanish ambassador and on a man named Morgan, who was agent for the Queen of Scots.

"And I tell you," he said, tapping again on the table, "we who ferret out the news by which the statesmen guide their practices, receive small wages and less praise, even as those statesmen themselves get poxy treatment from the queen. A man does well to look to his own chances."

I thought him a zany, notwithstanding so to talk to me, who was a stranger to him; and I thought Will Shakespeare, glancing at him darkly now and then, gave little credit to his talk. But Will was mainly interested in the serving wench, doing what he so often does with a woman—teasing her with lofty and witty speeches, to enjoy her indiscretions or the artifice with which she tried to guard her modesty.

I was eager to be taken that hour to Lord Burghley, or to Sir Francis Walsingham, indifferent, indeed, which member of the council should be sponsor of my fortune, so be I missed no opportunity. But Berden told me neither of them could be seen that morning, since the Parliament was sitting and the lords held council in the morning to be ready for the session in the afternoon.

"Moreover," said he, "matters such as this are better deftly managed, such a pick-thank lot they are at court, each studying to claim all credit for himself."

CHAPTER V.

OF MANY FAMOUS MEN, AND OF THE MEETING WITH THOMAS PHELIPPES.

BERDEN found me not so ignorant as he imagined. Princes and their ministers seek safety for the State in preserving that very ignorance that constitutes its gravest danger; but we of the shires and counties were kept more or less informed by the members of Parliament returning to their homes between the short sessions.

Jesuits, too, in numbers toured the country in disguise, their wanderings winked at by the very folk who should have denounced them, because through their mouths men learned the foreign news.

So what I did know certainly was mixed with false and ridiculous tidings, but I had a sort of general knowledge that made me able to hold my ground with Berden. I knew, for instance, that the Scots queen was now at Tutbury in the custody of Sir Ralph Sadler, a man advanced in years, who, some said, favored her, though that I doubted.

My father had been one of the first in our part of England to sign the

association bond for the protection of Queen Elizabeth's life, but it was understood, nevertheless, that her life hung by a pack-thread since the Pope had excommunicated her, with promises of wealth in this world and salvation in the next for her assassin.

It was common rumor, too, and well known to us country gentry, that Percy, Neville, Arundel, Throgmorton, Paget and others of our nobility who had escaped to foreign parts were planning invasion to bring Mary of Scotland from Tutbury and set her on the English throne. The Duke of Guise should go to Scotland to invade us from the north, and the King of Spain should send his troops to land in Ireland. Nor had England any army to resist them.

There were also stories that our queen would marry the Earl of Leicester, to raise an heir to her own body and to set all rivalries at rest. But there were few who liked that prospect, since the Earl was but a Dudley, and ill spoken of.

So there was much to talk of, and no little mutual understanding, as Berden and I rode toward Paul's yard. That 'prentice lad, Jack Giles, had followed us; he seemed vastly taken with me, so I let him hold the horses, but I wondered what trouble his master would make for him when he should return to that shop in Cheapside.

Mighty entertainment had I watching how the grave and venerable men who stood at corners measuring the young gallants' swords and broke them if they passed a lawful length. For all were aping the Italians in those days, but an order in council had set limits to the fashion, and many a cock-feathered gallant I saw well mocked and impotently furious because his costly new Italian blade was snapped into a business for the blacksmith. Glad I was that none had coaxed me to Italianate myself. My sword was good old English, short and heavy, that a Halifax had borne on Flodden Field that time the Scots had sought to take advantage of King Harry when his back was turned.

AND when we had seen all the shopkeepers' daughters I wondered awhile at Paul's, which is a building that, I doubt not, makes the foreigners put tongue in cheek when they speak of us as barbarous pirates.

The spire is lacking since the lightning of '61, and some said then that was an omen of God's grace being withdrawn from England. But I believe in England, and such talk does not unman me. Nor in all the world is such another spectacle. All England's gallant men seemed there in Paul's walk, strolling.

There I first set eyes on men who are the very marrow of the spine of England, Berden naming them as he and I stood watching from a corner near the main door.

Of them all, Lord Howard of Effingham, the queen's lord chamberlain, was by far the handsomest; but Sir Philip Sidney, already master of the ordnance, although not greatly older than myself, was next to him in good looks.

But the man who made my heart leap as I watched him was Sir Francis Drake. He was dressed in a suit of red and white, with a velvet cloak that showed off the breadth of his shoulders and depth of his chest. He had a thick neck that looked fit to bear a cannon ball, and cannon ball was what I thought of as I stared at his high forehead and the brave blue eyes beneath.

He was newly married, or about to marry, I forget which, and that for the second time, although methought he did not resemble one whom marriage might enchain too much; he was sea-breezy, with a look of being captain on his own quarter-deck—ruddy-bearded, red-cheeked, ageless, and a fighter to the last shot if ever I clapped eyes on one, yet of a manner graceful even in that company.

And this I marked: that though he neither raised his voice nor gestured forcibly, his speech came out of him like gunshot; so that all men listened to him, though he seemed not to care that they listened.

I was glad then of Berden's promise to present me to a secretary of Sir Francis Walsingham, since that was all that kept me from copying Duke Humphrey's men and other advocates of broken causes.

Duke Humphrey's men were they who hung around Duke Humphrey's tomb in hope of chance employment; and I saw how they watched their opportunity to tug at the cloak of this nobleman or that, some suffering rebuke, some turned from in stony silence, and not one receiving gracious answer—except that I saw Sir Philip Sidney give money to a wounded fellow from the Dutch wars.

Came a man in a russet suit, whom at first sight I liked not at all—a spare, pock-marked fellow, red-haired, something over thirty, who passed through the crowd adroitly and tapped at Berden's shoulder from behind.

"What have you?" he demanded.

He was owlish. I perceived that Berden feared him; and indeed there was nothing about him that a man of merry humor might regard with liking, though he stirred curiosity. Nor was he altogether mean to look at; there was something of enthusiasm in him, as if in secret he pursued a steadfast aim, and it leaped into my mind, as I observed him, that an alchemist or a sorcerer might look as he did.

I felt confident the fellow would bring harm to whatever cause he made his own; wherein my intuition did him wrong, although I found out later —and the Queen of Scots discovered to her sorrow—that no subtler enemy existed. But there was no more reliable friend or servant, in his own way.

"I have Joshua Stiles as good as caught," said Berden and presented me, naming the man Master Thomas Phelippes. His strange brown eyes changed vaguely, as if, mayhap, he knew my name by hearsay; and I learned later that he never forgot whatever he had once heard.

Berden quickly told his story, and Phelippes asked to see the trinket. He returned it to me after one glance.

"Yes, we have him now," he said quietly, "and another besides, if no fool blunders."

BERDEN flinched at that, so I knew there was discontent between them. For awhile they whispered with their backs toward me, so I turned to watch Sir Francis Drake again.

Phelippes touched me on the shoulder. "Ride," he said, "with Berden to the Palace Yard and await my coming."

It was like a story from a book. I felt my heart leap. To the Palace Yard already, and I scarce a day in London!

So we rode to Westminster, where a crowd stood struggling to see the quartered wretch whom they had dragged up Cheapside earlier in the day. But we threaded our way around the edges of the crowd and rode under an echoing arch, where halberdiers admitted Berden without challenge.

The inner yard was smoothly paved, with a great well in the midst that seemed to serve no purpose, since there were neither buckets nor beam, although there was a stone arch over it with hooks to which we fastened our reins. There we waited, watching the comings and goings of many messengers, some of whom, from their liveries, I knew to be followers of the Earl of Leicester.

Very tardily came Phelippes. He brought with him a certain Captain Jacques, who looked like an Italian but was not, though I never learned in what land he had first seen daylight. He rode and stood like a soldier to be counted on for fierceness, and behind him rode four others not less dark and desperate of aspect than himself.

Phelippes threw his reins to Berden and went in through a door in the shadow at a corner of the yard. The rest of us stood staring at one another. It was a long time, and we half froze, before Phelippes came out through the same narrow door and beckoned me. A day came, not long afterward, when Phelippes treated me with deference, but that day I was very willing to obey him.

I followed him up steps into a narrow corridor from which oaken doors opened on either hand. There was a weight of silence and a chill gloom, as if we were entering a dungeon; but we went up stone stairs to a wider corridor, and at the end of that a bright fire of sea-coal was burning in an iron grate at which a dozen saucy pages warmed themselves.

There Phelippes left me for awhile, and, since the pages made no room for me before the fire, I boxed the ears of one of them. They were not so spirited as Cheapside 'prentices, although I was soon to learn that they could be as waspish in their own way and a dozen times less easy to put in humor.

The good comfortable glow of sea-coals warmed me finely, and the need to stare those pages out of countenance restored my self-assurance, what with being chilled to the marrow in the yard and waiting like a serving man at Phelippes's beck and call. I recalled to myself that I was being much more fortunate than I had a reason to expect, and by the time Phelippes opened a door and beckoned I felt ready to make my bow to Queen Elizabeth herself.

CHAPTER VI.

LORD SECRETARY BURGHLEY.

I FOLLOWED Phelippes into a room in which sat four venerable-looking secretaries in black suits, who wrote studiously by the dim light from narrow windows. At the far end was a door by which a man sat on a stool, holding a black rod tipped with ivory; he tapped on the door with his stick, not opening until he heard a voice within, which brought my heart to my mouth.

I have given much thought to the conundrum how it is that coming events or persons can cause us in anticipation of their coming so to creep and tingle, but have never solved it nor have met the man who could, though many have talked a multitude of words about it. I know that I was sweating as I passed that inner door. I know not why.

Phelippes led into a dim room sumptuously furnished, lined with shelves on which were boxes, many of them covered with red leather. At a table in the midst two secretaries sat, their quill pens squeaking on the parchment. Neither of them glanced up. But he who sat in a great armchair by the fireside stared at me, and I had no eyes thereafter for whatever else was in the room, so curiously stirring was his presence.

Since that day I have come to think him great, and I have thought him mean; I have despised his underhandedness—the more since I have had to play my part in it—and I have admired his sagacity, his loyalty and courage, even while offended by his treacherous unfairness. But I have never overcome that feeling in his presence of being face to face with forces that are not exactly of this world—forces both good and evil, and all terrible.

"My Lord Burghley," said Phelippes, "this is the son of Sir Harry Halifax of Brownsover, of whom I spoke."

His lordship frowned, I standing before him with my left hand on my hilt. My right hand seemed one too many.

He was long past middle-age, gray-bearded, growing bald and wearing a black silk cap. He had the gout, and his right foot was in a great felt slip-

per resting on a cushion, he having doubtless not been kissed enough by pretty ladies nor not looking like one whom they were like to kiss more eagerly than children take their honied brimstone in the spring o' the year.

He was dressed all in black with a white lawn ruff, very dainty and stiff, and he wore a long gold chain, curiously wrought. I took him for a man of rather less than middle height, though that was not so easy to determine because of the chair and the way he sat in it; but he was not one to be feared for his physical strength; what power he had undoubtedly resided in the massive forehead. His face smacked of a kind of incredulous wisdom, as if nothing could happen that should surprise him, he having tasted of all disappointments. An irascible man, and, I doubted not, given to brooding chin on chest; pallid and far heavier of paunch than looked good for his health.

"You have a trinket?" he said suddenly, in a sullen voice, as if he made an accusation that he dared me to deny.

I gave him the red box, and he studied it a long while, stroking the gimcrack with his thumb as he watched the firelight playing on the green stone. At last he closed the box and set it on the table.

"Dangerous spoil to be caught with!" he said, staring at me. "What do you seek in London?"

"Fortune," said I, hoping I might make him smile; but he only stared, as if wondering what treachery might underlie my frank appearance—so that even I myself began to think me treacherous.

HE bade me tell him how I came to London, listening chin on hand, as if my journey pleased him not at all. I said nothing at first of the Earl of Leicester or of my father's death; but when I had finished he scowled at me.

"How now, sir!" he demanded. "Have you told the half of it? Who is this Mildred Jackson, whom a follower of the Earl of Leicester tells me you have dared to covet?"

So I told him, and he questioned me narrowly as to her age and as to how her mother, being gently bred, had come to marry such a rat as Tony Pepperday. Then he asked me about the Earl of Leicester's quarrel with my father, and of my father's death. I told him all I knew, which was not much.

Seeing him apparently displeased, I added how my father had let me sign the Association Bond, setting my name beneath his on the parchment, father and son united in a just cause.

He grunted. "Talk must be tested," he said, staring at Phelippes; and I noticed that his old gray eyes were wondrous thoughtful. "I commend none to Her Highness of whose integrity I lack experience."

My heart leaped to my mouth. I felt such sudden triumph as I did the day I beat my father to his knees at sword-play. I stammered something, I forget what.

"You stand foully with the Earl of Leicester, sirrah!" he said suddenly.

I felt my heart sink down into my boots. The Earl of Leicester was a member of the Privy Council, even as Lord Burghley himself, and I did not understand that he spoke for Phelippes's benefit, intending that Phelippes should report to others how he had rebuked me for the Earl of Leicester's sake. I stammered I had done the earl no wrong.

"He will himself be judge of that," Lord Burghley answered. "How is it you were silent until questioned? Do you come to London looking for vengeance?"

I answered: "Broken causes are ill mended by hasty speech; nor was my father Sir Harry one who looked for other vengeance than God visits, having taught me that whoever serves his

God with zeal and his lawful prince with honesty may look to God to recompense him."

"Most men look to the queen's purse," said Lord Burghley; and I saw a thin suggestion of a smile escape him. "Will you forget the wrong the Earl of Leicester did you?" he asked—as I thought, rather curiously, as if he tempted me.

I was startled to learn that he knew my father had been done to death; but it was plain enough that he did know, else he could not have couched his question in those terms. So I took counsel with myself. I answered as I used to do at school when I was not sure of a Latin quantity.

"Forgetfulness," I said, "is not a quality we Halifaxes shine in. My father Sir Harry was a loyal knight, and I should fall short of my duty an I strove not to restore his good name and to make another for myself, the better to continue his. However, a revenge were poxy service to a gentleman in heaven, who is doubtless too contented there to care for bickerings in this world."

"You have a smooth tongue, sirrah. I have seen how ready speech too often hides unreadiness," he answered. And, thinking I had said too much, I was silent, biting my tongue with anger at my lack of wisdom.

For awhile he stared at me again. Then suddenly:

"There is a warrant for the seizure of the person of Joshua Stiles, an alderman. Keep tryst with him in Spitalfields to-night as Phelippes says you have appointed. Berden shall have the warrant. Take with you Captain Jacques and the four men that he has. See to it that Joshua Stiles is in the Marshalsea by midnight, and when you have the signature of the keeper of the Marshalsea, return with it to my house, no matter at what hour, bringing with you Berden and the others."

Many a question leaped into my mind: as whether I should order Berden or he me; whether I should expect payment for the service; whether or no I was now in the queen's employment, or might look for that if the outcome were successful. But he perceived my will to question him and gestured. Phelippes plucked my sleeve. I bowed, Lord Burghley taking no more notice of me. As I left that room I said to myself:

"If this is a test of my fitness for the queen's service, it shall be neck or nothing! She shall like me, or the common grave-digger shall earn his shilling!"

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE STANDING ON TERMS WITH BERDEN.

I HAVE learned since, what all have to learn who deal with courtiers, aye, and with princes: that it is the use of statecraft to keep all men eager in uncertainty, rather than by flattering importunity to sharpen appetites.

By stirring hope and chilling it alternately the queen has saved the realm, controlling men whose masterful and gallant spirit would have wrecked England, and themselves, too, had she not outwitted and, at the same time, used them. They in turn and of necessity, though hating such sorry practice sometimes had to stir false hope and pay with broken promise, so that even such men as Sir Francis Drake were at their wits' end.

Not the greatest in the land could foretell what necessities to-morrow's fall from favor might produce. The queen herself lacked surety. All lesser folk were lucky to be able to forget long famine in short plenty and to drown the dread of outcome in the doing of a moment's deed. He who squealed least when the shoe pinched was the likeliest to find employment.

But I did not understand that at the time, and when we were outside the door I sought to question Phelippes.

"'Steeth and nails!" he answered,

" my master is Sir Francis Walsingham and one is enough! My trade is reading cyphers, but marry! I have never guessed right when I tried to read Lord Burghley's mind. That which is written in cypher is written and stands to be read; but a minister's thoughts, I doubt not, are a secret that the minister himself would give a fortune to unravel."

He took the warrant from the secretary in the outer room and handed it to Berden in the yard, saying Berden might borrow his horse, and then left us, entering the building by another door. Whereat Captain Jacques decided he would ride my mare, making use of outlandish oaths to make me timorous. He swaggered up and stood between me and the mare, his four men grinning.

Berden watched me with the corner of his eye, knowing no more than I did yet how I stood with Lord Burghley. I was minded to give him a good impression as well as to discover how much substance of authority was in myself, which later on the outer semblance of authority might fit, in the way that a good glove fits a strong hand.

" You will do my bidding," I answered. " Mount that knacker's meat that brought you!"

Jacques looked like having at me there and then with his long rapier, he being choleric and used, I doubted not, to snatching trifles like a bully rooster among chickens. But I turned my back, and looked to my horse's girths. As I expected, he tried to turn his disappointment with a mocking laugh, so I turned on him again.

" For a soldier you are not so ready with obedience as suits my mood," I said. " Have I to show you who is master?"

" Show me your commission," he retorted.

Having none, though I meant to set my foot that minute on the first rung of the ladder of promotion, I strode toward him, with my hand clear from my sword-hilt, though he touched his. I scorned to show fear of him.

" I know a 'prentice," I said, " who can take your place and do the duty better. Which is it—mount and obey, or to the devil with you to ask the Lords in Council for a copy of my orders? Haply they will waste their time feeding your curiosity!"

So he summed me up and, being a braggart, he added too high. " You might have told me in the first place that you have a queen's commission," he said, toothing and lipping the words outlandishly. " If I had known—"

" You know or you don't know. What do I care? Mount!" I ordered; and he swung into the saddle, shrugging his shoulders and showing a grin to his men, as much as to say they should judge by and by of the upshot. So I bade the men tell me their names, and I cursed them roundly, finding fault with their filthy apparel, grumbling that a gentleman must ride queen's errands with a group of scarecrows at his back. They feared me more than Jacques ere I was through with them, I studying to look indifferent, not fierce, as if impatronizing my authority on lack-grace mercenaries were a trifle and I well used to it.

THEN " Up tails all!" I shouted; and we rode out of the yard like a duke and his escort, even Berden keeping half a horse's length behind me, though that may have been because he wished me not to see the smile that flickered at the corner of his mouth; but I saw it and knew Berden was yet to deal with. I rode the mare and one of Jacques's men led my roan.

At the yard gate who should run toward me but the 'prentice lad Jack Giles. I found out afterward that he had clacked his tongue dry, questioning the halberdiers who I might be.

Not knowing they had naturally filled him full of lies for their own amusement. They had not said I was

Emperor of Tartary come seeking the queen's hand in marriage, nor the Pope's legate with a bull deposing her; but there was little else they had not thought of, so the lad had notions about me like a tall ship sailing through the ocean of his dreams. I bade him mount the roan, suspecting he might save me the necessity of asking Berden the way to Spitalfields and Alderman Stiles's house; the less I had to consult Berden, the less difficult I thought it might be to stand on terms with him; and so in the event it proved.

I soon learned it was no far cry to Spitalfields, where we were likely to arrive too soon unless we dallied. Nevertheless, if I should dally in Westminster, my bob-tailed following might learn I lacked the queen's commission. Sorely I was tempted, I remember, to go searching for Will Shakespeare, just to let him see me riding on queen's business already. But I bit that thought and swallowed it, another leaping into place: if Mildred might only see me! I rode wondrous upright after that, and made the mare prance. People turned to look at me.

Having to pass through London City I decided to get that done with, and to beguile the time later where distance should prevent my rascals from overworking curiosity. It was the first taste I had ever had of clattering with a troop behind me and I made the best of it, though we were only seven, all told, and the 'prentice rode like an ape on a stick. I led so smart a pace that people fled to right and left of us, until Berden at last spurred up abreast of me.

"Softly!" he said. "You are not Lieutenant General of England yet!"

I neither answered nor slackened speed, suspecting that now was my chance to deal with Berden. Presently he asked me softly:

"Shall I tell these men you hold a queen's commission, or shall I tell Lord Burghley that you make pretense of it?"

Then I was glad that the noise of our hoofs prevented the others from hearing.

"Tell him," I answered, "whatever you please. But I will tell him this night whether you have helped or hindered."

He chewed that, as it might be bacon rind, until I thought he harbored enmity. But at last he answered:

"You will go far, Will Halifax. When I was your age, if I had held a queen's commission I would have shown it to the first who asked."

WE rode between the counting-houses of the richest merchants in the world, and between the warehouses of the India merchants and the Easterlings, spicey with strange smells, and with here and there a dark-skinned heathen staring at us from under his comical cloth hat, until we came to London Bridge. And there the stench was so abominable that the horses shied at it, and we all held our noses in hand or handkerchief.

There was a man's head on a spike above the arch at our end, and all the way along the bridge there were the rotting quarters of about two hundred Jesuits, all done to death since Candlemas. It was a wonder that the folk who lived in houses on the bridge could stomach the stench—aye, or suffer the sight day after day. I spoke of my disgust to Berden.

"What else would you do?" he asked me. "Those men have all sought to murder the queen or to persuade likeminded miscreants to do it. 'Tis better to stand off rebellion and the King of Spain's men than to be touchy o' nostril. For every piece of Jesuit that hangs there, there are two good English sailors in the dungeons of the Inquisition. Sit you merry. Vex not your eyes or your nose for quartered Jesuits; there's blood enough of honest men to grieve for."

But it seemed to me, as indeed it does to this day, that horrid spectacles

should rather make ungodly men more desperate than change their disaffection; and as for the sort who think the Pope can bless them out of hell, should the worst death terrify them?

"It comes of not minding their own business," added Berden, "so serve 'em right!"

I agreed with him there, so I set my mind to thinking of the alderman whom I must hale into the Marshalsea. If I were he, thought I, and all that stink of rotting carcasses to warn me. I would play the fox with half dozen earths to run to; aye, and keep a twitching snout upwind so it should need a better trap than coney-snare to catch me. He who would hang my pelt on London Bridge should have to work for it.

Had I known Phelippes was the craftiest spy in England and the deadliest of all the Scots Queen's enemies, I might have better understood how dangerous my task was. Too, I might have guessed why so much secrecy was being used, and why a stranger to the city such as I was should be loosed on the scent.

I was not so raw and addle-witted as to overlook the question why the Lords in Council had not sent halberdiers to Joshua Stiles's counting house, if so be they had cause against him. There was sharp practicing on more than one side, I was confident.

We rode around the Tower moat, I marveling at all that pile of masonry against the afternoon sky, shuddering a little, too, as I remember, at the thought of how many noblemen—aye, and a queen, had lost their heads behind that grim wall.

What with one thought leading to another it began to dawn on me that I was in the midst of such treasons as had cost wiser men than me their heads, and that haply mere audacity were insufficient for the night's work. And the more I thought of it, the more I saw that Berden was of like mind; he was making such grimaces to himself as a yokel makes through a horse collar at a country fair for a prize of bacon and ale.

"Have you saddle boils?" I asked him, and he tried to grin a little, misliking that I should think him fearful. But I had Berden's measure.

When we came to a tavern such as we might enter without too much comment I drew rein to order bait for the beasts and for ourselves such supper as the mean place could provide. Our host came into the yard to look us over—a flinty-eyed, furtive rogue with a St. Anthony's fire in his nose that I doubted not he kept well slaked; and before he would give us as much as a drink for man or beast he demanded to know who would settle the reckoning.

LUDD knew I had little enough money. Most of what I had was Mildred's, and I liked not at all the thought of squandering what she had given me on ale for Jacques and his cutthroats. Yet I dared not say we were the Queen's men, since I had no right to sign a requisition. Nor would I pass responsibility to Berden, who would then have understood I lacked authority.

So I roundly cursed the fellow for a poxy coney-catcher and flung a coin into the mixen at his feet, declaring I would pay such reckoning as passed my scrutiny. Whereat my ruffians went into the inn to swill and gorge themselves at my cost. Now I smelled another danger than the heavy draft on my light purse.

Extravagance, I thought, will certainly appear to them a weakness, as it will also make them pothouse brave and uncontrollable. Moreover, it was common knowledge, aye, and much complaint of it, that Queen's men fared less generously than the servants of a gentleman; so, if I should treat them liberally that might only serve to advertise to them my lack of such credentials as Queen's men carry.

"Bread, cheese and beef," I ordered, "and for each hour that we tarry here one mug of ale to the man—nor not a drop beside, not though they offer payment. If a man of mine is drunk when I require his services, I'll have your license confiscated and yourself whipped at a cart tail. For you look to me, mine host, like a skull full of lousy purposes!"

"Who loosed this ban-dog?" he grumbled. But he understood his risk too well, and my predicament too little, to defy me and I heard him repeat my order to the 'prentice potman.

In the tap room the borough coroner was holding inquest on a corpse; the room was crowded with the jury and a throng of witnesses, who could only testify that they neither recognized the body nor knew anything concerning it, they being there from curiosity and for the sake of such importance as the taking of an oath might give them.

There were no marks showing how the corpse had come by death, and so a surgeon was performing autopsy, instructing two apprentices the while he carved among the entrails, droning long words with a voice like a parson's o' Sunday.

My men elbowed their way into the throng around the table, so I left them to it, having seen enough of carrion on London Bridge. I went into the inner room and bade the lad Giles follow me, he walking wryly, being unused to the saddle and as galled already as a tripe under a good wife's scraper.

"The smallest fishes make the biggest splashes now and then," said I, "so I will try you first. Eat, drink, and then slip away unseen and bring me word what passes near the house of Joshua Stiles, the alderman. Keep silent and report to nobody but me."

The lad was greedy for my good will, even as I was studious to earn Lord Burghley's favor, so he dallied not long over pot and platter, but found the back door and went out, whistling, as if to the horse stalls.

Presently came Berden, his imagination full of the human entrails he had seen uncovered and his appetite no better for it. For awhile he grumbled about doctors being charlatans who make a mystery of ignorance and who trick credulity with long words; but I doubted whether he would talk so to the doctors if he had a hurt to mend. Receiving no response from me, he broached the stronger wine he had in cask.

"'Swounds! But this is no night's work for honest men!"

I TOLD him we had lousy enough rogues with us for any undertaking.

"Jacques and his blackguards will never see angels except in the shape of minted money, and that stolen."

"Aye," he answered, "lousy rascals who will leave us in the lurch! There are too few of us. Nor are the men we have much better than a pack of curs to catch a falcon with. What know you yet of Stiles and how he keeps himself?"

I knew nothing. I was careful, therefore, to appear wise, looking at Berden as if doubtful how far I could trust him. But he was not so taken by my air of secrecy as not to have his doubts. He laid a finger on his nose.

"I see," he said, "you are already chief adviser to Lord Burghley, so I pay you my humble respects. But are you aware that Joshua Stiles is plotting to deliver the Queen of Scots from Tutbury?"

It was news to me, but I was no such lack-wit as to let him know it.

"So far you shoot middling straight," I answered.

"And have they told you that the green thing in the red box that you showed to Phelippes, is the Queen of Scots's own talisman that the Lords in Council have been hunting for these many months? The sight of that thing was to warn the disaffected men to hold themselves in readiness. It has been sent around the country, and the Coun-

cil has heard of it scores of times, but none knew who the leaders are, nor how ready they are. It is easy enough to hang half-wit yokels or to make a carrier or two hop headless, but that uncovers no conspiracies. Who in the City of London is behind it all?—and how many?—and how prepared?

"To take Joshua Stiles by daylight might start a tumult. What then, my bully night rider? Why does my Lord Burghley pick a hot-pate such as you to do his errand? You shall have your crack at Stiles, you shall; and if his fellows crack your pate, so much the worse for you—but who else suffers? Nobody. If you catch him, and if the City of London takes his part, what then again? Why, pittikins and Godamercy! You are nothing but an addle-witted knight's son new to London, who did a decent alderman a gross indignity and may be thrown yourself into the Marshalsea in place of him!"

"'Od's teeth, you have the warrant," I retorted.

"Aye," he said, "I have it, which is to say, you have it not. If all goes well, good Benjamin Berden, a proper person, frequently employed in such particulars, has served a warrant issued by the Lords in Council. If not, aforesaid Benjamin Berden, a scapegrace oftentimes intrusted with ticklish treasons that were best not talked about, returns the warrant whence it came, he knowing which side uppermost his bread is buttered. Where is the warrant then? Who shall produce it? Who shall save Will Halifax from the vengeance of Stiles and others?"

It was not so easy to conceal from him that I felt my courage sinking. I remembered I had not even Lord Burghley's promise, let alone authority in writing—no, not even a promise of reward if I should catch the alderman. I thought of Mildred and her brave eyes, and of all her confidence in me gone like a gambler's fortune on the first throw of the dice if I should fail as Berden indicated. Nevertheless, I found hot words for him, although my spirit blew cold.

"I am doubtless not so deep in the Council's confidence as you are," I retorted, "yet it seems I am trusted more than you are, and apparently with cause."

"WELL crowed, my bully rooster," he said, laughing. He was no churl, though a life of playing spy had changed his natural courage into a cunning not admirable.

"But hear me first," he went on, "for your own good.

"If we all went tails up and heads down into any trap the Lords in Council tallyho us into, how long should we last? Yet dare we not refuse, since bread and cheese depends on it, and pickings. Therefore, sometimes we avoid the danger and the man escapes us, yet we bring back to our masters such reports as mollify their hard conceits.

"A good nose and a ready cry excuses the slow hound that otherwise they'd cull from the pack; and true news is as easy to pick up nowadays as lice in a wayside tavern. All England is full o' treason. If six of us and a 'prentice lad go after Joshua Stiles we are like to leave our carcasses for the crowner here to hold his quest on; but if we fill our noses full o' new, hot scent and cry it to the Lords in Council, we provide ourselves a suitabler employment and live longer. Treason, corrupt cozenage and felony provide us with our daily bread; it were a silly game to catch too many of the fools who feed us."

It was a weighty argument, because I saw he lacked the spunk for the night's work, and I knew that Jacques and his men were even less dependable. But I bethought me of Sir Francis Drake in Paul's Walk, and the memory of his stout speech and bearing stiffened courage.

"By God's beard," I answered, "I will carry such report of you as you

deserve this night, and you shall do the same by me, so let us look to it that each may praise the other!"

By his eye I knew he liked me better for that speech than if I had yielded to his persuasion. Rather ruefully, but with a grin, he struck hands on the bargain and then went to the tap room to draw Dutch courage from the hogshead. There was a noise in there, I remember, of strolling players who had come with bawdy songs and minstrelsy to share the jurors' pence now that the inquest was over and the surgeon was getting drunk with his two apprentices before the fire.

There can come a fog downriver, thickened by the smoke from chimneys, and it was no evening to tempt men outside doors. I began to fear my 'prentice lad had lost himself, and when he lingered until after six o'clock, as I knew by the cry of the watchman in the street, the doubt crept into me that I had acted like a country fool to trust him.

But he came at last, beckoning in the doorway, his snub nose twitching and his freckles all awork with news. I followed him out to the stable, noticing as I went that Jacques and his men were none too sober; they had found fools ready to buy drink for them in exchange for tales of foreign parts—all lies, I doubt not.

Women had arrived to tempt them after they should grow too drunk to know a wanton from an honest wench. Jacques was putting pepper and Holland spirits into his ale and was in a fair way toward picking quarrels.

'Prentice Giles waited for me where the fog and the steam from the yard dung made a nimbus around the stable lantern, and by the way he grinned I knew he had chanced on something that should set me by the ears. So I wore my best air of indifference, although he well-nigh robbed me of it with his first words:

"Master, there are twenty sailors lying in wait for you behind a garden wall near Alderman Stiles's house. Stiles has a boat on the river, and is on the way to it now, with two men. There the twenty sailors are to find him after they have killed you and whoever comes with you. I heard Stiles give his orders, for it was easy in the fog to creep close without their knowing it.

"They are to take a trinket in a red box from your person, and then to make all haste to the boat, which is already loaded with Stiles's luggage. They are to row the boat down river to a ship that is bound for Flushing."

HE knew where the boat was, and swore he could find it, fog or no fog. So I bade him put the bridles on my mare, on the roan, and on Berden's horse, and to have all three ready in the stable yard against my coming.

In the tap room Jacques sat with a slattern on his knee. He kicked his rapier point to bring the hilt well forward as a hint to me to govern myself shrewdly; so while I paid the tavern reckoning with my back toward him, I was thinking more of him than of the money, and I doubt not I was cheated. But so was Jacques—of his drunken hope of making me the target of his ill will. I needed just such a spur to my waning courage as Jacques provided.

I turned on him right suddenly and tripped the chair he sat on; he and the slut went sprawling in the sawdust. She was on her feet first, screaming to him to avenge her, making more fuss than an honest wench about the offense I had done to her modesty. She dubbed me a young springald, so as Jacques made shift to draw his rapier I fetched her a backhand clout across the ear that sent her staggering into him.

Jacques gave her a shove that sent her sprawling on the floor again out of his way; but that was too late. I had him by the sword wrist, and if he

had not let go the rapier I would have rendered his arm an object lesson for that drunken surgeon's 'prentices.

"'Twould serve you right," said I, "if I should snap this toy off to its proper length and thrash you with the half of it for making yourself a spectacle. You serve a gentleman, and God's teeth, you shall serve him mannerly!"

With that I threw his weapon in a corner and bade him go fetch it. I knew I had hurt his wrist more smartly than should make him eager for a fight just then, so I turned my back to him, and, after spilling his men's ale—they had drunk more than I ordered—I went in to speak my mind to Berden, who had stood at the crack of the inner door to watch what happened.

"That fellow Jacques will stick you in the back like a Michaelmas hog," he warned me; and I waxed sarcastic.

"Not with a brave, bold lad like you to stand beside me!" I said; and that was the last I ever had to say to Berden in such vein as that. Since that night Berden and I have been in many a tight place together, and I have never known him either to flinch or spare himself.

I told him I had work enough to keep Jacques otherwise engaged than stalking me. "Get six yards of good stout cord," I urged him. "Cut it in three and bring it. You and I and the 'prentice lad will catch our man, while Jacques and his ruffians draw the ambush."

"Dare you trust Jacques?" he demanded, for he realized that I had news, though he knew not yet how I had it.

"Look you well to your report concerning me, and never mind Jacques," I answered; whereat he laughed, for he was braver when he had no choice than when he thought his luck presented him with opportunity to run out and around an issue. So I let him know I bore no malice, taking him by the arm that Jacques and his men might see the two of us in open amity. I ordered Jacques to take his men and up-tails in the yard.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE TAKING OF ALDERMAN JOSHUA STILES.

HORSES and men were like ghosts in the fog by the light of the stable lantern, and there was opportunity for Jacques and his men to have revenge on me. But fortune seems to me to flow into the channel of men's moods, and Jacques's mood was offensive to the lady, if Fortune is a female, as the ancients seem always to have maintained, with what warrantry I know not.

I found him standing on the mixen, very angry with his horse that would not let him mount. I came up like a phantom, and the horse took fright at me. It threw him on his back, and would have kicked him and dragged him by the stirrup if I had not caught the rein and set his foot free. When I had helped him to his feet, and before he had time to make up his mind to dirk me, I gave him another set of thoughts to think about.

"Jacques," I said, "I will thank you to turn your malice against him who merits it. We hunt an alderman, who has set an ambush for us; and your fortune as much as mine must depend on the outcome, for I will as surely give you credit for your true share in this night's work as I will forget your ill will if you let me."

I could feel his ill will meditating treason, but I affected such confidence in his reasonableness as might seem natural in one of my youth and inexperience, and I gave him an opportunity to play the man if he should see fit.

"Ride, you and your men," I said, "to Joshua Stiles's garden gate and cry admittance, saying you are Master

Will Halifax. But beware. When they open, be ready to retreat into the fog and draw the ambush after you, thus giving me the chance to ride in and find Stiles and seize him."

I could see he liked the plan. It smacked of not much danger to himself and offered him the chance to play a scurvy trick on me. I had small doubt but that he had made up his mind there and then to help me to enter the grounds and then to warn the enemy to turn and kill me.

"How shall I find the house?" he asked.

I bade the 'prentice tell him, which was easy, since a road ran from where we were in one long curve until it passed the house, and there was nothing to do but keep the ditch on one hand and a row of elm trees on the other until Stiles's front gate should loom out of the fog.

Jacques rode off with his men behind him. Presently Berden and I and the 'prentice followed, but not far; I wanted Stiles's twenty men engaged and occupied while Berden and I should do what they were ambushed to prevent.

My father Sir Harry had seen to it that I was taught in all the gentlemanly arts of field and stream, so that I could find my way in darkness all over our countryside—aye, or in such light fogs as we have in Warwickshire; but it needed London eyes to penetrate the shroud that overhung the river and the hamlets hereabouts.

At that I think the 'prentice smelled the way as much as conned it. We could not even see the great light burning on the Tower, nor yet the glow that should have overhung the city from the lamps at doors and from the link-boys' torches.

THE 'prentice led along lanes toward the river, and it was like a journey into some infernal region; though they say that hell is hot, and that was a night so cold at first as to make it difficult to hold the reins. There were no sounds.

Now and then a dim light, sickly in the fog and deepening in loneliness, suggested where a house might be. Walls loomed up here and there, and I remember gates that seemed to go by dripping in the dark, as if we were motionless and all the world were drifting on an unseen tide. The frosty ghosts of elm trees looked as if their tops were bent beneath a weight of heaven that had fallen in.

The very dogs were silent. Once a donkey, unseen in a hollow like a witches' coven, brayed at us so sudden and affrighting that the skin went snaking up and down my spine; and when the brute ceased, silence was as terrifying as the godless clamor had been. I was in a better state to flee from my own shadow. Berden was no better, only he denied it afterward, lest I should hold him in disparagement. All that kept either of us going was the thought that we must not let Jack Giles the 'prentice see us cowardly; and I doubt not that Jack, who knew his way in London fog as rats know cellars, would have been scared out of his wits, nevertheless, if he had not thought we two were bold.

So we three fortified each other with a bankrupt credit. None spoke—not even I and Berden when we waited and the 'prentice scouted in the fog for landmarks, finding his way back to us by listening for our horses' stamping on the frozen mud.

But at last we heard the river sucking and sobbing at rotten banks, and I felt more at home, having heard such music along Avon-side at the end of a long day's otter-hunting when I found myself thirty miles from Brownsover and only river noises for a guide. But there is mystery along the Thames by night that transcends any I have met with, even at the seashore, and I might easily have believed with Berden that the ghosts of dead men were awalk, had I not feared my own fear more

than any other danger and so dared not think of anything except the task in hand.

And then I thought of this, that often has given me a sort of counterfeit of courage when the true stuff failed; mine enemy feared equally with me, and thus I stood on terms with him. It is a mean and ungodly humor that another's difficulties can encourage; yet, if meanness is, why blink it? I was cousin that night to all the cowards since the world began, yet not hugging my cowardice. I loathed it. And in truth I met a worser coward, along with two brave fellows whom I was loath to upset with such scanty ceremony.

WE could not see our horses' ears for the thickness of the fog, but at last we heard the sound of water lapping against the bilge-strakes of a moored boat, and knew by that that we had found Stiles. He heard us. In a voice that sounded far off, though it was close at hand, he cried out:

"Willy! Hey there, Willy!"

He believed we were his own men coming, and I heard him bid the two he had with him go show us where the plank lay between boat and shore. I heard the plank squeak as they set their weight on it and came to look for us. They chose the wrong direction, thinking we should come along the road from Stiles's house.

"Did you get the springald, Willy? Did you take the token from him?" Stiles called out.

But by that time I had given the reins to Jack to hold, and Berden and I were feeling our way on foot along the bank. I fell in once and climbed out dripping, for the bank was parlous and not frozen deep enough to bear my weight.

The ducking angered me, so that it helped Stiles not at all. I found the plank at last, groping on hands and knees, and rushed it, Berden and I jumping for the boat's hold blindly at the peril of our lives.

I fell on baskets wrapped in canvas, and the next thing I had Stiles by the throat, he stabbing at me with a Spanish dagger. But he only cut my coat. Berden, struggling up from where he had fallen, rapped him with the folded parchment warrant and said something about lawful custody; then, stuffing the warrant away in haste, he caught Stiles's elbows from behind—something that if he had done it first and thought of ceremony after might have saved me a bruise or two.

Stiles was not so stalwart as he looked, nor half so valiant as he had tried to seem that morning in the city; he used his dagger petulantly like a woman with a bodkin and cried quarter before he was hurt. Nor had he dignity. He went down on his knees to us. He cried out he would pay a rich man's ransom, as should make us independent of queen's wages. When I took one of the short cords from Berden's sword belt and tied his arms behind him, he screamed like a hare, although the rope no more than bit his skin.

Berden, fumbling in the fog, was too late gagging him with a forearm thrust between his teeth, and he screamed a second time, as though we might be killing him. I heard his two men come running back.

Berden cried: "Throw the plank into the river!"

I did that without thinking, realizing too late that now we had no proper means of reaching land. It occurred to me to cut the boat adrift and take our chance of friend or enemy down river, only I did not care to lose the horses, and I thought of Jack the 'prentice.

So I stood with one foot on the boat's edge and, aspiring to a gruffness that my voice refused, I shouted:

"Stand in the queen's name!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

His hand held a big and promising bottle

Creeron Cracks Wise

Nobody loves a practical joker; and Creeron was the hardest working smart-cracker that ever trod the decks of U. S. S. Wistonver in war-time

By THEODORE ROSCOE

THE so-called wise guy is apt to remain unloved in many circles. Uncle Sam's navy, during war-time, could hardly have been expected to regard such a genius with tolerance. There usually happened to be a gob or two aboard every vessel who shouldered the burden of dealing out practical jokes and tossing smart cracks—and his brothers in arms loved him so much they often contemplated handing him a keel-haul, a shove down an open hatch, or the "deep six."

Such a sailorman was Raymond Creeron, seaman first-class, of the U. S. S. Wistonver. An unsquelchable joker. A two-legged fount of puns, quips, smart come-backs and gruesome parlor tricks. His "seaman first-class," meant nothing. Creeron could have bluffed a squad of admirals into giving him a master mariner's rating, and he had probably told the recruiting officer he had followed the sea for years. To prove this he had boxed the compass backward and forward, having learned this feat while an Eagle Scout of Y. M. C. A. Troop 2. The recruiting officer probably thought he had signed a splendid specimen until he asked the newcomer his name. A thousand to five this wise one had replied:

"I'm Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie!"

That was this smart minstrel's lay. Introducing himself, telling his name, opening his conversation, butting into somebody's yarn, it was always the same chant with him. He was liable to rattle it off at any hour, day or night, hell or high water, under small provocation or apropos of nothing at all. He

would harp the maddening refrain with a dulcet grin, wink brightly, and thrust out a hand with the fingers doubled under. When your fingers suffered the shock of closing over his unsuspecting fist, he was ready to bark: "Shot off by the Kaiser!" or "Pardon th' stump!"

My first sight of the phenomenon was when a bunch of us were transferred to the Wistonver from the mosquito fleet that had been chasing a lot of phantom submarines located off Cape Hatteras by the yellow journals. Creeron, it seemed, had just come over from Brooklyn Navy Yard.

We stood lined up on deck, waiting for a couple of tough officers to come along with the low-down, when along the line swaggered the smartest sailor ever beheld by man—uniform brushed and pressed and fitting like the suit on a tailor's dummy, shoes resplendent with gloss, snow-white hat perched jauntily atop a trimly-sheared yellow head, face bright from recent ablutions, and jacket made impressive by a pompous row of marksman's medals riding down the pocket. Also there were gray gloves and a swagger stick. And a mobile mouth beaming a lordly smile as its owner strolled past us.

No glad glances followed the progress of that outfit going aft. At the end of the rank stood a young junior grade lieutenant recently graduated from Pelham Bay. A puzzled expression came to the j. g.'s face as he watched the smartly-carried bonny approach. When the tricky chap reached the j. g. he clicked off a salute that would have made the Prussian Guard look clumsy; then stood looking about as if hunting a place in line, twiddling absently with that swagger stick.

"Who," snapped the j. g., trying to be rough, "are *you?*"

You can believe that line of gobs was listening with cocked ears. Some queer fish had come to the surface in the wartime navy, and those sailors were prepared for almost anything. But their surprise could scarcely be fathomed when they heard the reply to the lieutenant's query.

"I," drawled the chap with the kingly stance, "am Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie." The next minute he had stuck out his hand. Before he could check himself, the new j. g. had reached for it. The bright-faced boy was there with his chatter. "Shot off by the Kaiser!" he beamed. "Pardon th' stump!"

Long, loud words issued from the lieutenant's scarlet face. Smoking expletives. Caustic commentary. But the boy with the beaming countenance, standing stiff at attention, might have been listening to a recommendation for citations. Our ears would have gone up in smoke at such a calling down before a lot of men, but his ears didn't go so much as shell pink. The j. g. soon winded, and the beautifully-accoutered gob calmly fell into line.

About that time the tough regular officers came along. It would have been difficult for the new j. g. to report the panning he had received. He did not mention the affair. He was young in the service, and proud, no doubt. So our smart fellow stuck his swagger stick in the back of his pants, and won a pleasant smile for being the dressiest gob on parade.

"There's a bozo," snarled Nevada Nichols, ex-cowboy standing next to me, "who should 'a' been hung by the neck at th' age of three days. A bozo," he snarled, "who's headin' into trouble—"

OUR Wistonver was a brand-new vessel of standard type just out of the shipyards on the West Coast. Pretty trim to the eye, she was to prove a goodly apple with a rotten heart. She was one of those craft flung together in record time by a bunch of gangsters hauling down double pay for staying out of the service to do their splendid bit at home. Her hull was fair enough, but a barber had

put in her engines, a cartoonist had drawn the shafts down her spine, and a candlestick-maker had hung the wheels under her stern.

Freighted with a cargo of army supplies—airplanes, lorries, wool uniforms made of cotton, explosives and what-not—she shoved her bows out of New York Harbor one bleak January midnight, bound for Brest. We might have been plowing down the Arctic Sea when we struck the gale that was digging water off Ambrose. The watch turned out bundled in knitted wool garments that held in the cold, and froze their ears behind any windbreak handy.

Hail, wet snow, and sheets of frigid water charged aboard at every gust of wind. Flying spume whipped the decks and iced tattooed hands. Even the hard-boiled old salts who had flung Dewey's shells at Manila admitting the weather was a bit inclement. Running short-handed, and being forced to stand extra watches in the teeth of that icy blow, was enough to give the grumps to any crew composed of human beings.

One of the Wistonver crew, however, was not a human being. It had been suspected before the hour of sailing by all who had encountered him; but the fact was fully realized when the gob walked into a shower of freezing water with a moony grin, executed a clever skate across the glassy, tipping deck, and came up smiling to answer the watch officer with: "Who'm I? Why, *I'm* Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie!"

That ghastly repetend echoing into the bleak night sent three of us on to our bunks with bitter reflections. Mule Rice, the first boy down the ladder, was a hulking ex-plumber whose guileless soul was reflected in the thunder of his laugh. Now his laughter sounded a note of evil as he tugged off his sou'wester, and demanded:

"Say, who the devil is that bushwhacker just reported on deck? Wise guy? Say, that guy squats aside me at mess, dog-gone it, an' salts th' food with juicy descriptions of garbage an' such until I like to pop. 'How ja like a fly sandwich?' he'd crack out. Or 'Th' sparrow pie ain't so good to-day, is it?' Cripes! I'm thinkin' he'll win hisself a tag in th' beak if he don't shut up."

"You ain't got no call to grouse," complained Nevada Nichols, who sat shirtless and shivering on a ditty-bag. "Take me, now. I stands a watch with 'at berry. Five times he's pulled a line about th' Kaiser an' th' Devil, an' his jokes smells like gas—"

"Oh, Lord!" moaned a voice buried under blankets in a hammock near the companion. A tousled black head of hair poked out, and his panted breath, drawling a Southern accent, hung little bouquets of steam in the chill air. "That whips me down. Here I thought I was lucky t' get assigned to this transport tub. Right glad you-all woke me up so's I could be forewarned. You fellows ain't tellin' of a chap with a goofy grin who's always spoutin', 'I'm Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie. Pardon th' stump,' are yo'?"

"So you knows him, too?" Nevada questioned in commiserating tone.

"Ain't it th' truth!" wailed the lad from the South. "Know him? Gentlemen, I put in two months on a trainin' ship with him. Two months! Yo' ain't seen nothin' yet. An' worst of him is, he always gets away clean with his panic. An' if he don't look like a skipper with all them medals! So he's aboard, eh? Lawd save mah soul!"

"He gets by with murder," protested Mule. "Take yesterday, now. Reports late, an' sasses th' O. D. Had th' nerve to sneak inta th' engineers' fo'c's'le an' take a hot shower, one o' th' firemen tells me. Bawls out th' gunners on th' forward rifle, A Deck, an' they think he's a kind of master-at-arms, or somethin'. An'—an' where'd he get them flashy medals he sports?"

The tousled black head sighed steamily. "Them? He claims he was

awarded 'em up at New London or wherever he was first detailed. He ain't half shy about callin' himself the world's best marksman either. Pistol or rifle, either hand. Oh, you'll hear! Unless we're lucky an' he gets washed overboard in this blow."

BUT Raymond Creeron, seaman first-class, was too fortunate to ever go overside; and we were too unfortunate to have it happen. Three hours later, when we were warming the pillow at a furious rate, he came below to turn us out for morning watch.

His method of waking a slumbering seaman was highly effective. He simply clapped an ice-cold palm over a snoring mouth, and howled: "Germans! We're sinking!"

Waking out of a dead sleep with that ballyhoo in his ear, a gob would be out of his hammock triple-quick. At least the three of us were, when Creeron turned the trick on us. Piling out in the frigid atmosphere—a sensation as pleasurable as plunging into a tub of cracked ice—we battled around in the darkness, grabbing for pants, preservers and oilskin coats. Then a pleasant voice spoke, to stifle frenzy.

"Sorry to disturb you, bullies of the briny deep, but Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie was told it was time to go summon the watch."

A sleepy roar rumbled from Nevada's throat. Mule Rice offered a resonant curse. Stabbing from a dark corner, the yellow ray of a pocket torch played on us; betrayed the location of Raymie. Blinking, Nevada flung his life-belt to the floor, and swung a knotty tattoed fist into the light.

"You poor piece of seaweed!" he shouted passionately. "For pullin' a stunt like this I'm gonna tag you one on th' kisser!"

The ray of yellow light did not waver. Only a hand jumped into the shaft of light near its source. And there was a big, promising bottle in that hand. Nevada's fist hung poised in the air.

"It's Black and White," came Creeron's unmistakable chuckle. "A full quart bottle, my brothers, and filched freshly from the well-stocked store of a certain second engineer. Happily I came across the cache while I was rifling an electric iron to press my blues yesterday. Let the storm howl, maties, let the tempest rage. But sit down with Mrs. Creeron's boy Raymie, and quaff from the flowing bowl. While the convoy plunges through the storm, four jolly tars wassail."

Now it was cold as sin outside of those bedding rolls, and Black and White is Black and White. Nevada's fist melted under the spell of the rays playing through the tall, pleasing bottle, and Mule's laugh was guileless. The owner of that bottle might be deserving of sudden death, but after all!

"Holy chee!" Mule's words quavered with emotion. "Ain't I glad we are alone by ourselves down here. Wait till I get into these boots!"

"Easy!" hissed Nevada. "Don't wake up that gob by th' companion. Them cotton-country lads is sponges. An' I got a hollow leg, myself."

Its light carefully shaded, the pocket torch was balanced on a ditty-bag. A cork popped sweetly; and the bottle reappeared. So did Creeron's voice. "All ready, boys and girls. Here's to the second engineer!"

We sat down with Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie, and quaffed from the flowing bowl. Thorns came with the roses, however, for he repeated his grisly monologue about the Kaiser and the Devil, we all won reprimands for reporting late to our stations, and Nevada caught a torrid verbal lacing because of the empty liquor bottle found in his hammock.

THREE days out, the U.S.S. Wistonver showed her true character when her dollar-watch engines sprained their innards, and she had to drop out of the convoy to plod along

by herself at about five knots. Not only was she bucking a wicked head sea, but she was faltering into the famous danger zone.

Trembling from stern to bow, she clambered painfully through steep water, engines gasping weakly, smoke spouting from her stacks. Every time she hit a wave it almost shook the bolts out of her stanchions. Boarding waters played havoc with deck gear, and once a pernicious sea climbed to her hurricane deck, smashed through a port and flooded the wireless room. She was making the headway of a century-old turtle with one hind leg.

Fully conscious they were riding an ideal 5200-ton target for every prowling U-boat, the ninety officers and men of the Wistonver were heard to curse west coast shipbuilders and utter wrathy diatribes against short-order cooks who constructed engines. Also they were given chance to rail against engineers who cooked. For the chief cook of the Wistonver went down with mumps, and the second cook did not know the how of boiling water. Evil rations; ailing ship; thick weather; grim, submarine-infested seas. A nerve-racking voyage.

Muttering opprobrium, the crew skulked about with one hand on a lifebelt and one eye on a boat. By day we fought across treacherous, trembly decks, striving to chop ice, lash gear, and dodge gusts of spray. By night we stood watch in a frigid darkness black as a whalehole, our nerves taut as strung wire, our senses straining to catch suspicious sights or sounds. When the crew of the forward port gun, B deck, went hysterical one midwatch, and fired their gun at nothing, a nervous oiler taking the air in a B deck alleyway dropped dead. Which did little to enliven the atmosphere.

One man on the Wistonver, however, failed to become depressed. Certainly, after the third day out there was no room for a jokester aboard the vessel. But Raymond Creeron, seaman first-class, breezed his way around as if he sailed a placid summery bay on Lake Huron. Whether he stood watch in a shower of icy spume or swabbed lead in the forepeak, he was invariably ready to put over his "pardon th' stump" hoax or launch into his pet recitation. Plague and pestilence? The Creator never punished Egypt the way Creeron pestered the Wistonver crew. Most aggravating of all was the way he displayed faultless attire at all times. flashed his row of medals, and refused to wear a lifebelt.

"Me?" he would taunt through his sunny grin. "You don't think Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie, would ever fall prey to the plunderers of the sea, do you? Nonsense, old fellow."

Never believe that the glances turned on Creeron did not reflect homicidal meditation. What he did and was would have signed a death sentence for any one else. Creeron stayed off well-merited retribution chiefly by his ability to appear laden with cigars redolent of the first officer's cabin, liquors from various sources, chocolate from the galley, shaving cream from the firemen's fo'c's'le, magazines from the Old Man's library. And he gladly shared them with us.

BUT it was hard to stifle ire when he turned you out at 4 A.M. with his cry, "Submarines!" And when he started telling what a crack shot he was, or what a prize reporter he had been on the Brooklyn *Beagle*—a new refrain—it was either walk away, or strike, or burst a blood vessel. Finally two of the crew decided to strike.

It was the beginning of the first watch, five days out, when Nevada Nichols and Mule Rice made known their inability to stand the wise guy any longer.

"I'm a gonna knock him kicking," Nevada Nichols soberly proclaimed. We had just turned out after a session

below with Creeron and some excellent sherry brandy—preceded by the usual raucous scare. "He uncorks them stale jests, an' it's killin' me," the big sailor insisted. "All I wanta do is kill him first. Yesterday somebody knots my singlet an' hides my jumper. Who done it, eh?"

"An' who went an' slips," demanded Mule Rice, "th' cord on my hammock? That braggin' blowhard of a Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie!"

Nevada was getting worked up on the subject. "Braggin'? Say, all day that gob harps in my ear what a swell guy he is, what a swell gun-shot. I'll say this for him—you can kid him and he don't get sore. I quiets him awhile by tellin' him a few lies o' my own. But then he comes up double with a story of what a priceless—his own words—priceless newspaperman and reporter he was on th' Brooklyn *Beagle* sheet."

Mule Rice peered uneasily into the impermeable blackness swirling all about us. A Stygian mist that shrieked with wind and flying drops of spray swept over the rail and smacked blood to our cheeks. Gusts of water filled with tiny particles of ice stung like the lash of a quirt. The blotting dark shook with the echo of storming seas. Lost in that blind and shouting night, the Wistonver toiled like a groaning old woman lamely trudging through a bog.

Not a solitary light pricked the darkness. Only the basso crash of water piling over bows, the resulting jerk of the deck beneath our feet, the plaint of straining iron, betrayed the vessel's existence.

"Listen!" Nevada Nichols shouted to make himself heard. "We better leg it now for our stations. But don't forget. When that chump comes below to turn us out t'-morra at 4 A.M., he gets his. Th' plan's all set. If he hollers a submarine warnin' to wake us up, I gets a crack at his kisser. Th' Southerner bunked by th' companion wants a chanst, so if th' wise guy uncorks his groan about bein' his mother's boy, th' Southerner gets a whack. 'Case he somehow chances to pull his yelp about pardonin' his stump, Mule bangs him on th' button. Reckon us three has suffered most, so we gets at him first. After we finishes, th' others gets a chance.

"But should he be so obligin' as t' get off all three them cracks before we locates him in th' dark an' gets at him individual, we all jumps him at th' same time an' does our dog-gonedest. Believe you me, mates, Mrs. Creeron's boy Raymie is one wise guy who'll really get *wise!*"

THREE forty-five A.M.

We had turned in at midnight, somewhat more cheerful. The seas had flattened a trifle; it had stopped sleeting; and a lull in the quarrel of the elements had brought a rent in the clouds and a smoky moon. Wan though it was, the moonlight had served to dispel the turbid, breathless dark. Too, word had come from below that a little more steam had been forced into the teakettle propelling us, and we would pick up another knot.

Perhaps the fates were relenting. The idea had cheered us some. Most stimulating of all, however, was the prospect of Creeron's impending chastisement. Eight bells—4 A.M.—could scarce arrive too soon.

It was three forty-five at last—and our slumbers were scattered by the summons of a resonant wailing.

"Wake up! Hey! Submarines! We've sighted th' Hun!"

Never missing his cue, Nevada was out of his hammock in one bound. Tossing off blankets, the rest of us bobbed up in the dark; glared.

"It's Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie!" squawked the hidden voice.

There sounded a thud near the companionway—the Southerner's bare heels hitting the floor.

"An' I'm tellin' you," the unseen

visitor wailed, "that I *will* be beggin' pardon for a stump, maybe, if we don't get above decks—"

Out snapped the favorite oath of Mule Rice. The next moment a pocket torch flashed on, to betray Raymond Creeron standing in the middle of the floor. Pouncing fast, three silent sailors closed in on the gob. Three knotted fists whipped out with whistly speed.

Out went the light. Turmoil filled the clammy dark. There rose a turbulent clamor—crashing, thumpings, thuddings, whine of laboring breath, smack of bone against flesh, grunts of pain.

A voice mellowed by Southern suns cried out: "He got me that time!"

Nevada gasped sharply. "Ow! Right in th' eye—"

Mule Rice was swearing purple oaths. "Uh! You devil! Ow!"

Smack! Smack! Thump! Plop!

"He's down!" Nevada yelled. "I landed that one square. Get th' light—let's have a look at th' fool hombre—"

Spearing the dark, a shaft of light streamed from the recovered torch. Nevada took the torch, and the circle of light disclosed the recumbent body of Raymond Creeron, seaman first-class, resting upon the floor. Dark, puffy blotches rimmed the closed eyes of Raymond Creeron, seaman first-class. A welt splotched his left cheek. Blood dripped from the end of his nose. But his lunar smile had come to his lips, and it seemed to mock the purple eye suffered by Mule Rice, the split lips enjoyed by the lad from the South, and the swollen, bleeding nose of Nevada Nichols.

"Fought like a cornered bobcat," panted Nevada, mopping his nose with an arm. "But I reckon he'll pipe down a bit now. Maybe he won't be so ready to come down here an' scare th' ballast outa a sleepin' sailor by squallin', 'Submarines!' an'—"

Blaraam!

A deafening explosion clapped our ears; flung us in a kicking, scrambling heap. The Wistonver lurched as if buffeted by a tidal wave. A second concussion wrenched the vessel, the deafening echoes clattering sharply down her shivering alleys.

Scrambling desperately, we fought to our feet; stood lost in total darkness, our ears buzzing, minds blank, stomachs ill with excitement. Somebody found the light, and switched it on. Our hearing cleared, we listened to an ever-increasing racket taking possession of the decks overhead. Pungent smell of burning oil drifted on the cold wind. Somewhere deep in the black bowels of the ship, a crowd of men must have been screaming at the top of their lungs. Bulkheads banged. A brisk slamming sounded overhead. Bells clanged; and arose a sudden whistling hiss—the noise of escaping steam.

Mule Rice spoke brittle words. "Gawd! We've stopped a tin fish!"

Nevada Nichols made a sudden dive for his oilskins. "Come on, guys, we got to get topside first! She's torpedoed!" He repeated the exclamation rather hysterically. "She's torpedoed! She's torpedoed!"

JAMMING into footgear, sweaters, pants, coats, anything wearable that came to hand, we dressed in admirable speed, and sprinted for the companion. The ship's engines had stopped, and she was staggering with a logy roll and a noticeable starboard list. The sickish oily stench lurked in the alleys, and our B Deck companion was choked with gaseous smoke. It would be a mistake to think we loitered on our way to the boat stations. Strapping on lifebelts as we ran, we climbed companion ladders and crossed decks in record time.

The Wistonver seemed to be settling with a comforting slowness, but her decks were the scenes of desperate confusion. Apparently the Heinie's first torpedo had banged into

her fuel tanks. The explosion had sprayed burning oil in every direction and fired the ship in a hundred places. Hatches and ports amidships belched colored smoke. Brisk flames frolicking on the afterdeck cast a crimson blush on the low-hanging clouds.

The way things were going it looked like every man for himself. Another half hour, and if the ship was not ununder she would be a furnace that could scorch an asbestos angel. The main idea was to get off.

Getting off was not as easy as might appear. The officer assigned our boat was nowhere to be seen; and just as Nevada, Mule and the rest of us reached our boat station the order was passed to lower away. This we most earnestly desired to do, but what with the fire and the excitement and the bungling of a gunner's mate and a chief yeoman who turned up from somewhere, we succeeded in gumming the works.

The boat was almost down when the forward falls tangled. The five sailors, the dumb gunner's mate and the brainless yeoman, battling in the boat, were almost flung into the sea. Dragged by the forward falls, stern in the water, the boat all but capsized.

Here was a hair-tearing situation. As if to hustle us along, the Wistonver enjoyed another internal combustion that let her sink about two feet. And there was our boat with tangled falls, threatening to turn turtle at any convenient lurch. All the other boats seemed safe and away; and there were ten of us standing on a burning deck and eating peanuts, while the maniacs in the boat below shouted nonsense.

The third mate, a bald little chap with the nosebleed, happened to be one of our number, but he was too nervous to know port from starboard. Nevada was yanking at the painter of our troubled craft, and bellowing at the seven occupants below to snap out of it and cut the falls before the boat went over. They responded with the wisdom of monkeys, and almost cut the painter. Then they lost their knife.

Meanwhile, the old Wistonver had obligingly stayed her dive to Davy Jones, but how she was getting hot! We recalled the reserve oil tanks. We also recalled the shell rooms near the magazines, to say nothing of the cargo of high explosives. But it was Mule Rice, with his black eye, who happened to recall another item.

"Hey!" he suddenly shouted. "We forgot. Th' wise guy—we left him kayoed on th' deck down there!"

"That's right!" the Southerner yelled. "We sho-nuff did forget him!"

"I'd like to let him drown," Nevada growled, making a wry face. But he dropped the boat painter, and was the first one to start for the companion ladder leading below.

But we did not dash down that companion ladder and bravely rescue the limp, boyish form of our beloved jester. Not a bit of it. We had not taken three jumps in the direction of that ladder before a gob appeared on the top step, glanced shyly about him, then resolutely stepped into the firelight. And what a gob!

In undisguised amazement we stared at the neat, unrumpled uniform, the jaunty, snow-white hat, the polished boots—even the swagger stick, gloves, and the row of flashy medals. His scratched face was colorless, save for the shines around each eye, but his hands were thrust in jacket pockets, and his composure was as suave as his flawless sartorial aspect. With the offhand ease of a man about town strolling Riverside Drive, he walked toward us. It was nothing short of sacrilege, such nonchalance aboard a torpedoed vessel sinking in submarine-haunted waters.

Nevada Nichols waved his tattooed fists. "We hadn't oughta let him go in our boat—"

The gob had strolled to the rail. "It's beginning to look as if nobody was going in your boat," he commented

loudly. With that self-confident moon smile of his, he surveyed the tangled falls. "Come, gentlemen," he called. "Has one of your number a gun? Good. The little ensign has one? May I borrow it please?"

The little ensign, a hard-boiled half pint of a man, growled reproach, but tossed the gob his automatic. Aiming in an airy offhand fashion, the fussily-dressed gob cut the offending falls with six decisive shots. "Which is pretty smart sharpshooting," he admitted, "when you consider the roll of the ship, the smoke, and the flickering light. And"—he indicated his right hand still in his pocket—"I did it left-handed."

SHARPSHOOTER or no, it was not easy to forgive Raymond Creeron, seaman first-class, for his sins; and when he lounged in the stern of the boat with hands in pockets and an important smile, his air of superiority was superior indeed. In fact, it was so superior, that the Germans who came to the surface looking for officers, mistook the gob in the furbished outfit and patronizing smile for nothing less than a commodore.

We had got clear of the sinking Wistonver; and were standing by to pick up a couple of firemen and a yowling steward off a liferaft. Our Wistonver had suffered another explosion—a lusty blast that sent the six-inch gun on her afterdeck spinning forty feet into the air—and burrowed gloomily into the waves. The U-boat had bobbed up to look over the job.

Daylight was brightening the wintry sky when the submarine drew alongside. We could clearly distinguish the men at her rail, and the stalwart officer with the comic opera whiskers ruling the foredeck. He stared at us through excellent German binoculars; sighted the medals and garb of the gob in the stern. Officers were the things they were looking for. The rest of us in the lifeboat looked like fishermen. The one with the medals must be in command.

The one with the medals was sent for. He did not seem to mind. His pallid face wreathed in smiles, and as he neared the U-boat's bow he uttered a spirited laugh. He was grinning his mooniest when he boarded the U-boat, and when he clapped the pompous skipper on the back we could hear him laugh. Then, to complete an astounding episode, that U-boat skipper embraced him, and escorted him back to the gangway.

Even Nevada found no word to say when Creeron lounged back to our craft, and the submarine drew off and dived. Mule Rice sat with his jaw dropping six inches. The bald third mate glared in admiration. Creeron, sitting with hands in jacket pockets, was pale as a ghost, but grinning.

"Say!" The third extended an open hand. "I wanta shake with you, sailor. You shoot knots out of rope, an' tell Hun officers stories that make 'em kiss you an' get out. What's the secret? What'd you tell that Boche? Who are you?"

"I?" murmured Creeron with an elaborate drawl. "I'm a sharpshooter, and former star reporter of the Brooklyn *Beagle*. A news story of mine once saved that Dutchman a prison sentence when he was visiting in New York. Yes, indeed. He remembered when I told him who I was. Just little me, I said, Mrs. Creeron's boy, Raymie. And," he concluded, smiling his moony smile, "as I bashed the fingers off my right hand durin' that third explosion below decks on our ill-fated vessel, I'm afraid I can't shake hands with you, Mr. Third. Unless, of course," he drew a battered hand from a jacket pocket, "you'll—er—pardon—"

Whereupon Raymond Creeron, seaman first-class, and the gamest gob that ever kidded the navy, slipped into kindly unconsciousness.

THE END.

The Devil Horse

By E. E. HARRIMAN

With a shout he let go all holds and leaped

Rustlers of the Arizona range, a relentless district attorney, and a fiend on hoofs—what a titanic drama they staged between them in the sagebrush country!

WARD PENNINGTON began to gather his effects together in readiness to leave the train, as he saw the rainbow glimmer of Sunset Mountain's volcanic cinder coat. After eight years in New York it thrilled him to pass the San Francisco Peaks and good old Sunset.

He wondered if anybody would be at the station to greet him besides his father, and almost at once decided it was unlikely. Six years he had spent in university and law courses at Columbia, followed by two years in the office where his father had been before ill health sent him to Arizona. It had made Ward the educated man his father wished him to be, but had turned him into a stranger in his own land.

A little gleam of honest review told him he had never been popular enough to induce many to ride forty miles just to greet him at the station. Now he was returning to his home to achieve a greater unpopularity, since Rush Pennington planned a political career for his son and hoped to enter him in the race for district attorney as a starter, with the United States Senate looming mistily in the distance.

At the first glimpse of the Flagstaff station, Ward visualized a scene of eight years ago, when he was leaving for the East. His father had coveted certain water rights held by Mike Gibbons. It was Rush Pennington's ruthless doctrine that no law should be regarded unless it was impregnable, and

that all titles came under the same rule. So he had hired gimlet-eyed attorneys to find flaws in Mike's titles, then had dragged Mike through five law courts to a favorable decision and left Mike financially flat as well as bereft of the two springs that made his range valuable.

Mike had seen Rush in passing and rode his leggy sorrel close to deliver himself of an opinion of his despoiler.

"Rush, ye old thief of the warrld, hark to me," he began, before an impromptu audience of a hundred or more, collected around the station. "Because ye could match dollars agin my dimes and have a big surplus left over, ye used yer wealth to batter me into pulp, without a shadow of right on your side. It was only the law of the *lobo*—the wolf that hamstrings a heifer that he may butcher her at his leisure. Fer years ye have gone about makin' enemies where it had been far easier to make friends. It is proud the lad must be of a father so near kin to the wolf. The day may come, Rush, when ye may regret havin' let greed make ye ignore the better task of makin' friends. Ye may yet sorrow that ye have never sowed the seeds of kindness or watered them with honesty.

"Fer twenty years I've known ye, Rush Pennington, and all that time ye have had but one rule of conduct: 'Git the money!' And never at all at all has it been modified by adding the word 'honestly.' I was here afore ye and I may still be here after the poison in yer black heart is killin' the earth worms. Mike Gibbons is down, but he is not out; and he has never yet cringed or crawled before ye, and he nor his never will. So now I'm here to give ye the Rathlin man's benediction. To hell with ye, Rush."

Ward recalled every word and intonation and his face burned as it had done long ago, but from a different reason. Then he had been much abashed and humiliated, because his father had made no reply. Now he no longer felt humiliation, but hot anger. During his study of law he had absorbed the idea so common among attorneys that a man need not respect a law in which a smart lawyer can find loopholes; that unless a law is impregnable, its intent or that of those writing the law counts for less than nothing; that perfection of construction is the only thing to be respected, never pausing to reflect that this rule damns themselves *in toto*, since perfection among lawyers is unknown.

Both the law school and that office on Wall Street had given Ward the idea that laws were either inflexible granite or intangible mists. His entire training in the East had supplemented his father's boyhood instructions to him—to be utterly selfish. So now Ward was coming back to put into practice the law of power that the poet expresses:

> Sufficeth them, the simple plan
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can.

AS Ward descended from the car, he saw a couple of girls coming down from the rear end of the next car ahead and a third girl darting to meet them. This third girl attracted his attention not only by her swiftly graceful advance and her squeal of delight, but by her hair which was a beautiful shade of red.

With startled recollection he gave her a direct look and flushed. It was Sheila, daughter of that Mike whom his father had robbed by legal methods. Ward had gone to school with her and had teased her unmercifully about her hair then. Now he admired it immensely and realized that the slip of a girl had grown into a very lovely woman in eight years.

Rush Pennington gripped his son just then and hauled him towards a fine automobile, fairly trembling with excitement over having his boy back again. It was forty odd miles to the

ranch, and Rush no longer had the stamina to fork a bronc for a ride like that.

"Ward, my boy, how are ye? Glad to get home again, huh? That's good. I have everything lined up for ye. Nomination as good as made and we can carry the election easy. You will want a slogan, and I have one all made for ye. Rustlers have been worse in the last year than they ever have been since 1874. How's this, Ward: 'Limit sentences for rustlers'?"

"Pretty good, dad. Ought to please the stock growers."

"You bet! And they're the boys you gotta please to get in."

"I suppose I must have my headquarters in Flag."

"Sure. Sam Borden is boss there and he's given me his word to help us. You're as good as elected right now, Ward!"

At last came the day of election. Ward polled fifty-three per cent of the total votes cast and was duly certified as the new district attorney. Almost his first act was to impanel a grand jury, and his second act was to go before that body and urge action against rustling; a popular move and a needed one.

There were two investigators attached to the office when Ward began to rule, and he ordered a thorough study of rustling as carried on in his county. The pair spent twelve days in the work and preferred charges of actual stealing in two cases and complicity in three more—against Mike Gibbons and his sons.

Ward took these men and their evidence before the grand jury, and asked it to consider the advisability of indicting all of the men named. Followed then a three days' row in the jury room and the refusal of an indictment, accompanied by an accusation of perjury and of manufacturing evidence, hurled against the pair of detectives.

Friends of Mike on the jury insisted upon calling in a number of reputable men to testify and the secret service men of Ward's office were discredited; they proved to be personal enemies of the Gibbons men, striving to carry a private grudge into the public service. The grand jury accused both men of criminal acts and they fled the county between suns, after a grand juror in cross-examination brought out the fact that they had been placed in office by the influence of Rush Pennington. The juror demanded a trial for perjury, and faced Ward indignantly.

"You took an oath to enforce the laws and here you are trying to make your office the tool of your greedy father. This jury may hand in an indictment that you haven't asked for if this goes much farther. Mike has been robbed of his water rights and now he is being persecuted by the Penningtons. You have managed to get off on the wrong foot right at the start and you need to be told to change your gait. You and that father of yours have got to learn that you can't use your office to put over any schemes of this kind. Isn't Rush Pennington satisfied with the judgment he got against Mike? Why should he try to shove the man into the pen? It is nothing on earth but damned persecution and injustice of the worst kind—and the first thing you know you will be answering charges yourself instead of preferring them."

WARD realized that this mishap had just about ruined his hope of further advancement politically, when one of the jurors divulged publicly what had happened in this investigation. Sentiment set strongly in favor of the Gibbons family and against the new district attorney.

Ward knew he must retrieve himself in some way, and he acted promptly. First he had a session with his father in which he informed the older man that his office could not be used as a bludgeon with which to belabor anybody.

"One more such a case and I am all through, down and out in my own county, probably in the State. Keep your hands off or I pull out for the East again and stay there. God only knows whether I will ever again be able to hold my head up here or not. I am a whipped pup right now," he declared. "My reputation is level with that of a coyote."

Getting advice from some of the old-timers on appointments, he put in new men who were keen-witted, straight, and active in their duties and by the end of their first month he had seven men in jail charged with the theft of calves.

He convicted all of them, which made the stockmen talk hopefully and somewhat stemmed the tide of disrepute. Still, the main source of trouble had not been touched and none knew the name or hangout of the leader who planned and carried out robberies of greater magnitude. And still the Gibbons family hated the young district attorney and spread their views on his infamy abroad among all their friends.

Sheila met Ward on a street in Flag and gave him the rough side of her tongue when he spoke to her in a lady-like way that bit deep into his sensitive soul, sensitive because it had been skinned so often of late.

Ward had always loved to ride and feeling a spirited horse between his legs had always been the height of real enjoyment to him. Now he owned two splendid animals his father had given him and he rode every day.

Any day when he had been humiliated in public, as happened often enough in these days of continued unpopularity, he would ride far into the wildest country within reach of Flag, to return with his mount lathered. He had no idea of riding too hard for his horse to endure unharmed, but often his memory of some incident would lash him into increasing speed, and he would rouse from bitter reverie to find his horse racing and sweating. It was strange that he rode hardest after Sheila talked a few red-hot sentences to him, which happened upon three occasions.

"Paquito," he told one horse, "it is an infernal shame to treat my horse like this, but I don't know that I'm doing it. I get so full of anger and shame, all else is only a sort of dream. Hate is all I get out of my job, and I am fed up on it. Damn a job like this. It makes me feel rotten, and makes most folks think I am rotten."

He had begun to wonder if the idea held by his father and his favorite prof in the law school was right. Perhaps there might be something said on the side of the opposition. Possibly Mike Gibbons could cite a few good reasons why he should never have been dispossessed of his springs. The Western doctrine of the square deal had begun to drill holes in Ward's convictions. He began to suspect that anything more like that detective frame-up would blast a hole too large and ragged to mend, in his armor of selfish arguments.

Now that he had good men under him and encouraged them to activity, his campaign against rustlers was gaining daily and now it was the outlaw element that cursed Ward Pennington hardest while some stockmen who had been loudest in criticisms, had turned to tentative applause.

"If Ward keeps on," or "If Ward don't tire out too quick," they would remark, "we may see Coconino cleaned of rustlers and hoss-thieves yet."

Always remained that shade of doubt of his persistence in well-doing; never a whole-souled approval or loud-voiced prophecy of future good. At the same time the rustlers managed to keep in circulation a lot of talk which no man knew positively had originated among the thieves, but which was relished and passed on by every doubter or enemy of the district attorney. Ward's job was anything but a comfort to him these days. Still he strug-

gled at it and hoped some day to convince the county of his honesty of purpose and his determination to enforce the laws.

THEN there came a day when he met Sheila and asked her outright to give him credit for having tried his best to right a wrong when he had discovered that a personal enmity had induced false testimony against her menfolks. She looked at him with eyes that had in them the look of eagle eyes, and no forgiveness.

"When have you ever apologized to my father and brothers?" she asked. "Or when did you ever make it public that you were sorry for an error?"

He had no answer ready, and she left him abruptly and with a curl of the lip he read aright as contemptuous.

The horse Pedrito carried him far that afternoon, farther than Paquito had the day before, and Paquito had come home so weary and sweat-caked that Jose the stableman had used a rather full vocabulary of profanity in two languages while cleaning him.

Ward rode into a district he had never penetrated before and had no realization of his whereabouts when he came out of his daze and decided to return. He looked about him and failed to recognize any point in the landscape. He was in a draw that led down into a cañon. The cañon's wide bottom was well grassed, with numerous oak trees grouped here and there along its length.

To his surprise the draw was all trampled by cloven hoofs, as though large numbers of cattle had been driven through it. Turning his mount he rode up the draw instead of down and came out upon a mesa where numberless single trails or ones lightly marked by hoofs converged at the head of his draw.

Thoroughly alert now, he leaned over to study the ground, and saw horse tracks upon the marks made by cattle. With a whispered oath, he turned back and once more rode down toward the cañon bottom. This trampled draw meant rustling, for no cattle rancher in this section would be driving stock into this cañon at this time of year. Later, when the mesas had dried out, they would be grazing the cattle in cañons where grass held green far longer.

Now he followed the trail made by many cattle that had been driven in: it brought him out to a broad bench, from which he could overlook the bottom up and down a good mile of length. There he paused and stared at a corner of a big corral visible across the bottom among the trees of an oak grove.

He could see several head of stock which kept milling, new ones coming in sight constantly. By this sign he knew that either they had not been long enough in the corral to get quieted down, or else they had been there too long and were thirsty and hungry. Reflecting upon the tracks he had lately followed he decided that his first guess was the correct one, as those tracks were exceedingly fresh. He must get officers down here at once to inspect these cattle and their brands.

Wheeling Pedrito, he rode up the draw again. About halfway up he had to pass an outcropping of porphyry and it rose high above the hill at his right. As his horse pushed past the ledge, Pedrito lifted his head and swung it to look at some object. Ward wondered what had attracted the horse and leaned a little forward to look.

His ears caught the swish of a thrown rope and he tried to dodge backward, just too late. A rawhide loop caught him around the neck and jerked him from his saddle before he could lift a hand to throw it off. Dragged by the neck, he became as one dead and lay limp on the ground.

When he recovered from being choked into insensibility, he saw a man bending over him and grinning at his condition. The man wore a bandanna -

mask, and Ward could see only his eyes and chin. However, both of these held qualities he would not be forgetting soon. The right eye had a blue mark on the outer side of the white, in the form of a dotted kite frame. Evidently the eye had been powder-marked long ago. On his chin some ancient feud had left a scar in the shape of a hook, with the shank lying along the jaw length, as if a knife, slashing at the throat, had landed high, with a scooping sweep that lifted a flap of flesh on the chin, later to be replaced and heal fast. Ward could perceive powder marks on the temple and along the rim of the eye socket. He resolved to remember the marks if he lived to escape this man.

"What a haul I've made," jeered the outlaw, with a chuckle. "Our new D. A. all by his lonesome. Out to do a lil sleuthing all by yerself, huh? Oughta take a capable guard along on such trips, sonny. Now you're due to leave yer amiable pa abitin' his fingernails in sorror. But jest think how pleased Mike Gibbons will be to get rid of a pest that made him trouble and wanted to make more, only his witnesses were proved damn liars."

The outlaw laughed as he said that, then swore and kicked Ward in his ribs violently. He swore again with heartfelt viciousness.

"You sent up some of my best men, an' I'm goin' to give ye a ride to celebrate the event," he promised with evil emphasis and he whistled oddly a couple of times. Down in the cañon another shrill note answered and in a little while two other men appeared, riding up the draw.

"GET help and fetch that yaller hoss up here. This here is our dear lil pet, the new D. A. of Coconino. Fetch along plenty of stuff to use in tyin' him on the hoss. Bein' a real bronc-twister he wants to show an int'rested audience how easy he can ride the *caballo amarillo* bareback. Git a hustle on ye, fer the show must start inside of six minutes er I plug him six times. If ye hanker fer fun move fast."

One of the men whooped excitedly and ran, the other stood still to protest against turning Ward loose in any fix, when they make take it out on his hide, and even collect some cash return for all the hot trouble he had caused them in the past weeks.

The leader shut him up in an abrupt manner. He would tolerate no questioning of his orders; snarlingly he threatened to take the man apart if he heard another word from him. With a mumbled growl the fellow ceased his talk.

Presently three others and a horse appeared. The horse, yellow, bony, hammer-headed and mean, was all the three of them could handle, trying to keep him under restraint and make him come up the draw. One man carried several ropes and a handful of thongs. The helpers tied the horse between two stout trees. Then they took the coat and trousers off Ward.

"Belly down and arms around the neck of the hoss," said the leader. "He sure will enjoy bein' bucked with the withers under his brisket." Two tied up a foreleg of the horse and the brute showed knowledge of what that meant by his actions. Though his lip wrinkled ferociously at his captors and his long teeth snapped threateningly, he knew he was too well tied to wreak vengeance on the men, so he stood quietly awaiting a better opportunity to start something.

A little later Ward was on the brute, his wrists fast in a thong below the neck, his legs tied securely to a rope girdle just in front of the hind legs, and another rope encircling both horse and man where a cinch would naturally come. Now the outlaw leader looped a rope around Ward's neck and took a hitch on the neck of the horse. He grinned horribly as he did so.

"So you won't miss the ride in case you work loose somewhere else," he

said. "I'll guarantee this hoss will take ye fer a ride if you fall clear off, with that hitch on him. Stand ready, boys, to cut the hoss loose when I give the word. Pennington, this will be worth tellin'. Cut!"

Knives slashed and ropes fell away; the outlaw horse leaped once and set himself to buck. Then he made four crow-hops and ran, while the gang gave vent to their disgust in profane yells, which changed to yells of joy as the beast reached level ground and started a furious display of bucks. For a space of two minutes he tried every trick known to his kind, even the surging grind against a tree that the real outlaw horse dearly loves when all else fails to wreck his rider. However, Ward's leg came down on a soft flank and the horse had ground his own ribs on the tree before he got far enough forward to hurt his rider. The beast eased off a trifle and merely peeled the skin off Ward's knee without any breaking of bones.

Presently he was away again at a run, taking every bit of rough going as it came; leaping obstacles, rushing through thickets, under branches, tearing the underclothes off Ward and scoring his skin deeply in a multitude of places. Within twenty minutes Ward was bleeding freely from scores of cuts and the breath had been pounded from his lungs by that bumping hump of the withers. Twice some hooking branch caught in the rope that held his neck and jerked it terribly.

All this time he had worked at the thong binding his wrists together, a seemingly impossible task to free them, but he could no more have failed to try than he could have stopped the beating of his heart. The vicious brute that carried him kept changing tactics, jumping down cut banks, then running wildly in tangled growths, occasionally bucking for a jump or two. Sure-footed as a mountain goat, it galloped without a slip or stagger along places a horse or man in a sane moment would navigate with utmost caution if at all.

Breathless, bloody, aching intolerably, and despairing of ever freeing his wrists, Ward rode on in misery; he had no alternative. Vainly he hoped that his head might yet meet some tree bole and bring merciful unconsciousness; but nothing of the kind came to him, only the gouging, raking, bloodletting branches that plowed great gashes in his skin, tore the hair from his head, and so marred his face as to make it unrecognizable. All the way from hair to heels he was weltering, smarting, stinging, aching.

NOW the yellow horse came out of the forest and entered a foothill country, cut and plowed by deep barrancas, but open country where were no murderous thickets and torturing oak limbs.

At this juncture Ward felt the thong slip a little. He tugged at it swiftly. Again it slipped, and a full-strength pull released his hands. The ugly brute he rode was loping at a brisk pace, but Ward knew the demon was tired and growing steadily more weary.

Locking his hands below that neck, he wriggled and pulled to get farther forward if he could. He gained a hand's breadth and again tried. Then his left arm reached far forward and his hand closed upon the nose of the yellow horse, shutting off his wind. Three jumps the brute made, then in agony of breathless lungs he stopped, directly beside an abruptly vertical wall of a deep barranca.

Ward tried to shift position, failed, and only stirred his mount to resistance. The animal shifted feet and half made a turn. Dirt caved, and a scrambling, clawing, snorting terrorized beast went backward into the depths of a twelve-foot barranca.

Ward came to his senses long afterward, to find himself lying partly under the horse and somebody working

over him and crying. He opened his eyes and grunted unintelligibly. To his astonishment, a face turned and Irish gray eyes looked into his. To increase his muddlement a red head bowed itself and tear-wet lips touched his face.

"Are you nearly killed, Ward?" Sheila asked tenderly. "You must be, poor fellow. I might never have seen you at all if my own horse hadn't smelled blood and snorted. I wish I could shoot the men who fixed you this way. I sure do. Oh, Ward, suppose I hadn't seen you?"

She began to cry harder than ever at her thought, and he touched a shoulder with a bloody hand.

"You would have been rid of me, then, by morning," he said softly.

"Rid of you!" she stormed at him. "I never want to be rid of you."

"Why, Sheila, I thought you hated me," he protested.

"I should, for dad's sake—but, Ward, I've been crazy about you ever since I was fourteen. Finding you in this fix—it's just too much. I glory in my shame, telling you how I feel about you. Now, Ward, I'll lift this leg, and when I get it as high as possible you try to pull out from under this dead beast. It may hurt, but it will be better than lying there. Lucky I'm strong!"

Raising the horse's hoof, Sheila got a shoulder under the shank, and in heroic effort straightened her legs; she hitched lower and boosted again. A third attempt, and Ward dragged himself clear. Sheila let the leg drop, and hurried to Ward with sympathetic grief.

"Ward, honey, this newfangled rig girls wear doesn't carry any excess cloth for bandaging the hero, unfortunately. My grandmother could have torn off enough to cover you from hair to hocks, but it just isn't here. It would reduce me to a Lady Godiva costume to swathe a third of your bloody spots, so I guess you will have to bleed and suffer until I get you home to our house.

"Then I'll sacrifice a couple of sheets to you, with dad to help bundle you up. Let me help you up and on my horse, if I can. Then I'll scramble on behind and steer the craft home."

The plucky girl took hold of the nearest arm and tugged on it. In weak agony Ward did his best. At last he was in the saddle. Then she led the horse up beside a rock and from it mounted behind. Putting both strong arms around the bloody figure before her, she kicked her horse in his flank and spoke sharply to him.

"Here is where you earn your keep for once, cayuse. Get a wiggle on you, *caballo*. Did it hurt you much, Ward, to scramble around this way?"

"Not enough to matter, you blessed redhead. Sheila, I begin to have a glimmer of sense. I have wondered why it hurt so to hear you cut into me as though you hated me more than anything else in the world. It was because I loved you, dear; and my heart trouble is increasing fast."

Involuntarily her arms tightened around his body, but she relaxed them instantly with a gasp of dismay.

"Did I hurt you then, Ward?" she asked anxiously. "I always hug so hard. Dad calls me his high-pressure engine because I do everything in such an eager style. I never thought about your hurts then."

"It was good for them, beloved. Don't worry."

SO they came to the Gibbons home, and Dennis, youngest of the boys, was out in front when the horse carried his double burden near.

"Call the others, Denny," Sheila said, and the boy ran up the steps and shouted in at the door. "Jim! Jack!" he yelled. "Fetch dad and Peter lively. Sheila has the worst-lookin' wreck in her saddle you ever saw. Dunno who he is or where she got him, but she wants to unload. Hustle!"

They came, saw a gory figure in tattered union suit and blood clots swaying in the girl's arms, and lifted him down. Not until he was holding the head and shoulders of the sufferer in his arms did Mike know who it was. Then he merely remarked in an awed tone:

"The saints be good to us!"

He helped carry Ward to his own bed. There they washed him, bandaged a multitude of cuts, and treated scores of skin-deep scratches. No man could have been kinder in the handling of bruises than Mike.

"Listen, Mike," said Ward, after he had begun to feel easier. Then he told what he had discovered. "Raise the neighbors and form a posse. By the time they get here I can ride. A few good hours of sleep will put me in shape to lead you, and we must hit that gang at daylight."

At three in the morning Ward roused from sleep and found Sheila by his bed, while Peter showed his face in the doorway.

"The men are here," she said. "But you are in no condition to ride with them, are you?"

"I am going, Sheila," he replied. "Run along and let Pete dress me, if he has any clothes to fit me. Your men folks are such huskies."

"Denny can rig you out," said Peter. "With all those bandages on, you can fill his coat near enough. Better to have it loose anyhow."

Denny brought the clothes and helped Peter put them on Ward. Then both boys aided the sufferer in walking outside, where seventeen riders sat their horses and waited. Lifting him into the saddle, they put the reins in his hands, and Pete buckled a belt around his waist. Then Mike stepped up and handed him a short-barreled gun.

"In a pocket of your coat, man," he urged. "You may need it at close quarters. It is a good one. Are ye able fer the ride, me boy?"

"I'll stick it out, Mike; it is the least I can do," Ward answered.

Sheila stood on the steps, and he rode past her to touch her hand as he led the seventeen away on an errand of death. She said but two words in farewell—"My man!"—but she spoke them proudly. The lawyer had left off his legal shell and become just plain man and a real one.

They came to that draw at the time of false dawn, and rode down it like so many ghosts to the bench-land. There in whispers Ward gave directions, and four men dismounted, tied their horses to trees, and passed silently over to the big corral. Jim Gibbons led four to the east end of the cabin, while his brother Jack took as many more to the west end. Then Ward and Mike, with Denny and one other, took position facing the entrance.

The men at each end had orders to keep back far enough to avoid shooting toward each other, yet be where they could pick off men trying to escape. The corral gang were instructed to take cover where they could stop anybody running to get horses. Denny, excited but steady-nerved and carrying a .45-90, whispered to Ward that he meant to knock the chinking out from between two logs breast high and sow lead all along the rear cabin wall, where he guessed the bunks were.

Now a face appeared at a window, and a wild yell notified the outlaws that they were attacked. Ward saw the face, and chucked a gun instantly. There had been a time when he shot running rabbits from the back of loping horses, and he proved now that men are right in saying that shooting is like swimming, in that a man never forgets how to shoot after he once learns it well.

THE face at the window had its mouth wide open, yelling, when Ward snapped a shot at it; and as it sank lower Mike saw blood on the lips.

"Got him, by ginger!" Gibbons applauded; and the fun began.

Denny's rifle roared continuously, and the thin chinking proved no great obstacle to bullets driven by ninety grains of powder. The glass in the two windows crashed before bullets and shouts of triumph proved that the three lots of men detailed to watch the other sides of the cabin were doing good work.

Ward and Mike were still mounted, and when a rider went past the rear of the cabin, untouched by lead, both spurred after him. Mike beat Ward to it by a single jump, and Ward checked his mount at a corner of the cabin. A second rider came down to pass there, and Ward darted out at him, driving the breast of his mount against the outlaw's horse behind the ribs.

The charge landed squarely, and the roan horse of the outlaw went down. Ward saw the face of the rider and knew him as the leader who had ordered his being bound upon the back of the yellow plug.

With a shout he let go all holds and toppled sidewise upon the falling man. He had emptied his revolver and dropped it. Now his hand went to a coat pocket. His left hand reached for a shock of long hair, and the two hit the ground together, with Ward on top and his fingers locked in hair.

The outlaw had fired twice as he fell, but Ward felt no wound as he struggled to get his short gun into action.

They found Ward later, still clinging to his handful of hair and with two empty shells in his hidden gun. He grinned into the face of Mike quite happily.

"I got him, Mike," he crowed weakly. "This bird had me tied on that hell-roaring *caballo*. The short-barreled gun came in handy."

The outlaw chief had nicked Ward; not seriously, but, on top of yesterday's experience, it left him mighty weak; so Jack took the position Sheila had held the day before, and steadied Ward gently and firmly on the ride home. Mike rode beside them and told the result of the attack.

"There were five dead and three wounded inside the cabin. 'Twas a bright notion Denny had about the chinkin'," he said. "Then there were two killed climbin' out of windows, and four laid out in makin' a dash fer hosses and liberty. Besides, we have a little matter of seven prisoners; some in need of a doctor.

"This sure puts a crimp in stock rustlin' in Coconino. It ain't often a district attorney gets out personally and shoots straight to enforce the law. Ward, me boy, you can have anything ye ask fer in this county after this."

"All right, Mike," Ward said. "I'll take Sheila first."

"I agree," Gibbons replied. "But the shock will wreck Rush nervously, I'm afraid. Think he is strong enough to bear it?"

"He will have to be," Ward murmured dreamily, as Jack chuckled and called him profanely affectionate hard names.

THE END.

He stared at the gun as if it were a venomous snake about to strike

The Black Ace

Hard pressed by the brilliant Mme. Storey, the fiend of psychology Touchon demands a show-down—and gets it!

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Murder at Fernhurst," "It Never Got Into the Papers," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

MME. STOREY, the famous criminologist, is retained to put the clever charlatan, Dr. Jacmer Touchon, behind prison bars. He pretends to be a "psychosynthetist," or soul-builder, inveigling wealthy women into confiding their secrets to him; then he had a confederate blackmail them.

Mme. Storey meets Touchon, who pretends to make love to her, although he knows she is investigating him; then he thinks himself cleverer than she is, and enjoys the deadly game.

She hires Basil Thorne, an actor, who finds Francis Fay, Touchon's confederate, and scares him into making an appointment with Mme. Storey. But Touchon somehow learns of it, and appears just ahead of Fay. He, Mme. Storey, and Bella Brickley, her secretary—who is telling the story—are in the office when Fay appears. From behind a tapestry, some one cries "Judas!" and shoots Fay. Touchon, playing protector, kills the assassin.

The man is identified as Arthur Sims, "Blondy," an accountant. His buddy, Jack Coler, or "Scarface," dis-

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appears. Mme. Storey's agent Crider traces him, keeping him from shooting Touchon as the killer of his pal Blondy —for they did not know that their colleague Fay was working for Touchon. Crider also learns that Scarface runs the Cobra Club, a place where "associate members"—wealthy thrill-hunters—can mix with "regular members," gangsters.

Meantime, Touchon, working through Inspector Creery, a stupid political appointee, who is jealous of Mme. Storey, frames up a "confession" by Barney Craigin, convicted murderer, that he had paid Fay to have Blondy to kill Mme. Storey, and that Blondy, double crossed, was about to kill both Fay and her when Touchon interfered. She cannot get Craigin to retract, although she traces his wife to a new home, where she is displaying considerable money.

Touchon, who has discredited Mme. Storey as an investigator and covered his own crimes, now retires from practice, and instantly burns all his records before her eyes. She guesses his next move, and frustrates his attempt to kill Scarface, his chief remaining link with the past.

Although Touchon immediately surrounds her with private detectives, she arranges a secret exit from the Sixty-Second Street house which backs up to her Sixty-Third Street home.

She tricks Touchon into telephoning, and has the conversation overheard by Mr. Greenlees, chief clerk in the office where Blondy and Scarface worked; and he identifies the voice as one which called Blondy the day of the shooting.

She and Bella bob and dye their hair, having wigs made for their natural selves; and masquerading as the wealthy young Inez Van Benthuysen, she with Bella and Basil Thorne, get themselves taken into the Cobra Club, She meets Scarface, who is a handsome tigerish youth; and at once there is an intense battle of wills. Mme. Storey convincing him that she likes him, but will not let him make advances.

CHAPTER XXV.

A BOLD MOVE.

WHEN Mme. Storey and I met at the breakfast table next morning, she looked frankly pale and fagged. Well, we had only had about an hour and a half's sleep, and the night had been very wearing. There was something more than mere weariness in her face however; a hint of discontent or resentment that one never saw there. Like a stupid fool I never guessed the reason for it.

For myself, I was thoroughly out of temper. I had not had even the hour and a half's forgetfulness, what with worrying over the hole we were in. It seemed to me that a young man of Scarface's explosive capacity was beyond even her ability to handle. We had had another scene with him upon leaving the club. He had insisted upon seeing "Inez" home, and it was only with the exercise of the greatest adroitness that we had put him off. It was really the astute Basil who had saved the day by making believe to pick a quarrel with him.

Scarface had yielded on condition that we promised to return the following night. When Inez referred to the rules of the club he had said: "Damn the rules! I made them, and I guess I can break them if I want."

So we were going again the coming night. I did not see how we could get through with it. I foresaw disaster.

I suppose my thoughts showed in my face for Mme. Storey presently said: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," I said.

She looked distinctly annoyed with me. It occurred to me that I was acting rather pettishly, so I said: "I don't like the situation we're in, but it does no good to talk about it."

"Well, I don't like it, either," said

Mme. Storey. "One can't foresee everything."

Even then I did not understand. "Scarface—" I began.

She took me up quickly. "I'm not going to hurt Scarface. I only want to reach Touchon through him. I can even reconcile it with my conscience to let Scarface get clear away in the end."

"That's not what I meant," I said. "Is it fair to lead him on—"

"Fair!" she said. "You heard the compact I made with him."

"Such compacts are only made to be broken," I said.

"Not when the woman means what she says. He saw that I meant it; and if he didn't, he soon will."

"Even so," I insisted, "is it fair play?"

"There's no such thing as fair play between the sexes," she burst out. "Nobody expects such a thing. Do you suppose that Scarface has treated women fairly?"

"Not for a moment," I said.

"You mean," she said, interrupting, "that he is falling in love with me in spite of our agreement to be only good pals—or even because of that compact. What you are trying to say is that if I keep him at arm's-length he will end by conceiving a tremendous passion for me, the real thing, which is talked about so much, and so seldom occurs."

"Yes, that's what I mean," I said.

"Well, I don't need to be told it," she said with a curious bitterness. "Anybody could see that there was a genuine fire in the man. But what of it? It won't do him any harm. People don't die of unrequited passion except in novels, and even novelists don't suggest that men die of it. It may even do him good. He's been spoiled by women. It will help strike a balance for all the suffering he has inflicted on women."

"It's not his fault that women are fools," I said.

"Well, really," she said, "I didn't expect Scarface to find such a champion in you!"

"I can't help but feel sorry—" I began.

"Oh, Bella, don't make it any harder for me," she said with a sudden softening in her voice. "It's too late to turn back now. My dear girl, I am not made of wood!"

And then I understood! It was but rarely that my mistress gave me such a glimpse into her feelings. You may be sure that I made haste to hold my tongue on the subject.

AFTER breakfast we went down to the office, followed as always by Touchon's sleuths. What a dance Mme. Storey led those estimable men! By this time we knew most of them by sight, and it used to tickle her to strike up conversations with them, merely for the purpose of observing their embarrassment. On this particular morning it was her humor to take the subway down town. She lingered on the platform studying the magazines on the news-stand until a train was about to start. Then she darted for it, and we were edified by the sight of a fat detective clawing his way frantically into the car just as the doors were closing.

"That was a near thing," said Mme. Storey to him blandly.

He mumbled something in his throat.

"Haven't I seen you before somewhere?" she asked innocently.

The detective made believe to see a friend down the car, and moved hastily away.

At ten o'clock Mme. Storey called up Asa Van Benthuysen. He said he would be charmed to see her at any time before twelve.

"I'd like you to come with me this time," she said to me. "I want him to become accustomed to you."

"Then you are determined to carry through this mad scheme?" I said.

"Well, let us see what he says to it," she answered smiling.

We took a taxicab down to the

Equitable Building, followed, of course. We led our trackers to the offices of Greene and Greene. Touchon and everybody else knows that General Greene is Mme. Storey's lawyer. What Touchon didn't know was that there was a rear door to the suite to enable the general to escape importunate clients. We went out through this and gained the Metropolis Building which is near by. There, in the exquisite suite of offices allocated to the chairman of the board, we found the great Van Benthuysen, lapped in the smiles and the eager services of his highly paid employees.

"Well, here is an undeserved pleasure!" he cried. "And Miss Brickley, too! Delighted to see you both!"

Asa Van Benthuysen is a big man in every sense of the word. He has a head like a buffalo upon an immense swollen torso, which nevertheless has dignity. An expression of great sweetness and wisdom animates his enormous countenance.

"Well," said Mme. Storey, "when you gave me your permission to masquerade as your daughter, you stipulated that I must tell you everything that happened. That's what I have come for."

He pushed the cigarettes toward her. "Shoot!" he smiled.

She proceeded to give him a highly diverting account of our experiences of the night before. He was entranced with the story. At intervals he slapped his vast thigh and exclaimed softly: "Ah! that's the real thing! That's real!"

When she had finished her tale, Mme. Storey asked him cunningly: "Why do you keep referring to it as 'the real thing?'"

"Well, my dear," he said somewhat wistfully, "here you see me in my grandeur; full of years, honors, riches; greatly respected as they say, and greatly envied, I have no doubt. But all this cuts me off from life. I love life. It is my passion, and it makes me sad to be removed from it. Sometimes I seem to myself like a toad sitting on a bag of gold. How gladly I'd give it all to be young again and close to life!"

"Well," said Mme. Storey, "that emboldens me to make another request."

"What's that?" he asked eagerly.

"This young man Scarface suspected me from the first," she said. "I think my make-up got across with him all right, but he insisted that I was too wise for eighteen years old. So I said half-jokingly that he must meet my father, and ask him how old I was. Will you stand for that?"

"Ha! Will I stand for it?" cried Mr. Van Benthuysen. "Do you mean will I play the rôle of your papa, my dear? I should be proud to do so."

"Ah, thank you!" cried Mme. Storey.

"It will be an amusing experience for me," said Mr. Van Benthuysen.

"How will we arrange it?" said Mme Storey. "It is bound to be difficult, for I am followed everywhere."

"How about asking the young man to dinner at my house?" he suggested. "At our house, I mean." He corrected himself with a smile. "Wouldn't that help to convince him of your identity?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Mme. Storey. "Better than anything. But I should never have ventured to propose such a thing."

"It will be all right," he said, "the old lady would be scandalized, of course, but she is safe in Hot Springs, or wherever she is. You do not want to waste any time, I take it. Make it to-morrow night."

"How can I ever thank you sufficiently!" she cried.

"Pooh!" he said. "The shoe is on the other foot, my dear. I shall be eternally grateful to you for the experience. There is one thing I would like," he added, "provided it suits your plans."

"What is that?"

"Let him bring a few of his friends. Make it a party. That amusing little gumman, what is his extraordinary name? Jigamarig?"

"Chiglick."

"Chiglick. And one or two of the girls."

"But, Mr. Van Benthuysen," objected Mme. Storey, "your house is full of priceless art treasures. And these people are, after all—"

"Scarface seems to have great influence over them," he said. "Put it up to him. If he is prepared to guarantee his friends, I'm satisfied."

"I'll do it!"

"In any case," added Mr. Van Benthuysen, "I'd be well content to lose a bauble or two for the sake of the experience."

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONFIDENCES.

SCARFACE had besought Inez to come to dinner at the Cobra Club on the occasion of her second visit. They could then spend the evening together before the place filled up, he said. This, for obvious reasons, it was impossible for her to do; but she had promised to come to supper with him. There was no engagement with Touchon this night. The Cobra Club opened for business at eleven o'clock, and it was customary for people to drive there direct from the theater. For the first hour or two the restaurant and dance floor was the center of attraction. People then drifted upstairs to the gaming tables.

We went to the theater by our two selves this night, in order to persuade our spies that our day was fully occupied. When we got home Grace reported that the light in the servants' bedroom of the Sixty-Second Street house had already been out for an hour, so after changing our make-up, we immediately set out.

Crider drove us down town. He was instructed to be waiting at the corner of Delancey Street and the Bowery at four o'clock. This was at some distance from the club. We met Chiglick outside the Elite Theater, and he steered us through the mezzanine balcony into the alley, and so to the clubhouse. One felt the same lawless thrill in penetrating to the secret stronghold of pleasure. Come to think of it, these precautions must have been instituted principally for the fun the members got out of it. The police could hardly have been ignorant of the existence of the place.

Scarface was waiting for us in the reception room. His manner was quite changed. He made no attempt to charm Inez to-night. He was entirely comradely. Apparently he had made up his mind to accept the compact at face value.

I believe he thought he was cured of his infatuation. If so he was sadly mistaken, for it had only given place to a far deeper and stronger feeling. You could see that by the way his eyes started at the sound of her voice; by the whole softening of the man in her presence. It made my heart ache a little—I don't know why, for I had no call to feel compassionate on that young bravo's account. At any rate, my fears quieted down, for if he didn't know what was the matter with him, I thought we should have the less trouble in handling him. He was as startlingly candid as ever. It was his greatest attraction.

He coolly dismissed Chiglick, and led the way upstairs. As we passed through the restaurant, dancing was in full swing. Maud Heddle happened to be standing near the stairs. At the sight of Inez her lip trembled, and she quickly turned her back. Inez would not stand for that. She put an arm around the girl, and kissed her delicious curved cheek.

"Don't be silly, Maud," Inez murmured. "You and I are going to be friends!"

Scarface led the way on upstairs. In a charming room on the third floor a little table was set for four. Flowers, silver, crystal, everything was perfect. Where had Scarface learned it all? Champagne was cooling in buckets of ice; and on a sideboard one glimpsed caviare, truffles in aspic, paté de Toulouse, *et cetera*, in trays of ice. Scarface, rubbing his lip, was watching Inez out of the corners of his eyes.

"Lovely!" she cried. "Only it's so far away from the dancing."

"I'm not going to dance with you," he said coolly. "It would only be an aggravation. If you want to dance with Basil you'll have to toddle downstairs."

I thought Inez looked just a little put out at being taken so literally at her word.

Basil was the fourth at the table, of course. In looking back over what I have told, I see that I have made Basil play a very minor part in these affairs. That was his own fault, because he deliberately kept himself in the background; but with his wise eye and good-humored grin he was a tower of strength to us. He never lost his head. At a critical moment he was always right there; we should never have been able to get along without him.

"I must say you do yourselves pretty well in the Cobra Club," remarked Inez, nibbling a truffle.

"That's why I run the joint," said Scarface carelessly. "I'm willing to take all this trouble so I can have these things for myself. I was born with luxurious tastes and no means of satisfying them. It must be A-1 or nothing for me. I can starve all right, but I won't put up with second-rate things. Well, in order to get the first-rate, I had to make other people pay for it."

"THERE must be a bit of profit in it, too," suggested Inez.

He shook his head. "No. I'm in the hands of Manny Low, who owns this house. It's the house that makes the club; furthermore, we have to have the protection that Manny can furnish. He takes the profits of the tables and the initiation fees. I get what the people spend here, which just about meets running expenses. I could make something if I wanted to trim here and there. Nobody would notice the difference, but it wouldn't suit me at all. This place must be run as if it were my private house, and I never had to give a thought to money. That's the only way I can get any fun out of it. Manny thinks I'm a fool, and God knows I think *he* is, with his fifty millions and his inferiority complex. So there you are. Every man hugs his own folly. I have to depend on outside sources for my spending money," he went on with a scornful smile. "I have a patron who pays me five hundred dollars a week."

"What for?" asked Inez coolly.

"Doing what I am told," he retorted.

"I shouldn't have thought your stubborn nature could brook it."

"My patron is no piker," said Scarface. "He's a big man. I can serve him without any sacrifice of self-respect.

Inez was too wise to ask him any more questions. In any case it was not necessary. With Scarface's invincible candor, everything was bound to come out.

"You want to know what I do for my five hundred a week," he went on. "Well, I never yet sailed under false pretenses, and I'm not going to begin with you, Inez. Not if we're going to be pals. My patron retains me for whatever crooked work he may want done. I'm a crook, and everybody knows it."

"And you glory in it," she murmured.

"Not glory in it," he objected, "but I face it. I deliberately turned crooked; my eyes are open, and I know what I'm doing."

"That's a pose, just like the pose of being good," she said scornfully.

"Maybe it is," he said undisturbed, "but it has this advantage, it enables me to speak from the chest. I am not obliged to snuffle."

At another time he said scornfully: "I take what I want where I find it!"

In spite of myself a sound of compunction escaped me upon hearing such an outrageous sentiment aired. He turned to me, grinning good-naturedly. "That shocks lil Em'ly," he said teasingly. "It needn't, Em'. All men are the same in their desires, only most are afraid to avow them. When I look around me and see how men's so-called goodness is nothing in the world but fear of consequences, it gives me a disgust of my kind. Men have erected a whole structure of morals on fear, and I won't subscribe to it.

"I have a good understanding," he went on. "I read. I comprehend something of the nature of things. I see that modern society is founded upon injustice. It's nothing in the world but savagery with a veneer of hypocrisy. I prefer my savagery straight. I repudiate such a society. I refuse to be bound by its laws. I go my own way. If they are too strong for me, well, down I go; but nobody will ever hear me whimper."

I confess that I was a little carried off my feet by this bold declaration of faith. The speaker was so good-looking and his dark eyes flashed so compellingly. There was a bright aura of evil about his handsome head. One could conceive of losing one's soul for such a Lucifer. It was Inez who recalled me to common sense by saying slyly:

"That is what is called rationalizing one's desires. Men, contemptible though they may be, have had the wit to analyze the process in themselves."

"It may be," he said coolly; then a flash of suspicion narrowed his eyes. "Hey, kid, what do you know about such things, at your age?" he demanded.

"Oh, I hear my old man prating," she retorted lightly.

"I have my own code," Scarface presently went on. "I stick to that."

"Let's hear it," said Inez frankly curious.

He shook his head. "I never talk about it," he said. "If I did it would sound pious. I leave piety to the church-goers."

When the table was cleared a game of *vingt-et-un* was proposed. But the talk was too interesting, and the cards were allowed to lie on the table unheeded. We lolled about the room smoking and disputing. Who would have expected to find a philosophical discussion in the Cobra Club? Scarface held the floor for the most part. What an extraordinary fellow he was! I leave it to others to judge him.

LATER, business on the dancing floor having slacked off, I suppose, Maud Heddle appeared at the door of the room, glancing timidly at Scarface for permission to remain. She had no pride where he was concerned. He did not send her away. It was curious how, being denied Inez, he turned back in his half-contemptuous way to Maud.

"Come on in, kid," he said.

He made room on a little sofa beside him, and she sat, dropping her head on his shoulder. He flung a careless arm around her, and went on talking. Maud apparently, was contented with these crumbs of affection. Most of the talk was beyond her comprehension, and she did not trouble about it.

"Your old man must be quite a lad," Scarface said to Inez.

"He wants to meet you," said Inez, coolly.

"Hey?" said Scarface.

"Will you come up to dinner at our house to-morrow night?" she said demurely.

"Who, me?" For once we saw Scarface out of countenance.

"That's what I said."

"But would it be square to the old boy to introduce me as—"

"Oh, I've told him all about you," she said coolly.

"The hell you have!" said Scarface. "Does he know that you come here?"

"Certainly. He lets me go wherever I please, provided Emily is with me. We have an agreement that I shall not disgrace the family name. It's his idea that girls as well as boys should see everything as a part of their education. My mother has a different idea, but she's out of town at present."

"Well," said Scarface with an admiring glance, "judging from the results, I should say there was something in his idea."

"Thanks, Scarface," said Inez, dimpling. "And will you come?"

"Will I come? With bells on!"

"My father thought it would be nice if you brought a few of your friends," Inez continued. "He wants Maud and Chiglick."

"Will you go, Chicken?" asked Scarface, lifting the girl's chin.—

She nodded. "If you go," she said.

"And say three more," said Inez, "to make up an even ten at the table. Picturesque characters."

"Monk Eyster," said Scarface. "He's so tough he'd turn Sheffield steel. And Cora Hamann; she's a dumb-bell, but you can't help laughing at her. And lastly Daisy Darling, because she's easy to look at."

Scarface unhesitatingly guaranteed the good behavior of the guests. "I'll talk to them before we start," he said significantly.

"Then it's settled," said Inez. "Tomorrow at seven. You know where we live?"

"I reckon we can find the house," said Scarface dryly.

The giving of this invitation had the expected psychological effect of quieting Scarface's doubts. His eyes no longer narrowed at Inez. When she got off anything wise beyond her supposed years, he ascribed it to her unusual upbringing.

"Your old man must be quite a lad!" he would exclaim at intervals.

All through the evening Inez, with the most unconcerned manner in the world, was subtly playing him. Finally he began to give us details of his recent actions. You can imagine with what a breathless interest I listened. This was what we had been working so hard for.

"This fellow I work for," said Scarface; "it's quite romantic. I've done a good many jobs for him, and taken a pot of his money, but I've never laid eyes on him."

"Why, how can that be?" asked Inez with an incredulous air. "How did you establish relations with him in the beginning?"

"Through a third party," said Scarface mysteriously; "a crook I had known before. This third party knew the boss, of course, but the boss didn't want to meet me. Thought it might establish a link in case of trouble. That was natural. When I first went to work for him eight months ago, it was stipulated that I must take a job as accountant, listing checks on an adding machine all day. This was to establish an alibi as a respectable young clerk and all.

"It was simply hell for a free spirit like me, but the money looked good, so I put up with it. In the same big company where I went to work, there was another young accountant who was also an agent of the boss's, and we became pals. I can't tell you his name; it's too well known now." Scarface's hard eyes softened when he came to this part.

"He was a wonderful fellow. Absolutely different from me. A little fellow with an easy-going, fun-loving nature, he always depended on me, and I felt right from the first that we were intended to be pals. There was something about that kid you couldn't resist.

"He was a universal favorite. We shared everything. I could trust him

like myself. In fact, he was the only real pal I ever had."

MAUD raised her head from his shoulder jealously. "How about me?" she murmured.

"Oh, you're my sweetheart," he said carelessly. "That's something else again."

"Go on about your pal," murmured Inez.

"He worked at an adding machine also," said Scarface, "and we fixed up a scheme to communicate with each other by lists of numbers. Do you get the idea? We wrote notes to each other on the adding machines. Nobody ever got on to it. It was my job to go around and collect the lists of checks. In that way I could drop a note on B— on my pal's machine." (The name Blondy almost escaped Scarface here.) "Then I'd collect his note to me. Manny Low was running this place then, and my pal and I used to come here nights. But he didn't live to see me as manager here." Scarface lowered his head and fell silent.

"My pal is gone," he said, presently rousing himself, "and so is the other fellow I told you about. That leaves me as the boss's right hand man. Still, we've never met. Funny thing; once he called me up and said he wanted to have a look at me. Said he would feel more like trusting a man when he'd seen him. So we made a date to meet on a certain bench in Central Park late that night. But while I was waiting for him two street girls came along and tried to make up to me. Damned awkward at such a moment."

How carefully I avoided looking at Inez at this juncture!

"When they were talking to me, a man came by that I supposed was the boss," Scarface continued. "He didn't stop. I had to get up and walk away in order to shake the females. When I came back I met them walking with the same man. I couldn't get a look at his face. I supposed that he was leading them away from the meeting place, and I went back there. I waited an hour, but he didn't come. Those darn girls had queered the meeting. Next day he called me up and said that the incident had convinced him it was too dangerous for us to try to meet. So I haven't seen him yet. I wouldn't know how to reach him, but he can always call me up here. I am here every night at six thirty to receive a call.

"He's a wonderful man!" Scarface went on with a sober enthusiasm. "Clever as Satan! It's marvelous how he can foretell by psychology what people are going to do. Of course I don't know all the ins and outs of his game. He's a crook on a grand scale. His operations must run into the millions from the way he scatters money about. I wish I could tell you about one stunt that I helped him pull off. Unbelievably clever. But if I said a word you'd know all. It was a famous case. It cost my boss fifty thousand dollars to buy a piece of fake evidence that he wanted, and he gladly paid it. I delivered the sum myself in the form of unregistered Liberty Bonds."

"But how were they delivered to you if you never saw him?" asked Inez.

"By messenger."

"The one I'm most interested in is your pal," said Inez. "What happened to him?"

Scarface's face turned stony. A curious triangular furrow was etched on his forehead. "He was shot," he said brusquely. "And the man who shot him I have marked for my own. I almost got him once already, but a bystander in the street grabbed hold of me. After that the boss called me off. I was not to indulge my private vendetta until after he had pulled off his big stunt," he said. "After that I could do what I liked."

"So there is a big stunt in prospect?" said Inez.

"Yes," said Scarface. "I'm waiting orders."

That was all then. The thing that impressed me most about Scarface's disclosure was the extraordinary way in which the facts were bearing out my mistress's previous deductions.

As we drove home in the cab silent and weary, Mme. Storey roused herself to say: "Well, Bella, we are beginning to see daylight at last."

"But all that Scarface told us we knew already," I said. "How will you clinch it?"

"When I confront Jacmer Touchon with Scarface, our work will be done."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TEMPTER

DURING office hours Mme. Storey and I used to take turns in sleeping in the middle room. We dared not both lie down at the same time, for there was always the chance that Jacmer Touchon might drop in, and of course we made it a point to be perfectly open with him, to give him the freedom of the place. To have kept him waiting would instantly have aroused his suspicions.

This neighborly intimacy that he cultivated, this dropping in at odd hours, was part of his general scheme for enveloping us completely. That and our frequent lunches and dinners together; the many evenings we spent in company; and the spies that dogged us everywhere. He must have known that we were aware they were his spies, but he didn't care—he wished us to feel his power. These spies were never mentioned nowadays by him or Mme. Storey.

To me Touchon was like one of those suffocating nightmare shapes that you cannot see around nor measure; he was like the great Boyg who, as Peer Gynt fought it, always receded, and in receding ever encompassed the hero more closely. He got so on my nerves I could have screamed at the sight of him.

I could not altogether hide my feelings, nor did I try, for it had been agreed on in the beginning between Mme. Storey and me that it was no part of our scheme for me to appear to love Touchon. Well, as he saw that he was bearing harder on me, he became always more fulsomely friendly in manner. That was how he took his pleasure. Whenever the thought of him came into my head I would fall to trembling with hatred.

During the morning following our second visit to the Cobra Club he came sauntering into the outer office with his mocking eyes and his hateful smile of pretended friendship. "Well, Bella!" he said, then checked himself in seeming concern. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said shortly.

"You look a little jaded, my dear. You are not your usual blooming self this morning."

A sharp feeling of anxiety attacked me. One always looked for a double meaning in Touchon's words. Had he discovered our nightly expeditions? But I reflected that he could not possibly look so sure of himself if he had. This was merely his usual persiflage. "I was not aware of it," I said.

"You must take care of yourself," he said solicitously.

"I do," said I.

"Is Mme. Storey disengaged?" he asked.

"There's no one with her," I said carelessly. "Go right in." I knew that the door into the middle room was locked.

He passed into her room, and I pounded the typewriter to work off my venom. He turned around, saying:

"There's no one here."

"Then she's in the middle room," I said, rising. "I'll call her." I went through her room and knocked at the door at the end.

Instantly she answered clearly: "What is it?" One never caught her napping.

"Dr. Touchon is here," I said.

Almost instantly she appeared, dusting her hands. There was real dust on them, too, also a convincing smudge on her cheek. "Morning, Jacmer!" she said. "Don't look at me!"

"But that's what I came for!" he interjected.

"I have been digging into some old records," she said.

"What records?" he asked, assuming the privileged curiosity of an old friend.

She sat down at her desk, and set about repairing the damage to her complexion. I defied even Jacmer Touchon to guess that she had just been awakened from a sound sleep. "The Melanie Soupert case, if you must know," she said carelessly. "Bella and I have been discussing writing up some of those old cases for publication."

This was the first I had heard of such a thing. She was improvising as she went along.

"Oh, you shouldn't do that," he said with pretended earnestness.

"Why not?"

"It would be *infra dig.*," he said. "It would look as if you had realized that your vogue had passed, and had made up your mind to cash in on what you could."

"Perhaps you are right," she said with a submissive air.

TOUCHON looked at me in an ugly way. His eyes conveyed a peremptory command to leave the room. I made believe not to catch the hint. I had him there, because his pretended friendliness gave me an excuse for remaining. He could not tell me to get out without coming out of character.

Mme. Storey pulled the cigarette box toward her, and helped herself. "Anything special?" she asked idly.

"No," he said. "Since I gave up my practice I am often at a loose end. And as I knew you weren't very busy either, I just fluffed across."

Touchon's experiments with slang did not become him very well. Like many another gentleman of forty odd who brushes his hair straight back for a good reason, he wished to appear very much up to the minute. Good Heavens, how I hated that man! In a way the feeling was a godsend, for it bore me up; I was not nearly so crushed in his presence as I had been in the beginning.

Mme. Storey half turned her chair, and looked out of the window, letting the light quite frankly reveal the weary hollows in her face.

"You are not looking your best, Rosika," he said with a genuine concern, which was, nevertheless, entirely selfish. He looked on her beauty as belonging to him, and his proprietorship was alarmed by anything which threatened to mar it.

"I'm tired," she said.

By degrees Mme. Storey had entirely changed her method of dealing with Touchon. She perceived that he did not desire her to fall in love with him, but only wished to break her will. For him the supreme joy would lie in possessing a woman who was secretly terrified of him.

Consequently she had suggested by her manner that she was no longer able to keep up the laughing duel of the sexes that she had herself provoked. She now allowed a hint of strain to appear in her; she had become more subdued in his company, sometimes unexpectedly submissive. Her eyes would fall on him when she was apparently off her guard, with a look of reproach or resentment. It was a consummate piece of acting. It reassured Touchon more than the reports of his detectives. He had become supremely confident.

"You are not happy, Rosika," he murmured fondly. "This useless struggle to win in the face of adverse conditions! Why do you allow it to wear you out?"

"I don't know," she said listlessly.

"Then give it up," he said persuasively. "Give up this unfeminine desire to shine in the eyes of the public. What a barren satisfaction even when you succeed. Give it up and rest content to be just what God intended you to be."

"What's that?"

"The most charming woman in the world!"

"Oh, Jacmer!" she said pettishly.

"Your career has enslaved you thus far," he said. "What a pity! What a pity! The time has come now for you to make a bold stroke for freedom. Close up shop here. Go away. Let life have its way with you!"

"But what would Bella do?" she said.

There was no hint of irony in her voice, but I knew it was there. My mistress and I shared these comedies in spirit, though we could not allow our appreciation to appear outwardly.

Touchon looked at me. His glance said: Bella can go to hell for aught I care! But his lips murmured fondly:

"Bella is so desperately clever and efficient she could place herself elsewhere without the slightest difficulty if she wished to do so. Or if she would like a long vacation, too, I should be charmed to place the means at her disposal."

"Thanks, I can pay for my own vacations," I said.

He laughed indulgently. "Bella is incorrigibly independent!" he said lightly. I wish I could give you all the implications of this speech. Bella is a plain woman, his contemptuous glance said; it's a good thing for her that she's able to take care of herself.

"I HAVE just learned that Commodore Barrow's yacht, the Maraquipe, is offered for charter," he presently went on. "The last word in luxury. What would you say to a cruise among the West Indies, Rosika? To sail away on your own ship when the winter sets in, and leave all worries and troubles with the frost and bitter winds behind. The sea down there is not like our gray sea; it lies in pools of liquid cobalt inside the reefs. And the bold mountains springing from the sea are painted with an incredible green. But the nights that is the most wonderful part; the tropic nights are as soft as velvet with tenderer stars than ours.

"One would naturally avoid the routes of the tourist ships," he went on. "There are countless lovely islands that are never visited: St. Martin's, Barbuda, Saba, St. Eustacia. Dream islands! Think of visiting them at your own sweet will in the most perfect of yachts. Of course, it would be scandalously expensive, but what else is money for? One only lives once, and that is my idea of living greatly!"

There was a hypnotic quality in the man's voice; a promise of peace, forgetfulness, infinite luxury. If Mme. Storey had really been the harassed and vacillating woman that he supposed, she must have yielded to it. There was no mention of himself in this Elysium you will notice, but of course he loomed in the picture like a portent.

"What do you say, Rosika?"

"I'll think it over," she murmured.

He took a more peremptory tone. "That's what you always say. That gets you nowhere. The Maraquipe will be snapped up as soon as it is generally known that she is offered. You must decide now—or let me decide for you."

"Don't press me, Jacmer," she said nervously. "Don't press me. I must have time to think."

He lowered his eyes to hide his satisfaction. He was well pleased with the way things were going. "I must press you," he said. "You are merely drifting. And if you are incapable of deciding, I will decide for you."

"Give me a week," she said with a desperate air. "In a week I will let you know."

His eyes blazed on her, full of greedy triumph. "Very well," he said, "a week. Meanwhile I will take an option on the Maraquipe."

She said nothing.

He presently arose to go, feeling, I suppose, that he had better be content with his gain for that day. "How about dining to-night?" he said.

"Not to-night, thanks, Jacmer," said Mme. Storey.

"Have you something on?" he asked sharply.

"No," she said, "I'm just tired. I'm going home to get in something loose, and just as soon as I have swallowed my dinner I'm going to bed."

"That will be the best thing for you," he purred. He took her hand. He did not kiss it nowadays, but pressed it fondly. "I'll trot over some time to-morrow to see how you are."

When he had gone neither Mme. Storey nor I made any reference to what had taken place. What was there to say? We both realized the frightful danger that attended upon the part she was playing, and it would have done no good to confess our fears to each other.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GANGSTER GUESTS.

MME. STOREY'S house on East Sixty-Third Street, to which I have referred so many times, was not a house at all but half a house. It was an apartment on two floors of a small converted dwelling; what the French call a *maisonnette*. Her friend, the famous Mrs. Lysaght occupied the two floors above.

Mme. Storey's apartment is arranged in a convenient and novel fashion. The kitchen is alongside the front door, and has a wicket opening on the entry like the concierge's window in France. The dining room overlooks the back yard which has been landscaped like a little formal garden; the living room is over the dining room, and Mme. Storey's bedroom is in front. The servants of both households sleep on the top floor. Since there was no guest room, a cot had been placed for me in Mme. Storey's room during my stay in the house.

Some anxious planning was involved in getting us out of the house on the night of Mr. Van Benthuysen's dinner. The problem was solved when Grace brought Mme. Storey a key to the front door of the house on Sixty-Second Street, which she had quietly filched from its nail in the hall. The rest was easy. The two servants from that house were invited to sup with our servants, and while they were all enjoying themselves in the kitchen, Mme. Storey and I, having dressed for our parts, quietly slipped out of the back of our house, and over the back fence by the ladders which the girls had left in place. At this season it was perfectly dark at half past six. We entered the kitchen door which they had left unlocked, and ascending to the first story, after having made sure that our key fitted the front door, we blithely let ourselves out, and boarded Crider's cab, which was waiting.

Everybody in New York knows the Van Benthuysen palace. It is a huge brick pile on one of the Avenue's choicest corners with a *porte-cochère* on the side street. It was built in the day when turrets were in fashion, and millionaires' windows were about six feet wide. Thus it looks a little old-fashioned now, but still magnificent. The lofty, pillared hall running through the house and filled in at the back with rare tropical plants, made me sigh with pleasure. In its spaciousness and emptiness it represented real luxury, as distinguished from the spurious sort that anybody can have in great hotels and steamships.

Mr. Van Benthuysen was waiting for us in the library, a colossus in evening dress, with a grin of anticipation lighting his heavy face, and a cigar about

a foot long sticking from between his lips. Basil was already in the house. We immediately went into anxious consultation.

"We should have been here earlier in order to talk things over and rehearse a bit," said Mme. Storey, "but it was impossible to get out before dark. First, how about the servants? That is our greatest danger."

"I have taken measures," said Mr. Van Benthuysen beaming. "The only servants of my own who are in the house are the housekeeper, my valet, and a couple of maids. These will not appear during the evening. They know nothing except that I am entertaining friends at dinner. All the servants you will see have been supplied by the chef who cooked the dinner. It is the famous Alphonse Duprat, and it ought to be good. His men know nothing about my family affairs, of course."

"Then there is yourself," she said, admonishing him affectionately, "this is a huge joke to you, but you will please remember that a tremendous result hangs upon it, and that the least slip of the tongue on your part may ruin me."

"Trust me, my dear," he said serenely, "I have not attended business conferences for forty years without being able to play a part with an open brow and smiling countenance. I always address you as 'my dear.' That will come quite naturally."

"But remember that Bella is not Miss Brickley, but Miss Beekman, Emily Beekman. You know her very well. She is almost an inmate of the house."

"Emily! Emily! Emily!" he chanted, wagging his forefinger at me. "I know you very well."

We had to laugh. His jocularity was good for us all. It helped to ease the strain.

"How about photographs of the real Inez?" asked Mme. Storey.

"All removed," he said.

"We ought to have some photographs of me to put about, but there was not time enough to have them made. Remember," she warned him, "it is admitted that you are a liberal-minded parent, but you must not forget to admonish me if I go too far."

"Shall I send you to bed?" he asked.

"Be serious! Now take me for a stroll through the rooms so that I may be familiar with the plan of my own house."

PROMPTLY at seven the rest of the guests arrived. Through the drawing-room door I had a glimpse of them huddling together in the hall, frankly intimidated. Well, they had reason to be. Van Benthuysen is a name to conjure with in New York. Asa Van Benthuysen looms like a great mythical figure in the minds of all children who have been brought up there.

Presently they were ushered in to the drawing-room where we were waiting; they were still keeping close together as if for mutual protection. There are two drawing-rooms each fifty feet long, and stretching across the avenue front of the house. These are among the most wonderful rooms in the world, on account of the treasures they contain.

Mme. Storey had assumed the character of Inez like another skin. She was clinging to her "father's" arm, looking up in his face with a smile of filial affection. He was just a little taller than she. The millionaire shook hands with his guests.

Even the bold Scarface was a little out of countenance. His proud spirit hated to acknowledge it, consequently he looked savage. The classical furrow was etched on his forehead. The old man looked at him with the frank pleasure of a connoisseur in humanity. "Here is a man!" his eyes seemed to say, "whatever he may be."

Chiglick and Maud Heddle I have already described. Daisy Darling had

been chosen merely because she was a delicious thing to look at. No more need be said about her. Monk Eyster and Cora Hamann were to supply picturesqueness to the party—and they did. I shall let them speak for themselves directly.

Mr. Van Benthuysen's cocktails broke the ice; and still more did the millionaire's friendly grin. His guests were astonished to find him so human and approachable. He beamed on them with a peculiar understanding and sympathy; one might almost have said that he envied them. Thieves and worse they might be, but they were closer to life than he—such was his notion. Mr. Van Benthuysen was a bit of a romanticist. One could see that he had determined to forego all moral considerations and meet these people on the plane of their common humanity. In such an encouraging atmosphere Scarface and his friends blossomed like flowers in the sun.

Dinner was announced and we went straggling across the hall and through the library. Mr. Van Benthuysen led the way with Maud hanging to one arm and Daisy to the other, Chiglick scampering around the group, trying to get a word in the millionaire's ear. Scarface and Inez followed, then Monk Eyster and I with Basil and Cora bringing up the rear. Monk looked more sheepish than wolfish in his hired evening suit. He had not found his tongue yet.

I heard Scarface murmur to Inez as he glanced down the noble hall: "I understand now what a fool I was that first night."

A little twinge of pain moved her lips. He didn't know her well enough to have marked it.

"The big house hasn't got anything to do with it," she said quickly.

"Not the four walls and the roof," he said, "nor all the gimcracks that fill it. It's—it's—" He struggled to find expression. "It's the things you feel here and can't give a name to."

Inez said nothing.

"Your father is a better man than me," he said grudgingly. This was a tremendous admission from the conceited Scarface. "He has used them and mastered them," he said bitterly, "and I can only tell them to go to hell. They'll soon get me."

"Oh, no!" murmured Inez with a catch in her breath. There was no acting about this.

In the dining room we were seated at a round table, small enough to permit of general conversation. A butler officiated at the sideboard, and three footmen served. I could see Scarface taking everything in from the corners of his eyes with an expression of bitter appreciation. This, he seemed to be saying, is the real thing! Mr. Van Benthuysen and Inez faced each other across the board with affectionate smiles. It was "daughter" from him, and "dad" from her. Good comedy. Inez had Scarface on her right, Basil on her left; while the old man was flanked by the two pretty girls. Next to Daisy Darling came Chiglick, then myself, with Scarface on my left. Cora Hamann and Monk were across the table from me.

MR. VAN BENTHUYSEN revealed in his jocular comment that he had been told all about the Cobra Club.

"Why don't you belong, sir?" asked Scarface.

"Good God!" cried the millionaire in mock horror. "I'm a bank clerk. If I were seen in such a place I'd lose my job!"

The conversation soon became entirely unconstrained. I am sure that elegant room had never heard the like, nor ever will again. The servants, of course, had been instructed to fill the glasses as quickly as they were emptied. This was a new experience for most of the guests, and some of them, I fancy, tried to see how far the game could be carried. But the sound and

mellow wines did them no harm. The worst that could be said was that they became a little silly.

Inez's eyes were very bright. She contrived to simulate the look of utter irresponsibility that is characteristic of the very young nowadays. One would have said there was not a care in her cropped blond head. It was her note to be a little shocking.

"Inez, you've had enough wine," said Mr. Van Benthuysen.

"Oh, don't be tiresome, dad."

"If you are not careful, I will send you to bed, young woman."

"Then the party will have to go to bed with me."

"Inez, behave!"

Oh, excellent comedy! While she appeared utterly giddy, she kept the reins of the conversation in her own hands. It was she who brought out the foibles of the guests in order to amuse the old man.

"Scarface, tell dad how you and your pal used to correspond on the adding machine," she would say. Or, "Chiglick, tell about that time when you locked the cashier of the bank in his vault, and then they had to employ you to blow the vault open, because the president had forgotten the combination."

It was Chiglick, I think, who made the hit of the evening, spitting his amazing tales out of the corner of his mouth with little expression. But Monk and Cora got the biggest laugh.

Monk Eyster was one of the most desperate crooks New York ever produced. All the world knows his history. But by this time he had begun to turn soft; as Chiglick put it, he was living on his rep, and preferred telling of his past exploits to performing new ones. The job at the Cobra Club satisfied him very well. Cora Hamann's only claim to distinction was that she had been tried three times for her life, and had finally won acquittal. She was such an utter fool, she was as funny as a comic opera.

Cora was a blonde who had been handsome in a common way, but she had no instinct for dress—used to put on everything but the kitchen stove, Chiglick said. Her trials had created a tremendous sensation in their day, and she still looked upon herself as the heroine of the hour. Monk and Cora were continually at loggerheads respecting the relative importance of their trials.

"When I took the stand at my third trial," said Cora, "there wasn't a dry eye in the court room. The papers said the fluttering of the handkerchiefs was like a snowstorm."

"Somebody must 'a' peeled a onion," muttered Chiglick in my ear.

"Even the reporters cried," Cora went on. "As one of them put it, their ink was mixed with tears."

"Aah!" said Monk. "Reporters always writes with pencils."

"Not at *my* trial," said Cora with a superior smile.

Old Mr. Van Benthuysen's fat sides shook with silent laughter.

"There were forty-nine reporters at my third trial," said Cora proudly. "It was the largest number ever gathered in a court room."

"Come off," said Monk, "there were fifty-three at mine, besides the special writers who couldn't get inside the rail."

"How do you know there were that many?" asked Cora.

"I counted 'em. Didn't have nothin' else to do all day."

"My trial created more excitement than any which had ever been held," said Cora. "The papers said so."

"They said that about mine, too," said Monk. "And mine come after yours!"

"Every morning before court I held a perfect reception in the Tombs," said Cora. "Clergymen and clubwomen and artistes and litterateurs. Only people of influence were allowed in."

"You can have your clergymen," said Monk grinning. "You should 'a'

seen the pretty girls that come to my cell. And the letters I got!"

"Mash notes!" said Cora scornfully. "I got plenty of those, too. Thousands. I tossed them aside unread."

"Ain't you regretted it since?" asked Monk slyly.

Cora disdained to answer. "All over the country the people remained in the streets throughout the night waiting for the verdict," she went on.

"While the jury slep'!" put in Monk.

"No! No!" said Cora. "They were deliberating throughout the long watches of the night with drawn faces and sleepless eyes. Life and death were in the balance. The scenes in the court room, when the verdict was brought in, beggared all description. There was not a dry eye—"

"Wait a minute, Cora," interrupted Chiglick with pretended concern. "You said that before. You mean, 'every eye was wet.'"

"Every eye was wet," Cora repeated seriously. The rest of the story was lost in our laughter. Cora looked surprised, and that made us laugh afresh.

It was noticeable that neither Monk nor Cora ever referred in any way to the circumstances which had occasioned these trials.

JUST before we left the table the laugh was turned against Chiglick. Mr. Van Benthuysen had made a complete conquest of the little gangster. Chiglick's bright, inhuman eyes scarcely ever left the banker's face. He leaned forward in front of Daisy, saying hoarsely:

"Chief, if you ever got any lil job you want done, just call on me."

"A job?" said Mr. Van Benthuysen agreeably. "What sort of job, Chiglick?"

"Anythin' a-tall! Anythin' a-tall!" said Chiglick very earnestly. "That's the point."

Still Mr. Van Benthuysen did not comprehend. "You want me to give you a job?" he said. "In my office?"

A most comical look of horror overspread Chiglick's face. "Oh, Gawd, chief, not workin'!" he cried.

Laughter engulfed us again.

After dinner the guests were conducted on a tour of the house. But Mr. Van Benthuysen soon grew tired of this. Made him feel like the conductor of a sight-seeing bus, he said, and sent them away to explore on their own account. When they'd had enough they were to come back to the library for drinks and smokes. The group broke up and the different parts wandered about at their own sweet will.

How quaint it was to come upon Cora and Monk who, having made up their differences, were seriously discussing the artistic merits of the Cezannes, the Renoirs, and the Gaugins in the picture gallery! Or to see Chiglick in the library with a Benvenuto Cellini cup, the chief treasure in all the house in his hands, following the delicate chasing with his nervous, cigarette-stained fingers—light fingers if there ever were any.

Mr. Van Benthuysen did not appear to be alarmed. He merely explained to Chiglick that the gold in the little cup was worth perhaps a couple of hundred dollars, whereas the workmanship rendered its value beyond all computation. Chiglick put it down with an awed air. As a matter of fact, not the smallest among Mr. Van Benthuysen's treasures was discovered to be missing next day.

In crossing the hall I caught a glimpse of Inez and Scarface seated half hidden under the bank of greenery at the end. They did not see me. From their serious faces it was evident that something important was going on.

I scarcely knew what to do. From the very first of this case, my mistress had enjoined that I was to be present at all interviews, in order, I suppose, that I might be able to testify if required. Perhaps she desired me to lis-

ten now, and had had no opportunity to warn me. I decided to eavesdrop. If it was something I was not supposed to hear, I could always hold my tongue about it. I am good at that.

By going down the side of the hall out of range of their vision, and approaching from the other side of the greenery, it was quite easy to get close enough to hear. Inez and Scarface were seated on the base of a little marble fountain among the greenery, leaning forward with elbows on knees. The fountain was backed with great ferns which hid me completely.

As I came within hearing Inez was saying: "But why? Why? As long as my father is willing?"

Scarface answered: "I hate to see you there among the gamblers and the shady women and the crooks. You are too good for it. What good does it do you, when you have all this? This suits you."

"I want to see life," she said.

"That's childish," he said scornfully. "Like playing in the mud."

"I won't promise not to come again," she said.

"Oh, you have every right to come," he said bitterly. "We have taken your fee."

"That isn't it," she said. "The fee is nothing. But I have a right to my freedom as well as you—to go where I choose, and see what I choose."

"Free!" he said with a bitter laugh. "Me? That's all you know. Your father is the only free man," he went on. "He has money; that is freedom."

"He doesn't think so."

"Oh, well, nobody is satisfied," he said.

A silence followed.

"THERE'S another reason I don't want you to come again," he burst out in a low, passionate voice. "I don't want to see you any more!"

"Oh!" she interjected in a hurt voice.

"The fact is, I can't stand it! There is nothing in this pal business. Like offering a hungry man husks. And anything else is, as you said, impossible. I don't want to see you any more!" he cried. "It breaks me all up. It spoils my aim. I don't know where I am."

"It's your life that you are dissatisfied with," she said. "Why not change it?"

"What's the alternative?" he asked bitterly. "I suppose your father would give me a job if I asked him. Stool warmer. No! I've had a taste of it. I must play a bigger part than that, straight or crooked. No! I've chosen my line, and I'll stick to it. You have unsettled me for the moment, but at heart I am still myself. I can't change my spots."

Another silence.

"Inez," he said in a tender voice, "I want to tell you all about myself; to fill in the places I left blank the other night."

"No, no!" she said sharply. "Not if it is dangerous to you."

"But that's the very reason," he said. "I would like to feel that my life was in your hands. There's a curious satisfaction in it."

"No! I don't want to hear it."

"But I'm going to tell you. Listen. The man I work for is known to me as Mr. Caspar. That's not his real name, of course. I don't know what his main graft is, because I was never employed on it. That was Fay's job. Francis Fay. That recalls something to you, eh? The Storey murder case. And my pal's name was Arthur Sims. Everybody called him Blondy.

"Get this straight. Mme. Storey is after my boss. It's a fight to a finish. I am helping him with it. He means to crush the woman and drive her out of business, or—" He paused significantly.

"Oh, Scarface, you wouldn't—" Inez's firm voice faltered.

"Why wouldn't I?"

"A woman?"

"She plays a man's part," he said harshly. "She deserves to be treated as a man. She's a detective; her business is to send crooks to prison. Do you know what that means? I do; I've been there. I'm a crook, and she's my enemy. I will destroy her if I get a chance."

There was another silence. I was petrified with terror at what I had heard. I could not guess what my mistress's feelings might be. It was Scarface himself who furnished a clew.

"That makes you turn from me," he said somberly. "That's all right; I expected it. This romantic attitude that you and your father have about crooks is comic. You need to get your eyes opened. And you and I need to keep away from each other."

Another silence, then evidently she made a move to get up, for he said in a sharp whisper:

"Ah! Don't go. Five minutes more. Let me tell you the rest."

She protested.

"I *must* tell you. The first round in this fight went to Mme. Storey, for she tempted Fay to betray his master. But the boss found it out in the nick of time, and sent Blondy to Mme. Storey's office to shoot Fay when he appeared there.

"The boss never takes any chances. He had paid the hall boy, where Fay lived, to report to him all the calls that Fay sent and received. Blondy, as he left the office, wrote me a note on the adding machine, telling me what his orders were. It was a kind of good-by, because he suspected he might get taken. The get-away was not clear. But he was dead game.

"He should not have been in this business at all; he wasn't hard like me. He went to Mme. Storey's office, and he shot Fay. But as ill luck would have it, that damned Touchon happened to be there with a gun in his pocket, and he shot my pal. I shall get him later. I have promised it to myself.

"Mme. Storey thought she had my boss then, but he was too clever for her. He sent me to Sing Sing disguised as a woman to talk to Barney Craigin, the convicted murderer, and to persude him to write a confession that he had hired Fay and Blondy to get Mme. Storey.

"Craigin had his own reasons for bearing her a grudge, you see. The way it worked out was all in the papers. Cost my boss fifty thousand dollars to support Mrs. Craigin for life. But it cleared up the whole matter with the police, and tied Mme. Storey up in knots. She's helpless. I'm waiting now for his next move against her. In all the world only you and I and the boss know the truth about this matter."

"I wish you hadn't told me!" she murmured. "I wish you hadn't told me!"

"Inez," he said in a low, moved voice, "if this is the last time I'm going to see you—" he spoke so low I could catch no more; but I didn't want to hear it. My cheeks were burning.

This was not a matter of any public concern. I softly stole away from my hiding place.

THE party broke up early because the guests had to be on hand for the after-theater rush at the Cobra Club. They all, except Scarface, begged Inez to accompany them down there, but she refused. After they had driven away, Mr. Van Benthuysen voted the evening a complete success as far as he was concerned. He was still chuckling at his recollections.

"Haven't enjoyed myself so much in years," he said. "I hope you gained your object by it."

"I won Scarface's complete confidence," Mme. Storey said; but she looked anything but triumphant.

We got away as soon as we could. When we were alone together I told

my mistress how much I had overheard.

"I didn't know whether or not you wished me to listen," I said.

"It doesn't matter," she said with a shrug.

"With Basil Thorne's evidence of the relations between Touchon and Fay, taken with these disclosures of Scarface," I said eagerly, "you have a pretty complete case."

"I can't use what Scarface told me," she said with a painful gesture. "Not after the way I got it."

CHAPTER XXIX.

BATTLE OF WILLS.

SHORTLY after we had arrived at the office next morning, Jacmer Touchon came in. At a glance he looked much the same as usual, nevertheless my instincts immediately took alarm. There was the hint of a strain in his grin; his warm complexion had a slightly mottled aspect, such as might have been due to violent emotion—rage or fear. My heart failed me. Had anything betrayed us to him?

"Well, Bella," he said with that offensive grin fixed in his face. "Did you have a nice quiet night?"

By that I knew he had discovered something. "Perfect!" I said. "I feel like a new woman!"

He laughed unpleasantly. "Is Rosika in her room?" he asked.

"Go right in," I said. Mme. Storey, having officially had a full night's rest, would not require to lie down this morning.

I followed him in. My mistress was seated at her big table smoking, holding her head on one side to keep the smoke out of her eyes. She was reading her mail.

"Morning, Jacmer," she said. "Sit down."

By a hint of wariness that appeared in her eyes I knew that she saw the same thing I had.

The hand with which he helped himself to a cigarette trembled slightly. But what a marvelous hold he had upon himself. The man must have been a seething furnace inside. What had happened? I cast back over our movements the night before for some explanation. Certainly we had not been followed to Mr. Van Benthuysen's or back again. I could have sworn to it.

"You feel better this morning?" he asked politely.

"Much."

"Ah!" He could not quite hide the sneer. "I have taken an option on the Maraquipe," he went on.

"That's nice," she said noncommittally.

His eyes leaped up. "Then you have decided to come?"

"I have decided nothing," she said. "You gave me a week."

"Then why is it 'nice'?"

"Oh, merely because you seem to wish to go."

"But you know this is all planned for you."

"Please, Jacmer, not all over again," she said. "In a week—"

"But you seemed so much stronger after your rest," he said with a hateful smile.

Mme. Storey did not reply. She had an extraordinarily difficult part to play. If the man had really discovered anything, it was not only useless, it was ridiculous to try to keep up further pretenses. Finally she asked with a level look:

"What is the matter, Jacmer? You are changed since yesterday."

He leaned a little toward her. I could not see into his face, but I knew what that slight thrust forward meant. It was habitual with him. He was uncovering the full blaze of his extraordinary eyes on her. She quickly lowered her eyes. Nothing was said. Presently he got up and walked a few paces toward the fireplace. He affected to study a piece of old faience that hung there. This intimated that the man was

in a shocking state of uncertainty. The suggestion rejoiced my very soul.

He came back and faced me with a hard, contemptuous stare. "Bella," he said, "I have private matters to talk over with Mme. Storey. Please leave the room."

My heart leaped into my throat. I looked at my mistress. She nodded slightly. Her face was pale and composed. She had decided not to stoop to any further pretenses with Touchon. I walked out of the room in a turmoil of emotions: terror, anxiety for her—and relief. Yes, I confess I was coward enough to be glad my presence was not required at that scene.

I closed the door after me, and hastily slipped on the headpiece of the dictaphone. Mme. Storey, I knew, would turn it on if she wished me to hear what transpired. How chagrined I should have felt if she had not turned it on. But she did. I immediately heard Touchon's voice over the wire. The dictaphone instrument is affixed to the under side of my desk where it cannot possible be seen unless you were to get down on hands and knees. The transmitter is sunk under the top of Mme. Storey's table.

All the while I was threshing my brains to discover what could have aroused his suspicions. As a matter of fact, we never did learn for certain how much he knew. The probable explanation was that he had questioned Mme. Storey's intention of going to bed immediately after dinner, and had sent one of his men into her house to reconnoiter, and so had discovered our absence; for, as we were presently to learn, Touchon possessed a key to Mme. Storey's house.

AFTER some words of no particular moment had passed between them, I heard Touchon say in a new voice: "Rosika, I have come for you."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked quickly.

"Anything you like," he answered. "Marriage? It would seem as if two people like you and I could afford to smile at the conventions, nevertheless, if marriage means anything to you, I am agreeable."

Safely hidden in my own room though I was, his boldness affected me so strongly that I had difficulty in getting my breath.

"I should not insist on marriage, Jacmer," Mme. Storey replied. Even over the wire I could distinguish the dryness of her tone.

"Good!" he said. "Then get your hat, and let's go. I'm sick of this shilly-shallying. I intend to cut you off with one stroke from all your entanglements. You belong to me now. Bella can close up here after you have gone."

"But where are we going?"

"Anywhere you like. Let's go and take a look at the Maraquipe. She's ready for sea. Let's live aboard her. Nowhere else could we find such privacy."

"I am not going with you," she said in an ordinary voice.

"You have gone too far!" he cried with a confident laugh. "You can't draw back now. You're mine, Rosika, mine!"

"By what right?" she asked.

"Anything you like," he said carelessly. "The right of my will!"

There was a brief silence. I could picture how his terrible eyes were seeking to command her. But she must have smiled. A smile, of course, instantly rendered his pretensions ridiculous. The sight of it put him in such a fury that his voice became almost inarticulate.

"So! So! You have changed, too, since yesterday, eh? All those little falterings and hesitations and appealing glances, just to lead me on, eh? You have been fooling me!"

"Well, what did you expect?" she asked. And then I am certain she smiled.

"Just the same you are mine!" he

cried. "With all your cleverness you are only a woman and I'm a man. You cannot resist me! Look at me! Look at me!"

"You are being ridiculous now," she said.

"Look at me!" he repeated furiously. "I command you! Look at me and tell me what you see!"

"Very well," she said crisply. "I see that you are not nearly so sure of yourself as you pretend to be. Something has happened which has forced your hand."

"Where did you spend last evening?" he demanded.

"That is my affair."

"I demand an answer."

"You may continue to do so."

My mind was a good bit relieved by this. He did not know where we had been. Touchon was rapidly becoming demoralized by passion.

"By God, Rosika, you can't defy me like this!" he cried. "No woman, nor man either, ever defied me and got away with it! You had better yield while you can. With me, a dazzling future lies before you. Against me, oblivion! My will tolerates no opposition. What opposes me I destroy. Do you understand? I destroy it!"

"You have shown me what you can do," she said, "and I am not impressed."

"By God! I'll have you anyway," he cried in a changed voice.

"Keep away from me!" she said sharply.

"I'll have you!"

"Keep back!"

I FLUNG the headpiece on the desk and banged the door open. Though I was half paralyzed with fear, I had some dim notion of saving my mistress. However, she was well able to take care of herself. The open door surprised a dramatic tableau. Mme. Storey had risen, and pulled out the drawer of her table.

Her right hand lay in the drawer, and the muzzle of her gun was sticking over the edge of the table in Touchon's direction. Touchon hung half over the table, his hands up and flexed, just as he had reached over to seize my mistress. He was staring at the muzzle of the gun, just as if a venomous snake had raised its head in the drawer.

At the sound of the door, Mme. Storey let the gun drop and, leaning against the drawer, closed it. Touchon's arms fell. He struggled to recover his countenance.

"Leave the room!" he said to me furiously.

"You may stay, Bella," my mistress said coolly. "Dr. Touchon has finished what he had to say."

There was a silence. For the last time his terrible eyes sought to break down her resistance. On this occasion she fairly stared him out. His face turned black with rage, and the veins stood out startlingly on his forehead. He started to speak, but checked himself, realizing, I suppose, the danger of saying something that might ruin him. The man looked as if he were about to burst with venom. Casting a truly murderous glance on my mistress—in which I was included—he turned and ran from the room, shaking his arms in a strange paroxysm of rage.

At the slam of the outer door my mistress experienced a sort of collapse. Dropping in her chair, she covered her face with her hands. Strong shudders went through her frame. After all, one does not overcome a Jacmer Touchon every day.

"What a beast! What a beast!" she murmured.

I ran to her and put my arms around her, though I was no better off than she. We trembled together.

"I couldn't stave it off any longer," she said. "Now we must look for the worst."

"Telephone for Crider, for Basil Thorne," I said. "You must have protection here."

The urgency of my fears recalled her to herself. She laughed, albeit somewhat shakily. "Oh, Touchon won't do anything crude," she said. "He will always protect his own skin. The fact that he lost his head this morning will make him even more prudent. He must have time to mature and execute his plot. We still have a few more hours to live, my Bella."

"Don't joke about it," I said with a shiver.

"I must get in touch with Scarface before he does," she said.

"But if Touchon knows now that we are in the habit of stealing out of the house, how can we get down there?" I said.

"There are always ways to circumvent spies," she said serenely. "Half past six is his usual hour for calling up Scarface," she went on, "but, of course, he may be doing it now." She reached for the phone and gave the Cobra Club number.

There was no answer.

"Well, if we can't get them, Touchon can't," she said cheerfully.

We called up at half hour intervals during the day, always with the same result. No answer. Finally about two o'clock we heard Maud Heddle's voice on the wire. I was listening in.

"This is Inez," said my mistress. "Is Scarface there?"

"Hello, Inez!" said Maud. There was no longer any resentment there. "He hasn't come downstairs yet."

"Perhaps he won't mind being waked up. It's quite important."

"Oh, it's time he was up," said Maud. "I'll send for him."

In a few minutes we heard Scarface's lazy, deep voice. "'Lo, Inez!" Let him repudiate her all he liked, the voice was warm and eager. I could picture the handsome tousled black head at the phone.

"Scarface," she said, "I want to come down there."

"Well, you know what I said about that," he growled.

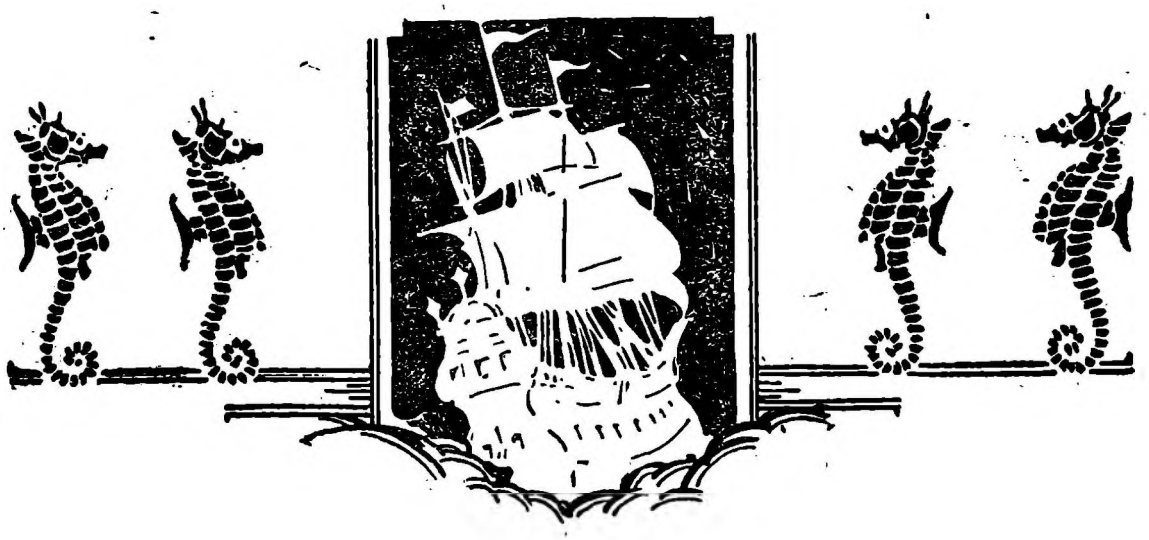
"But this is different. I don't want to come when the crowd is there. I want to come early when there is nobody, so I can talk to you."

There was a silence. One could almost feel the poor lad struggling with himself. There could be but one issue to such a struggle. "Well, all right," he said. "When? Before dinner?"

"As soon as it is dark. That will be a few minutes after six. Will you have Chiglick waiting for me in the lobby of the Elite Theater?"

"Righto."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



" What about the other fellow in there?" Bill growled, pointing toward the open door

Caught !

Bill and his pal drop off in a deserted station in the sagebrush—and find it more exciting than a Mexican revolution

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

A TINY station surmounted by an immense water tank. A dusty footpath leading from the station to a one-story shack. On every side the dreary monotony of the desert with its clumps of sagebrush.

Bill and I stood on the sand-coated platform and gazed dismally at the unalluring panorama. We had rolled out of the empty freight car after a twenty-four-hour stretch rashly thinking that because the train had stopped, it must have arrived somewhere.

" Ain't it a bird of a hole?" groaned Bill. " What chance is there for a couple of drifters to pick up a feed and lodging here?"

" None. None at all," I conceded lugubriously.

" What do—" He paused abruptly as a gunshot rang out. It came from the direction of the one-story shack at the other end of the path. From the doorway, as we watched, reeled a black-bearded man. He was hatless and coatless. A shabby gray shirt, collarless, and open at the neck, was tucked into his belted brown corduroy trousers, and they in turn were tucked into black leather puttees. As the black-whiskered giant emerged from the doorway, both arms were outspread as though in appeal.

For a brief second he reeled erratically under the blazing sun, and then collapsed in a grotesque heap in the path. A little cloud of dust arose lazily from around the heap.

The dust barely had settled when there appeared in the doorway from which he had emerged, another man, similarly garbed, with a pistol in his hand. He gazed for an instant at the silent huddled figure in the path, and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. Then he glared venomously toward the station, turned quickly, and disappeared back into the building. The pine door slammed shut behind him.

Bill and I stood there speechless with horror, gazing at the crumpled heap in the path. Bill turned and looked longingly down the track toward where the caboose at the end of the freight train had disappeared over the horizon.

"I'm homesick already," he ejaculated. "Life in a quiet little city like Chicago is good enough for me."

"These sagebrush towns are rough places," I remarked.

"It seems so," Bill agreed. "Wonder where the constable is?"

We stumbled over each other in our haste to get out of sight—and out of range—inside the station. A telegraph instrument was ticking lazily back of an iron-grated partition, but there were no other signs of life.

"What 'll we do?" For once Bill was nonplused.

"We'd better call the coroner," I ventured, thinking of the dusty, blood-soaked bundle of clothes in front of the shack.

"Sure, call the coroner, the chief of police, the reserves and squads of newspapermen and photographers," said Bill sarcastically. "Call 'em—but how?"

There was no telephone in the station, and the clatter of the telegraph was about as intelligible to us as the directions for knitting a baby's sweater.

"YOU know, there is somebody still out in that shack," I jerked my thumb in the general direction of the scene of the shooting.

"I only hope he stays—"

Bill paused. There had been the muffled sound of another shot. It seemed to come from the shack.

There was no other sound. Just dead, appalling silence.

Somewhere beyond the horizon there probably were ranch houses; but which horizon? Bill and I stood gazing helplessly at each other. The blazing sun was beating down unmercifully on the tin roof of the station, and it was hotter than the casting room of an old-time brass mill.

"We've got to do something," declared Bill finally. He peered cautiously out of the station window toward the shack. There were no signs of movement. The body still lay sprawled in the path.

"That fellow's a goner, all right," said Bill. "He hasn't moved since he fell. He had a gun, and it's lying close to the body. Maybe we can get hold of it before somebody else starts something." A pair of old drifters like Bill and me, always travel unarmed.

Just outside the station door was an iron can labeled "Rubbish." Bill cautiously stuck out his hand and dragged this can into the doorway. He waited a minute for something to happen. But there was only a tense silence; no sound came from the shack. Then Bill pushed the can over on its side.

"I'm going to get that gun," he explained briefly. There are times when Bill has his nerve right with him.

Rolling the can ahead of him as a shield, he crawled down the path and succeeded in getting the gun. Then pulling the can after him, he progressed backward to the shelter of the station.

"Now that you have got it, what 'll you do with it?" I demanded as we examined the blue steel automatic.

Bill shrugged his shoulders.

"Here's hoping we don't have to do anything with it," he said. "But at any rate we're prepared. Sooner or later a train 'll come through."

"It 'll come through, all right," I conceded; "come through at sixty

miles an hour. Maybe we'd better set the semaphore at danger." I indicated the lever just inside the telegrapher's railing. Bill promptly strode over and pulled it to the "Stop" notch.

Then, keeping watch of the shack from the friendly shelter of the station, we sat down to wait for a train.

We tried to dope out the mystery, but without much success. One of the two gray-shirted men undoubtedly was, or had been the telegrapher. But why the shooting? The man in the path was dead. There was no question as to that. But what of the man who had done the shooting and gone back into the shack. Was he, too, dead? If so, had he killed himself in there?

Suddenly Bill grabbed my arm and pointed excitedly toward the horizon. A dark figure was approaching. It was a horseman, coming at a gallop. In view of the happenings which already had greeted our arrival we restrained our first impulse to rush out and meet this newcomer.

The horseman was another gray-shirted individual, and a sombrero shaded his features. His pony was flecked with foam.

He had started reining up as he came abreast of the shack. An instant later he discovered the body in the path. He pulled up the horse so suddenly that it reared almost upright. Like a flash the man dismounted, and without stopping to investigate, leaped back of the shack, leaving the horse pawing and snorting beside the path.

"That guy acts suspicious," whispered Bill hoarsely. "He's scared of something."

"I don't blame him," I ventured.

Fearing that the new arrival might see us before we wanted to be seen, we drew back and waited.

BILL finally peeped out again. He reported that the stranger had emerged from back of the shack and with drawn gun in his hand was creeping toward the body.

Bill withdrew his head and again we waited.

It was my turn to look out next. The stranger was nowhere in sight. His pony was standing dejectedly in the sand. The body in the path had not been disturbed. The door of the shack was open.

"He's gone into the shack," I reported to Bill in a whisper.

But Bill was listening for something else.

"Listen!" he hissed.

I didn't hear anything.

"It's a train," he whispered exultantly. "I heard it whistle away off in the distance."

It was Bill's turn to look out. He raised his head to the window and gave an ejaculation of surprise.

Forgetting caution I looked out also.

The stranger was standing in the open doorway of the shack, his hands raised above his head! At his feet lay his gun. He was facing the station.

"This is the goldingest burg I ever was in, and I've been in nearly every one on the continent," declared Bill.

There was nobody in the station with us, of that we were certain. "Maybe there's a guy up on the roof that's got the drop on him," ventured Bill. The stranger seemed to be gazing upward toward the semaphore.

We waited for somebody to shoot, but there was no shot.

"Come on, you birds in there; I surrender!" The hoarse shout came from the stranger; a Colt was lying at his feet.

"I guess he means us!" I pointed out in bewilderment. "We better do something before he changes his mind." Why anybody should be volunteering to surrender to a pair of old drifters like us was a question beyond me.

BILL sprang to his feet and with gun pointed toward the stranger led the way out of the station.

"Keep your hands up!" Bill commanded the man, as we proceeded down

the path, gingerly skirting the body lying there. "Pick up the gun, Jim," he directed. And I lost no time doing so. If any guns were to be in evidence I preferred that Bill and I handle them.

"I thought that chicken-hearted rat would squeal," growled the stranger, leering toward the body in the path. "He got his medicine, though, the dirty skunk!" The bloodthirsty venom in his voice made me squirm uncomfortably, as our unexpected prisoner continued:

"I told Gus he'd squeal, but Gus, poor fool, wouldn't believe me. I suppose you flatfeet will get a big blurb in the papers about your wonderful detective work and all that. A lotta bunk!" The stranger spat scornfully into the sand.

Bill and I were carefully noncommittal. We didn't know what he was talking about, so there was nothing for us to say. The train had whistled again. The engineer probably had caught sight of the semaphore and was slowing down.

"How about the other fellow in there?" Bill pointed toward the open door of the shack.

"Dead!" snapped our captive. "Just like the poor fool to shoot himself. There's the note he left for me. Take it for evidence—I don't want any of you dicks trying to pin a murder charge on me." He pointed derisively to a sheet of paper lying on the floor just inside the doorway.

I picked it up, while Bill continued to keep our man covered.

There was a hastily penciled scrawl:

JOE:

I guess you were right. Two bulls dropped off the freight. The game is up, but I got the dirty squealer. Good-by.

GUS.

"See?" The stranger spat derisively again. "If you ever try to pull off a holdup, don't invite no measly station agent to go in with you on it. He'll squeal surer'n blazes. That's what I told Gus, but he wouldn't believe me until he saw you two cops drop off that freight. Then he knew right away that Red had squealed." Joe frowned grimly. "The coin we took off the limited at Pomoka is inside the shack. We had our get-away all fixed up airtight. But you got me. I even left my damned horse out in front where you'd have the drop on me if I went after it." He spread his arms in a gesture of despair.

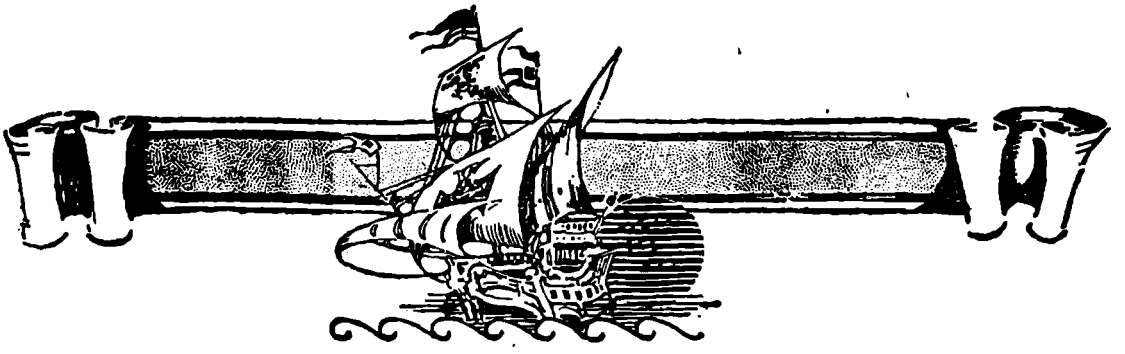
"Keep your hands up!" snapped Bill calmly.

The stranger sullenly obeyed. The train had stopped and members of the crew were hurrying toward us.

"I don't mind you cops grabbing all the credit you can," growled our prisoner. "But don't give that dirty squealer any credit."

"Maybe he doesn't deserve any," conceded Bill. "We'll give it to Lady Luck."

THE END.



"Well," came a sharp, accusing voice, "is he dead enough to suit yeh?"

The Mystery of Ball Bar Ranch

A deadly conflict of passions shakes the peaceful mountain country and hurries the mysterious tangle of events to a sudden and thrilling climax for Ben Camp and Justine

By ARTHUR PRESTON HANKINS

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

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JUSTINE DAVANT, niece of the eccentric Foster Ballard and his sister Aradne, of Ball Bar Ranch, high in the San Anselmo Mountains, is startled when her uncle announces he is going to be murdered in three weeks, and intends to have a funeral first, so he can enjoy it. At the "funeral" his will is read, giving her the ranch—provided she marries Lambert Abbie, the foreman, within a year.

She likes Bert, but considers that he is hardly suitable for her.

Ben Camp, a naturalist, rents Faraway Cabin, a deserted cow camp on the edge of the ranch, in order to photograph night-prowling animals with flash light "traps." Justine is interested in his work—and him—and is as delighted as he over his first catch, a huge grizzly; "Old Ephraim," as the pioneers called them. They agree that he should not divulge his occupation,

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or his discovery, for fear the cowboys would hunt down the meat-hungry bear before Ben could get more pictures of it.

They start to rebuild a trail across the rubble slide near the lake—a great, inexhaustible supply of great and small roundish stones that compose an entire mountainside, and discover a rusted cannon ball—a clew to the location of an old battleground where a treasure-laden party of Spanish colonists had been wiped out by Indians. Uncle Foster and others had searched for the treasure for years. They find that they are being spied on by Giles Rebble, Foster's cousin and enemy, and later by Giles's cousin Carey Backus.

Bert Abbie tries to cross the rubble slide to reach Ben and Justine, and is nearly killed in an avalanche; but, escaping, he arrives with the news that Uncle Foster has disappeared and his horse returned to the ranch with blood on the saddle and a .45 bullet embedded in the cantle!

In the search they find a cave, in which are bones of a skeleton—for coyotes strip a body quickly—and the rags of Uncle Foster's clothing, but no skull! Ben examines the bones carefully, then they are returned and buried in the coffin used in the premature, but seemingly justified, funeral.

Ben returns to the cabin; but apparently some one—or something—is trying to scare him away, for on successive nights a skull appears at his window, or his door is pushed mysteriously open—and he can find no person or tracks whatever.

One night Giles Rebble drops in, claiming just to have heard of Foster's death. Ben is not inclined to believe Rebble could have killed Foster, although he would have had barely time to get from the probable scene of the murder to Faraway, when Ben had seen him, but Carey Backus didn't show up till later.

While Giles is in the cabin Justine rides up in great excitement, with the word that Bert Abbie has inflamed the Ball Bar punchers to attack the Hazy Valley cousins for killing Uncle Foster. Bert and the cowboys are close on her heels; and Bert, seeing her horse, tells his men to ride on. He jumps into the cabin, snarling that Justine and her "lover" can do nothing to save Rebble and Backus—and then is confronted by Giles Rebble, the expert gunman himself!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GUNMAN.

JUSTINE screamed shrilly. She had not seen Giles Rebble till now.

"Mr. Lambert Abbie, I believe," said Rebble in a stiff, cracked voice.

Bert Abbie drew his jaw up in place, and his eyes now gleamed through narrow slits.

"Please take note, Mr. Abbie," Rebble went on carefully, "that I coulda bored you through th' back jest now, and you'd never known who shot you. Such a murderer as you claim I am woulda done jest that. Besides, here are two witnesses to give testimony that you threatened my life. I'd have been justified in blastin' your yellow backbone like the filthy thing you are. But us fellas over in Hazy Valley ain't cowards, Mr. Abbie. We give a man his chance. You got yours now. What're yeh gonta do?"

Ben Camp, rooted to the spot, saw the Adam's apple in Bert Abbie's throat leap painfully.

"Miss Justine," came Rebble's voice again, "step a little to one side, please. This yellow guy may find his courage in a little, and you're pretty near in line."

Justine, still holding a hand to her aching side, stepped back noiselessly, her dark eyes wide with terror.

"Swaller yer Adam's apple a few more times, Bert," Rebble taunted. "Maybe yeh c'n cough up somethin' that tastes like sand. Yer innards are

wrigglin', eh? I'll admit you musta been surprised; but you've had time to git over it by now. What's it to be, old-timer? She's an even break!"

Abbie continued to gulp, and the fascinated naturalist noticed that the hands hanging at his sides were trembling violently.

"Aw, you'll never dive for it in a thousan' years!" Giles Rebble jeered. "And you was so keen on smokin' me up a minute back." He spat disgustedly. "D'yeh know what I think, Abbie? I think you shot Uncle Foster Ballard, and shot 'im in th' back at that. I heard all about that funny funeral, and th' provisions o' th' will. Yeh, jest thought it was a likely time for yeh to get yours and throw suspicion on th' Hazy Valley outfit, didn't yeh? Well, I'm callin' yer bluff fer my cousin and me. Le's see who c'n git his out first, Bert!"

The Ball Bar foreman made no move. There was in his eyes the terror of a man who faces death and has no stomach for the sight.

"And, so long's you're polite enough to let me do all th' talkin', I'll tell you somethin' more: *You* never meant to ride to Hazy Valley to-night to help git us boys. You made Miss Justine's stoppin' here an excuse to keep outa th' racket. You got yer men all lickered up and their hearts set on this thing, and got 'em started. But you was gonta have a nice little alibi. You knew they wouldn't wait fer you, once they got us fellas where they wanted us. Come on now. I've waited long enough. I'm goin' fer my cannon, Abbie. Better join th' parade!"

"NO!" yelled Abbie as Rebble's hand moved up and settled on the butt of his right-hand gun. "Fer God's sake, Rebble, *no!* I can't draw with yeh! Yeh're too quick fer me! I'm whipped. I give up."

"I don't want yeh to give up," said Rebble patiently. "I want to kill yeh, Abbie! Ain't yeh got no sand at all?"

"Yeh're too quick fer me," trembled Abbie. "I wouldn't have no chanst. You win. I wanta go."

For a full minute Giles Rebble gazed at him scornfully. Then a gloating smile overspread his face.

"All right, go," he said, quite unexpectedly. "I wouldn't dirty my gun fer you. Open th' door and git. And you might as well call in your tools from Hazy Valley, 'cause Carey Backus ain't over there. Slink, you hound!"

And as the humiliated Abbie shuffled to the door and opened it, Rebble leaped behind him, lifted a foot, and kicked him ignominiously into the windy night.

Ben Camp caught Justine about the waist as she swayed backward.

But Justine Davant was not the fainting kind. With a superhuman effort she pulled herself together and stepped before Giles Rebble, her dark eyes flashing. Benjamin Camp could scarce believe his ears when he heard her angry cry:

"You think you've been magnificent, don't you? You're nothing but a bully! Bert Abbie isn't afraid of you, not for one little moment. But he knows you can beat him to the draw. Any sensible man would have done as he did. You're the coward, Giles Rebble, not he!"

The cowman stared at her. Then he looked in a puzzled way at Camp. Evidently he thought that he had impressed the girl as he had the naturalist —for by now Camp thoroughly believed that Lambert Abbie was Uncle Foster's murderer.

"I hate you!" cried the girl, almost hysterical. "Bert Abbie is not a murderer. And you, above all men, know he isn't. He may have been tempted to take advantage of the peculiar situation on Ball Bar Ranch to get what he wants. But he could never murder anybody in cold blood. I've known him too long."

"Why, ma'am," Rebble started to defend himself.

"Don't ma'am me! Don't ever speak to me again! Ben, lend me your saddle, will you? I'm going to ride hard and catch up with Bert, and go home with him. I won't have him humiliated as he has been, thinking that every one is against him. Get me your saddle, quick!"

In a daze Ben Camp obeyed her. He carried the saddle outside, found the mustard-colored mare grazing up the creek beside his own horse, and led her back to the cabin.

When he reached the door Giles Rebble had taken his leave.

Justine remained silent while he made ready for her departure.

"Don't you want me to ride with you till you catch up with Abbie?"

"No! Hurry, please."

"All ready, Justine."

She swung into the saddle. "Good night," she said. A clatter of hoofs up Faraway Creek and she was gone.

CHAPTER XVII.

BAD NEWS.

BENJAMIN CAMP was on his bunk trying to snatch a few hours' sleep. But sleep evaded him. The strange events in his little cabin had excited him, and he never had been more fully awake.

He lay there and watched the dawnlight creep along the ceiling, saw a spider awake and begin the business of the day. Justine's unexpected defense of Bert Abbie was the subject paramount in his mind. No understanding women! What amazing creatures they were!

Then suddenly, out of the confusion of his thoughts, came the remembrance that he had not finished reading the letter from Professor Raymond Emory. He threw off the covers, rose fully dressed, and lighted a candle.

There it was, halfway under the bed, where it had fluttered when Rebble's knocking had disturbed him. He seated himself on the bed and shuffled the pages.

Gradually, as he read on and on, his big blue eyes widened and he licked his lips with expectancy. Then he finished, slapped his thigh with the letter, and rose and fed it to Mohammed.

"By gosh!" he breathed. "If the old boy is right—but he's always right!"

He went about his morning routine, his mind still occupied with the Ball Bar mystery. His horse and burro attended to, breakfast over, a goodly supply of firewood cut, and he found himself facing hours of inactivity.

Well, he might as well put in the day working on Rubble Slide Trail. There was really no need to extend it further, but he must be occupied with something besides his gloomy thoughts.

This gloominess was the result of Justine's amazing attitude toward Lambert Abbie. It must have been sheer pity. And pity was dangerously akin to love. Abbie wasn't a bad-looking fellow, by any means. Pity, loyalty—these were the emotions that had actuated Justine in flying to the foreman's defense. Her stanch heart had swelled with wrath when she witnessed the humiliation of her old friend.

Ben Camp admired her for this, even though he considered her devotion blind. He was in love with her. He admitted it freely now.

All day long he worked at the trail, his eyes alert for another rusty cannon ball, which he did not find. He stayed on the trail until dusk descended, and it was safe for him to set his camera trap. He brought his paraphernalia from hiding, then, and put it in working order, the camera just above the trail and aimed at it, the trip-wire stretched across it.

Then home to the evening chores, and afterward to bed.

But no explosion disturbed his sleep, and when he visited the trap as dawn was creeping into the sky, he found the trip-wire as he had left it.

Hiding his outfit in the chaparral again, he went back to the cabin. He decided that, if Justine did not show up before noon, he would saddle his horse and ride off on a tour of exploration. He was tired of moving niggerheads to pass away the time.

BUT he was destined not to take that trip, for at about eleven o'clock Justine came riding down Faraway Creek on Mustard. And behind her rode Bert Abbie on his sorrel cutting horse. Ben Camp awaited their coming with a feeling of depression.

"Hello, Ben!" the girl greeted brightly as she galloped up Abbie rode forward and took the bridle reins from her hands as she dismounted, and there was a triumphant grin on his face that caused Camp's heart to sink.

"You're surprised to see us riding together, I guess," the girl remarked privately to Ben, as Abbie led their mounts away to picket them. "Well, we're on the best of terms. I've decided that I've been terribly unjust to poor old Bert. I had no cause at all for suspecting him. I was just all fussed up by the strange things that have happened, and haven't been myself. But I haven't taken him into my confidence where you are concerned. I haven't told him about Old Ephraim."

Ben Camp nodded slowly. "Thank you," he said.

"Why, what's the matter, Ben? You're not sorry that Bert and I have reached an understanding, are you?"

"What sort of an understanding?" he asked, though he knew he had no right to.

Her alluring red lips displayed a little pout. "You *are* disappointed," she accused. "And to tell the truth, I think it's a little ungenerous of you, Ben."

"Have you promised to marry Abbie?" he asked inexorably.

Justine colored. "Why, not exactly," she answered, seemingly unoffended. "But, after all, would it be such a calamitous thing? Remember, Ben, that I have known him since I was sixteen, when he was a kid cowpuncher of twenty. He wasn't foreman of Ball Bar then, of course. I have always found him upright and honest. A little prejudiced, perhaps, but we all have our prejudices."

She looked up appealingly. Ben Camp nodded for her to proceed.

"Well, I don't believe I knew how much I really thought of him until that odious Rebble tried to make a fool of him the other night."

"And did," Ben Camp thought grimly.

"Bert hadn't a chance," she went on with her defense. "It would have been suicidal for him to try to outdraw Giles Rebble. I come of Ballard stock, Ben. The Ballards stick. Was I to stand there and allow an old enemy of my uncle's and Bert's to unjustly accuse him of murder and never lift my voice? No, sir! Bert Abbie has served the Ballards since he was a kid, has helped them fight their battles. And I had turned him down so cruelly! Well, I got my senses back in time, anyway, thank goodness! And now we're the best of friends."

"You don't consider, then—please believe, Justine, that I am only anxious to see you get a square deal—that Bert would have tried to force you to marry him on the strength of that strange provision in your uncle's will?"

"Of course, he would! And you might do the same if you were in his shoes. All's fair in love and war, as the old saw goes. No, I'll admit that Bert Abbie isn't all that I might wish him to be; but he's loyal and true to his own, and devoted to me."

THE naturalist bowed his head. "I think you'll end up by marrying him," he said. "And I wish you happiness."

"You still mistrust him, I see!"

"I'd rather not discuss it," he told her quietly.

"Tell me frankly, Ben, do you actually believe he murdered Uncle Foster?"

"No," was Ben Camp's short reply. "I'll bet every cent I have he didn't."

Her limpid eyes mirrored her amazement. "Then you think the Hazy Valley cousins—'

"I've ceased to speculate over who murdered your uncle," he interposed. "Did the boys return from Hazy Valley without committing crime the other night?"

She laughed. "Yes. It seems they gave up the project when Bert failed to overtake them. They were a crestfallen bunch when they rode in next morning—the morning-after blues, you know. And Bert has convinced me he wasn't responsible for that impetuous ride. The boys got out of hand. He intended to overtake them and reason with them when they'd ridden off some of their intoxication. But Giles Rebble ruined that."

"Abbie didn't talk to you that way in the cabin, before he turned and saw Rebble against the wall," Ben couldn't help reminding her.

"He explained all that," she said, "when we rode home together. He was jealous because I came to you for help, and lost his temper. I have good reason to know that one can make reckless statements in a case like that."

Ben Camp's lips twitched mirthlessly. What queer emotion was causing this level-headed girl to allow wool to be pulled over her eyes. She must have been in love with Abbie all along. It had taken just such a thing as had occurred the other night to make her realize the truth.

"THAT'S your saddle Bert rode over in," Justine told him. "He'll ride back bareback. Thank you for the loan of it. We're just taking a little vacation to-day, celebrating our new understanding. Bert suggested that we ride over and see you, and return your saddle."

Ben Camp remembered the look of triumph on Lambert Abbie's face. He knew why Abbie had wanted to ride over in company with Justine.

"I'm glad you did so," he said. "Have you told him about the strange visitations I have had here?"

She hesitated. "No," she confessed at last.

"The cannon ball?"

"I haven't mentioned that, either."

"Did you tell him you and I have good reason to believe that, for some unknown reason, the Hazy Valley cousins are hanging about near Faraway?"

"Ye-yes, I told him that, when we were riding home the other night. He was puzzled at Rebble's being in your cabin. So I explained it."

"What did he think about it?"

"He couldn't make it out, but thinks it has something to do with Uncle Foster's murder."

"And how about our treasure hunt?"

"I didn't mention it. That's *our* secret—yours and mine. Finders are keepers, you know. If we discover the treasure, half of it will be yours. I can be loyal, Ben."

"Then we're to keep on hunting it together?"

"Of course. Never say die!"

Ben Camp nodded again, and turned to face the grinning foreman, who now came in carrying the bridles.

"I've brought what I consider a wonderful picnic lunch," Justine told both men. "Let's eat pretty soon, then try to scout up some adventures."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEATH.

FOUR days had passed since the visit of Justine Davant and her gloating lover. Ben Camp suspected why he had not seen Justine since that call. He was low in spirit this evening as, having once more set his camera trap for the night on the

rubble slide, he moved slowly homeward through the lingering dusk.

It seemed that he had lost all interest in his once fascinating vocation. Four nights, and no explosion in his magnesium cups. Yet he didn't seem deeply concerned. Life itself meant nothing.

He had not realized that he was so deeply in love with this radiant girl of the mountains. Ben hadn't been in love with a girl since his high school days. This was a man's love that he had given to Justine, and the belief that he had lost her hurt tremendously. His conviction that Bert Abbie was a thorough rascal did not serve to dispel the pain.

He had left the rubble slide, passing along the eastern end of the lake. Now he was entering the forest that grew denser as he neared the cabin. And then, through the gathering gloom, he saw the figure of a man flattened against a tree-trunk on his right. As he looked, the figure, moving slowly, edged around the trunk and disappeared.

Ben Camp couldn't name the man. He had seen too little of him, and darkness was coming fast. He pretended not to have seen at all. He was scarce afraid of being ambushed, for surely nobody in that country had a justifiable grudge against him. Not even Abbie, now.

So he continued straight on toward his cabin, glancing out of the corners of his eyes, however, at the big tree that concealed the watcher.

The more he thought over the matter, the more firmly he was convinced that he had never seen this man before. For one thing, he wore a broad-brimmed black hat, and the headgear of all of the men he had met in the San Anselmo Mountains was tan or pearl-gray. Also, the figure seemed taller than any of the natives he had encountered.

Who was this stranger, then, and how did he fit into the Ball Bar puzzle? Ben continued straight on, though, after he had passed the tree. He did not look back until it was some distance in his rear. Then, stooping now and then to pick up a resinous pine cone, though he needed none for kindling, he scoured the dim forest with his glance.

But he gained no further sight of the mysterious watcher of his movements.

He was more alert than usual as he sat up until ten o'clock in his cabin that night. The black-hatted stranger was on his mind, and he was prepared for any happening. If the skull should appear at his window, or if his door should open miraculously again, he was ready to credit past manifestations to this stealthy spy.

But nothing happened.

THE wind had risen and was howling dismally when he went to bed. The window frames rattled continuously, and the old door jerked back and forth, restrained from crashing open by the black-oak latch. The stove smoked. There was a perpetual roar as the pine branches lashed about, their millions of needles singing weirdly.

He had fallen asleep about eleven o'clock, he estimated. He was suddenly awakened by a faint explosion. He sat up in his blankets, struck a match, and looked at the dial of his watch.

Three minutes after twelve. The time was to be recorded on the slip of paper that he would attach to the exposure that his camera must have made out there on the rubble slide. Was it Old Ephraim again? For a moment he felt a slight glow of enthusiasm.

As he drew the blankets about his shoulders a second explosion occurred. Then a third, and a fourth. And these were followed by a regular fusillade.

Then all was silence again.

Sleep had been driven from him now. What was the meaning of this? Something had happened out there in the windy night. Perhaps the mag-

nesium powder hadn't been fired at all. Now that he was fully awake, it occurred to him that the explosions had not sounded like those of the charges in his cups. More like revolver shots —though one of them had seemed louder than the others.

But the sounds had certainly come from the direction of the rubble slide. They scarcely would have awakened him had they not been carried straight toward him by the boisterous wind.

Well, there was nothing that he could do toward investigating the mystery until day had come. He thought of the man in the black hat again as he lay back and tried to go to sleep. But sleep did not come for two hours or more.

At dawn he was astir. He would make a hasty breakfast and ferret out this thing immediately. He decided that he would ride horseback as far as the surface of the land would permit, in order to reach his camera sooner. He was in the saddle before objects were accurately distinguishable, riding at a gallop toward the lake.

He rode as far as he could around the eastern end of the narrow stretch of water, then dismounted and lowered the reins. Leaving the horse to graze along the lakeshore, he pressed upward in the direction of the rubble slide.

The day was coming swiftly now. The sky was lighting fast. Dew diamonds glistened on the chaparral leaves. The furious wind had died, and the vast sweep of wilderness was as tranquil as if painted by a master hand on a gigantic canvas.

He panted to the opening of the rubble-slide trail and hastened eastward toward his trap.

HIS heart gave a little leap as, drawing nearer, he saw the significant sag in the trip-wire. Soon he was looking into the scorched bottom of a magnesium cup.

Undoubtedly an exposure had been made, and, with something of the old thrill, he went about the removal of the plate and the taking down of his apparatus, to be hidden throughout the day to come.

He was almost sure that he had caught the big grizzly again. He had strung the trip-wire exceptionally high, so that most of the animals indigenous to the country would pass under it without disturbing it. But grizzlies walk erect much of the time, and his hopes ran high that Old Ephraim and no other quadruped had fired the flash.

He boyishly decided not to look for tracks along the trail. There would be little use, anyway, as the level ribbon was floored with stones and logs, with no earth at all between them. But Ben Camp didn't want to find a single sign which would tell him that the visitor had been the mammoth bear. He wanted that exquisite thrill that he experienced when, not knowing what the exposure might be, he removed the plate from the hypo-clearing solution and held it to the light. Ben Camp was desperate for something these days to give zest to his lonely life.

He pocketed the plate, packed his camera and other paraphernalia along the trail to the old hiding place. Then, taking a shorter and more precipitous route than he had followed in going to the trap, he grabbed and slid his way down toward the level land.

He had almost reached the level when he brought up short with an exclamation of alarm. On a steep slope before him, head pointed toward the lake, lay the figure of a man. His hands were stretched out in front of him, downward, and the sprawling legs had a useless look that was shocking.

"Hello!" cried Ben Camp, rather foolishly. "Are you hurt?"

There was no reply. Grasping at bushes for support, he went down on the steep slope, and caught his breath as he saw a pool of blood on the ground beside the figure.

He spoke again, and his voice sounded strange in the vast morning quietude

of the mountains. Then he kneeled, and his practiced fingers sought the left wrist of the motionless man.

Not a pulse-throb rewarded his long, silent investigation. With a shudder, he reached a hand underneath the body and felt for heartbeats.

Then, with a sigh, he stood erect, gently slewed the body around until it was not headed down the steep slope, and turned it over.

He gazed long at the set face below him. The man was a blond, and his hair was thick and coarse. A two-weeks' beard covered his face. The blue eyes were open, staring. The body was heavy and muscular, and dressed in a green-and-brown flannel shirt, a canvas coat, corduroy trousers, and high-heeled riding boots. The hat was a pearl-gray Stetson.

The shirt was stained with blood, and Ben Camp unbuttoned it to expose a hairy chest. There were two bullet holes in the torso, one in the abdomen, the other through the lungs.

Ben Camp had never seen this man before.

He looked around bewilderedly, vaguely recalling the fusillade of shots that had been wafted to him on the midnight wind.

"Well?" came a sharp, accusing voice. "Is he dead enough to suit yeh?"

Ben Camp wheeled in surprise.

There at the edge of the chaparral, a Winchester cradled with seeming carelessness in his arms, stood a hawk-nosed man whose dark eyes glittered under the wide brim of a black Western hat.

CHAPTER XIX.

SHERIFF FINNEY.

"I DIDN'T kill him," said Ben Camp, his voice steady and his blue eyes cold.

"No?"

The man in the black hat pushed his way through the chaparral and stood at Ben Camp's side, looking down thoughtfully at the body.

He was tall and awkward-looking, but somehow Ben Camp believed that he would not be awkward when in action. With his hook nose and his black eyes and beetling brows, he reminded the naturalist of a huge bird of prey. There was a short, blue-black growth of beard on his lean, iron jaw. The hands that caressed the slick walnut stock of the Winchester were enormous, and the knuckles were big and knotty.

"Who did kill 'im?" The voice was deep and resonant. It seemed to fit the gloomy blackness of this man.

"I haven't an idea," Ben Camp replied. "May I ask who you are?"

The moody black eyes fixed themselves on Ben Camp's face and regarded him without a flicker.

"Pat Finney, sheriff of Jeffries County," came the answer.

"Oh!" Ben Camp was a little startled. But his glance held that of the black man's, and his tones were firm as he asked: "Who is this fellow?"

"Don't know 'im?"

"I've never seen him before."

"That's Carey Backus, cousin o' Giles Rebble, both of Hazy Valley Ranch."

Ben Camp looked down at the waxen face again. "Carey Backus," he mused. "I never met him."

"Know Rebble?"

"Yes, he's been to my cabin at Faraway twice."

"You ain't packin' a gun, Mr. Camp."

"You know my name, then! No, I seldom pack a gun."

"Feel any hesitancy about helpin' me tote this fella down to th' lake-shore?"

"None whatever," Ben replied. "But that'll be a job—it's pretty steep."

The sheriff nodded gloomily. "We're husky, both of us," he said.

"Le's see what we c'n do. And then we'll have a little talk."

Ben Camp nodded silently.

Both of them were puffing from their exertions when the body finally lay at rest on the level, grassy land below the slide.

"That's your hoss, ain't it?" The sheriff pointed along the lake to the grazing animal.

"Yes," said Ben.

"Stand fer th' smell o' blood?"

"I don't know," said Ben. "You see, I'm not much of a hunter, sheriff. But I bought him over near Plume. He may have packed deer and other big game before I owned him."

"Get him, anyway, and we'll try him out. It's a long ways to your cabin, and this fella's heavy."

BEN brought his horse. He shied and snorted, as most horses will when confronted by a large dead body and the smell of blood, and danced about nervously while they were getting the dead man on his back, but he gave little trouble after the sheriff had wound Camp's lariat about the gruesome burden.

"Lead 'im on," commanded Finney. "I'll walk one side and be ready to help you if he starts to cuttin' up."

So the strange procession set out for Faraway Cabin, Ben Camp's thoughts in a bewildering whirl.

They reached the cabin without disaster, and with some difficulty lowered the body to the ground.

"Better pack 'im inside," said the sheriff. "Flies'll be pesterin' soon. Got somethin' to cover th' body with? It's customary."

"My *manta*."

"That's just th' thing. Grab holt."

"Have you had breakfast?" asked Ben Camp politely, when their unwelcome task was done.

The sheriff shook his head. "I hate to trouble you, Mr. Camp."

"No trouble at all." And Ben Camp filled the tea kettle and set it on the stove. "We can talk while we're waiting for it to boil. What is it that you want to talk with me about, sheriff?"

The sheriff nodded toward the *manta*-covered shape in a corner of the cabin. "About that," he said. "And you."

"Shoot," invited Camp evenly.

"One bullet went clean through the body," said the sheriff, "but not through his canvas coat. I found her before you come this mornin'. It's a .45."

Ben Camp nodded. "Then you had already seen the body and investigated it?"

"Yeah."

"Well, a .45 is the ordinary caliber of revolvers used in these mountains," said Camp.

"Yeah, and that makes an investigation difficult. You pack a .45 when you do pack a gun?"

"Yes," admitted Ben. "A Colt. Do you want to see it?"

The sheriff shook his head. "You'd be too clever to leave th' barrel foul, or chambers empty, if you'd blasted this fella. A waste o' time to see your gun. Anyway, you didn't kill Carey Backus."

Ben Camp breathed a sigh of relaxed tension. "I'm glad you realize that. I'd hate to be mixed up in an investigation, even though entirely innocent."

SHERIFF FINNEY nodded in his gloomy manner. "O' course," he said. "Mighty unpleasant. What's your business here, Mr. Camp?"

The naturalist explained, and showed him some prints of the animals he had snapped. But he kept the one of the grizzly bear in hiding. No use to tell all of his secrets. Men would travel far, he knew, to get a shot at a grizzly. He trusted no one where Old Ephraim was concerned.

"That fits in with what I heard about you over at Plume, where you came into this section," the sheriff said.

"You've been investigating me over there?" Ben asked, astounded.

Again that gloomy nod. "Since th' death of Uncle Foster Ballard. Also I wrote about you to the Western Museum o' Natural History. They give you a fine O. K."

"Then you've been investigating Uncle Foster's death?" puzzled Camp. "I imagined that the matter had been dropped entirely."

"Folks were entirely too ready to drop her," said Finney. "That got my curiosity workin'. Besides, there's another matter brought me up here."

"What?"

"I'm keepin' mum about that at present," the sheriff told him shortly.

The water was boiling, and Ben Camp rose to make the coffee. "I think I saw you watching me last night," he ventured.

"I was—but I didn't know you saw me. You're kind of secretive, Mr. Camp."

"I've had reason to be."

"Tell me why."

So Ben Camp told about the grinning skull and the mysteriously opening door, the unexpected appearance of Giles Rebble, and the unaccountable actions of him and his cousin with the telescope. But he said nothing about the cannon ball, for that secret he shared with Justine; and he wanted to consult with her before laying it bare, even to the sheriff of the county.

"What's goin' on here, anyway, Mr. Camp?" the sheriff puzzled.

"I wish I knew. Eggs up, or over, sheriff?"

"Suit yerself. I'll want you to ride with me to Ball Bar headquarters after I've et."

"I'm at your service."

The sheriff rose to his feet, took a handful of nails from under the stove, and, with Ben's hunting ax, securely nailed down both windows. And when they went out he produced a pair of handcuffs and utilized them to lock the cabin door.

"Beggin' yer pardon," he apologized.

Then he borrowed Ben's horse and rode off through the trees, returning in a quarter of an hour riding a big white gelding, and leading Ben's horse behind him.

"Ready?"

"Whenever you are."

"Le's ride."

Several hours later they rode through the ranch yard gates at Ball Bar, and the sheriff headed for the horse corral, where they had seen Lambert Abbie and two of the cow-punchers quite actively engaged in trying to put cold shoes on a frightened colt. So busy were they with the leaping, half-wild animal, that the sheriff and Ben had stopped their horses ten feet from them before they were observed.

Then Bert Abbie looked up, and his lips went round as he saw the black man gazing at him, his Winchester across his thighs and pointing toward him.

"Hello, Abbie," came the booming drawl. "I reckon I'll have to arrest you fer th' murder of Carey Backus. Now, take it calm, Bert. There's a hair trigger to this here old rifle I'm packin'."

CHAPTER XX.

INQUEST.

LAMBERT ABBIE had been taken to Earlybird and lodged in jail. Ball Bar hands had been dispatched to Faraway for the body of Carey Backus, which they transported from there to Hazy Valley Ranch.

Justine Davant was distracted. Only Aunt Aradne Ballard was accepting the situation with equanimity. In fact, as the evening of that first day drew near, she ceased to remember the arrest entirely, and began to worry about the failure of Uncle Foster to return from the cow camp known as Cannibal.

Justine and Ben Camp were seated in their old place under the trees, where

the Japanese lanterns had glowed so bravely on Uncle Foster's big day. Justine had been crying, and her eyes were red. She had asked Ben Camp to stay with them until this terrible thing was over.

"It isn't true! It isn't true!" she kept repeating, her dark eyes tragic. "What makes the sheriff think that Bert did it? There's some hideous mistake."

Ben Camp scarce knew how to comfort her. He felt intuitively that Sheriff Finney was a man who didn't often make mistakes. He was a reticent man, a shrewd man, a man of iron. Camp had vast confidence in his reasoning powers and his common sense.

"Didn't the sheriff tell you anything?" begged the miserable girl.

"Almost nothing at all," Ben Camp answered. "I didn't even know he intended to arrest Bert when we rode through the ranch yard gate. Justine, has Bert been at home lately?" he asked. "If only he can establish an alibi!"

"That's the great difficulty. I'm afraid he can't. He returned this afternoon from a three-days' absence. He'd been making the rounds of the various cow camps we're still using. He had a pack-horse with him, carrying his grub and bedding."

"Suppose you and I saddle up and ride to these camps, and see if we can prove that Bert spent last night at one of them."

"I've already sent Gerald Coons to do that," Justine replied. "He'll be back to-morrow afternoon. He'll go on to Cannibal, Bodkin's Basin, and Yellow Girl. There's a man at each."

"Then Coons's report will probably clear the matter up, and until he comes I'd advise you not to worry."

"But I can't help it, Ben! Who else would have any reason for killing one of the Hazy Valley cousins? Bert swore to get even, riding home from Faraway that night, after Giles Rebble had humiliated him. I tried to calm him down, and finally he dropped the subject. He was still boiling within, I know, but he didn't do this, Ben!"

"Let's try to forget it until Coons returns," he tried to soothe her.

BUT the return of the melancholy cow-puncher next afternoon brought no relief. Bert Abbie had visited Yellow Girl on his first day out. He had remained there only a short time, and had set out directly after noon for Bodkin's Basin. There he had spent the night, and during the forenoon of the following day had ridden on to Cannibal. The cabin at Cannibal had sheltered him that night, and he had ridden away the next morning at ten o'clock, ostensibly headed for headquarters.

So from ten o'clock that morning until about two o'clock on the afternoon following the shooting none of the Ball Bar people could account for his movements.

That evening the men who had been riding herd at these cow camps drifted in, one at a time. The sheriff had asked that they be present at the coroner's inquest, which was to be held at the county seat next day.

They set off early in the morning, Justine Davant and Benjamin Camp traveling in a buckboard, the three cow-punchers riding ahead on their saddle horses. Ball Bar was left deplorably short-handed, but this couldn't be helped.

The sturdy Western horses ate up the desert miles after the little cavalcade had left the mountains. Justine drove the two shaggy bay mustangs that were hitched to the buckboard, and she drove them at a gallop, expertly. They kept up with the saddlers easily. The girl's lips were set, and her eyes were troubled. She spoke but seldom to her companion on the jouncing seat.

They reached Earlybird at last, stabled their dripping animals, and took an automobile stage for the county

seat at four o'clock in the afternoon. At half past seven that evening they were seated silently in an anteroom of the coroner's quarters, silent, brooding, the object of many pairs of curious eyes.

The jury had already assembled, and were talking together in low voices in an adjoining room. A machine drew up to the door, and gruff voices were heard outside.

Then an undersheriff came in, a great, slant-shouldered ape of a man. Handcuffed to him was Lambert Abbie.

Justine drew in her breath and hid her eyes. Abbie was as pale as a ghost as he clanked along beside the deputy, grinning half-heartedly at his Ball Bar friends. At the door to the room in which the proceedings were to take place, the undersheriff unshackled his prisoner, and they disappeared together beyond the threshold.

Immediately afterward came the announcement that court was in session. A few preliminaries followed, then Sheriff Finney was called to the witness stand.

The Ball Bar outfit strained their ears in the anteroom, but it was impossible for them to hear all of the proceedings.

But this much Justine and Ben Camp did hear of the sheriff's testimony:

HE had, he said, been in the San Anselmo Mountains, in the vicinity of Ball Bar Ranch on official business as sheriff of Jeffries County. He had heard of strange happenings at Ball Bar Ranch; but his business in the mountains was not directly connected with these.

Asked by the coroner what his real business was up there, he pleaded that, so long as it was not connected with the case which was being tried, he felt justified in not disclosing it. It was an official secret, he claimed, and he was not at liberty to make disclosures until the matter had been cleared up.

The coroner yielded, and continued his questioning along other lines.

The silent listeners in the anteroom heard the sheriff tell of camping out in the mountains, near Faraway, and of inadvertently stumbling onto strange happenings in that vicinity. He detailed the mysterious movements of Giles Rebble and the deceased Carey Backus, his cousin. He told of Benjamin's residence in the Faraway cabin, and of his activities as a photographer of wild life; and he described the encounter between Rebble and Abbie, which had ended peacefully before he had been able to interfere for law and order.

On the afternoon preceding the night on which Carey Backus was supposed to have been killed, the sheriff was scouting about in the woods, trying to keep an eye on the cousins' camp, which was back from the lake, and Faraway Cabin. He had seen Lambert Abbie riding into the district, and his actions had seemed secretive and suspicious. But he lost him when dusk settled over the mountains.

Sheriff Finney camped near the eastern end of the lake for the night, but was awakened from his sleep about twelve o'clock by a fusillade of revolver shots. The first shot, coming alone and slightly in advance of the others, which were decidedly bunched, had brought him wide awake.

Rising, fully dressed, from his blankets, he had hastened in the direction from which the shots had come. Flashing his electric torch, he had clambered up a steep hillside, covered with scrubby chaparral, and had stumbled over the body of a man.

As Sheriff Finney flashed his light on the figure, it had begun to crawl down the steep hillside like a crippled dog, moaning and mumbling words.

"I stopped 'im, and bent over 'im," continued the sheriff. "I asked 'im 'Who shot yer, brother?' And he says, 'Abbie! That mangy Bert Abbie, of Ball Bar Ranch! And he got me right.'

"Them were his last words," the sheriff finished. "He died right there. And I left 'im lay till mornin', his arms outstretched down th' hillside. I hid close by and waited to find out what I could. Then Mr. Camp come and found th' body, and I stepped out and made myself known to 'im."

Abbie's lawyer now questioned the sheriff for some time, after which he was questioned by members of the jury. Then he left the stand, and the name of Benjamin Camp was called.

Ben squeezed Justine's icy hand assuringly and walked into the other room.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN AMAZING DISCOVERY.

THE inquest dragged on until nearly half past ten. The questioning of Ben Camp was brief; one after another the Ball Bar outfit were called to the stand, the white-faced Justine among them. Giles Rebble, who had come in later, was also called, but his testimony was given in such a low voice that those in the anteroom could not hear what he had to say. Abbie's attorney tried his best to establish an alibi for his client, but failed utterly.

In the end the jurymen went out and consulted for a short time. Returning, their foreman brought in a verdict of murder, and recommended that the prisoner be bound over to the Superior Court for trial.

Justine Davant, sobbing piteously, grasped at Bert Abbie's hands as the apelike undersheriff conducted him into the anteroom and put the handcuffs on again. Abbie gave her a sickly smile, and his eyes were glazed with fear. The Ball Bar cowboys grinned at the prisoner and awkwardly shuffled their feet. Then Abbie clanked out, locked to the undersheriff, and Justine was weeping softly on Ben Camp's shoulder.

There were at the time few cases on the docket of the Superior Court, and the hearing was set for a week from that date. Abbie's attorney accompanied Justine and Camp to the county jail next morning, where they were permitted to talk with the prisoner.

Abbie was a badly cowed man, and so panicky that Ben Camp could not repress his loathing for him. He at least should take it like a man, the naturalist thought, until the critical moment when a jury had pronounced him guilty. In Camp's mind he was already found guilty as charged, and his display of abject fear only served to strengthen this belief.

Justine had decided not to go back to Ball Bar in the interim, but to spend the time at the home of a friend at the county seat. So Ben Camp unwilling to return to Faraway and be constantly reminded of happier days with Justine, made up his mind to go to the city in which his museum was situated, to remain there until the hearing.

"Oh, Ben, can't you do something for him—for me?" cried the tired-eyed Justine as they parted at her friend's door. "There must be something up there in the mountains, some piece of evidence, that will prove Bert's innocence."

Ben Camp's blue eyes mirrored his gloom. He shook his head. And then he brightened suddenly.

"I'll have a talk with Professor Raymond Emory up at the museum," he declared. "He's always been my best friend, and he's a wise old owl. A paleontologist by profession, but sometimes I think he knows everything. Ray would have made a wonderful detective if he hadn't taken up science."

WITH that he left her; and when, next afternoon, he presented himself at the museum, it was to face a new disappointment. Professor Raymond Emory was away on his vacation, and would return on the 4th of August. Bert Abbie's hearing had been set for the fifth.

The days that immediately followed were tiresome ones for the naturalist. Waking, he thought of Justine; sleeping he dreamed of her. He would do anything to help her, even to making an effort to prove the presumably guilty Bert Abbie innocent. He wrote her a note of encouragement, and she answered briefly. Time marched on relentlessly. The 4th of August came, and at five o'clock in the afternoon he was at the station to meet his friend.

Professor Raymond Emory was older than Ben, a slightly bald, studious-looking little man, always dressed in a suit of clothes too large for him and a hat too small. The least of Professor Emory's worries was his attire. How to assemble the fossilized bones of a mastodon meant far more to him than personal appearance.

In Emory's tome-lined study, with a bottle of prewar whisky and smoking materials between them on a Chinese tabouret, Ben Camp related the strange happenings in the mountains from first to last.

Professor Emory listened with closed eyes, not once interrupting the narrator. At the conclusion he poured out a couple of drinks and nudged the siphon bottle in Ben's direction.

He sipped his Scotch and soda daintily, his gray eyes still studious, and then leaned back and steepled his slim white fingers.

Then he began to speak, and Ben Camp sat up straight before he had finished half a dozen sentences.

He talked for ten minutes, laying down his points as a checker player places his pawns. There was no hesitancy in any of his statements. His reasoning was pure and simple; his logic was amazing. It was ratiocination of the highest order.

"So there you are, Benjamin, my boy," he said in conclusion. "I've reconstructed a series of hypothetical scenes for you, and you can judge for yourself whether my theories are sound. Of course, whether or not you will be able to find any evidence to support my reasoning, remains to be seen. But now that you know what to look for, you'll be justified in going back into the mountains and making a systematic search. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. It's interesting. Unique."

"But the trial is to-morrow," Ben gloomily pointed out.

"To-morrow will probably be taken up with impaneling a jury," Emory told him. "And maybe the next day also. The chances are, Ben, that you can have the defendant's lawyer make arrangements for you to be absent during those two days. Get some letters from prominent men here, to be shown to the court, establishing the fact that you are a responsible and important personage. Good luck to you, my boy. Have another drink before you go?"

AT eight o'clock the following morning Ben Camp was in the office of Bert Abbie's counsel, who persuaded the judge of the Superior Court not to demand Ben's presence during the preliminaries of the trial.

"But be back here for the opening of court day after to-morrow morning," the attorney adjured him. "Make time, now; I'll stall all I can. Good luck, Mr. Camp!"

Good luck! Good luck! Everybody was wishing him good luck in saving Bert Abbie for the girl he loved!

It was a bitter pill, but Ben Camp meant to swallow it. Justine had been so sure he would be fair to Abbie, that he must live up to her faith in him. Yes, he loved her enough to save this man for her, if he could, even though it wrung his heart. He would be as fine as she mistakenly imagined him to be.

He hired an automobile and a driver, and started out at once. They made good time to the pass that connected the desert with the coast slope. Once on the desert, however, their progress was slowed tremendously; and Ben Camp

wriggled on the seat and tried to cajole his companion into taking greater risks with the ruts in the crunching sand.

They reached the foothills about three o'clock in the afternoon. Here, at a ranch known as Dutch Woman, which had been a station for travelers for many years, Ben Camp left his driver and the car to wait for his return, and, hiring a saddle horse from the rancher, he rode on up into the mountains.

When he reached Ball Bar Ranch on his streaming horse, he decided not to stop. Night was very close, but by now he was quite familiar with the long trail to Faraway. So he rode on into the gathering gloom and the deep, black forests, reaching his cabin before midnight.

The door had been unlocked by the Ball Bar men who had removed the body to Hazy Valley, the sheriff having given them the key to the handcuffs that had secured it. The windows, he found, were still nailed in place. The rusty cannon ball still lay in the corner where he had left it.

It seemed at first that nothing had been disturbed. But when he started in to lay a fire he was amazed to find that his kindling and fuel had been moved from the left side of the stove, where he was wont to pile it.

He found it in a neat heap behind Mohammed's throne, between the blue-clay pedestal and the cabin wall.

He stood scratching his head and staring at it. Then, bent on a thorough investigation, he thrust a foot under the pile and sent the pinecones and lengths of stovewood crashing against the wall.

His lips formed an astonished O as he bent down quickly, a lighted candle in his hand.

The blue-clay pedestal under the stove was only a shell. A great cavity showed inside it, which the pile of fuel had completely hidden.

Something glowed dully in the candlelight. It lay on the floor just inside the cavity in the pedestal.

Ben Camp stooped and picked it up.

It was a Spanish gold doubloon. The date stamped on it, which was revealed when he rubbed it with his shirtsleeve was 1799!

CHAPTER XXII.

TRIAL FOR MURDER.

THE prisoner was in the dock, his attorney and the beetle-browed undersheriff seated beside him. Court proceedings had been in progress some time, and Sheriff Pat Finney had just left the witness stand. Now the name Justine Davant was called by the bailiff, and the trembling girl left her seat, walked unseeingly through a little gate which somebody politely opened for her, and mounted to the witness box, where she was sworn.

The jurymen stared at her with interest and admiration, as did everybody else in the crowded court room.

Counsel for the defense rose to his feet and stepped before her, smiling encouragement. He began questioning her in a moderate tone, adroitly bringing out low answers designed to convince the jurymen that the prisoner before the bar could not possibly be guilty of the crime with which he was charged.

Then the district attorney took her in hand, and the situation was immediately reversed. Her simple answers to his seemingly simple questions made everything look black for Lambert Abbie. She realized it as each truthful answer came from her lips. Abbie's lawyer waived further questioning of the witness at that sitting, and to her unbounded relief she was excused.

Justine Davant leaned back in her seat outside the rail and closed her eyes. Where was Ben Camp? His name would soon be called, but she was sure he wasn't in the court room. Bert Abbie's attorney had told her that Ben

had gone back into the mountains, to seek for some clew which he hoped would establish Bert Abbie's innocence. He was doing this for her—he didn't like Bert Abbie. But what could he find? What could he do? The sheriff's statement concerning the dying words of Carey Backus seemed to prove conclusively that Abbie had committed the crime. What could Ben Camp do to offset that?

Two Ball Bar punchers testified, unable to help Abbie with an alibi. The girl now saw Abbie's attorney standing on his feet and looking all over the court room with swift, concerned glances. She believed that he was worrying about Benjamin Camp. Ben had not arrived then.

The jurymen were yawning. Already, Justine believed, the minds of these twelve good men and true were made up. She knew in her heart that their period of deliberation would be short—that they would bring in a verdict of guilty. The counsel for the defense, she thought, was merely playing for time. Now and then he turned halfway round, and his glance coasted over the court room. Then he would halfway turn in the other direction and do the same.

Then suddenly Justine saw his face lighten, and he briskly turned to the witness and said: "That will be all, thank you."

A minute later and the bailiff was calling:

"Benjamin Camp."

BEN CAMP walked neatly down the aisle, through the little gate, and mounted to a place before the witness stand. He stood there, erect and manly, his very shoulders showing confidence and ability. The oath taken, he deliberately took his seat and smiled genially at the lawyer for the defense. A glance of understanding passed between them, and then the lawyer's firm tones came:

"Mr. Camp, will you oblige me by telling the gentlemen of the jury, in your own words, just what you know about this case?"

"I think," said the witness, bowing toward the lawyer and the judge, "that if I may be permitted to explain my profession, and tell of my activities in the San Anselmo Mountains during the period under consideration, that I can more easily make understandable what I have brought along to show the jury."

"Proceed, Mr. Camp," said the attorney, and resumed his seat before the bench.

So the witness, in a low, cultured, clearly audible voice, told all concerned about his career as a photographer of wild animals, and explained his camera traps—the charges of magnesium in the little cups, the stunning report and the blinding flash that were the results of an animal's coming in contact with the trip-wire.

Judge, jurymen, court officials, and the crowd beyond the railing were deeply interested and impressed. Justine sat gazing wide-eyed at the speaker, and something of hope surged within her as she heard his firm, confident voice.

And now Ben Camp was drawing rapidly to a close. He told how, the night before, having discovered nothing in the mountains that pointed to the innocence of the accused, he had returned, defeated, to his lonely cabin, to make ready for an early departure next morning—the morning of the present day. And how, to pass the time—though his heart had not been in the work—he had developed the last plate that had been exposed, and which the strange circumstances had prevented him from developing long before.

"I fully expected," he said, "to find on this plate the likeness of a gigantic grizzly bear that I had been seeking for many days. But when I removed the plate from the hypo-clearing solution I nearly dropped from my chair.

For this is what fairly leaped at me when I held the plate up to the light of my red lamp. I made a print of it in the mountains as soon as the sun was bright enough this morning. That caused my delay, and I have been traveling like mad ever since."

HE had reached into an inside breast pocket of his coat while uttering these last sentences. Now he produced a package and unwrapped it slowly, while scarcely a breath could be heard in the court room. He handed an unmounted photograph to Abbie's lawyer, who rose and stepped forward.

Amid a vast silence the attorney stared at it. Then slowly a smile of triumph overspread his features.

He lifted his eyes to the bench. "We request, your honor, that this photograph be placed on file in the evidence."

When the request had been granted, the attorney stepped briskly before the jurymen and handed the photograph to the foreman.

"I make the demand," he said crisply, "that, when the gentlemen of the jury have all examined this piece of evidence, they retire for consultation, and return as quickly as possible with a verdict of not guilty. Your honor, we rest our case."

The eyes of the foreman of the jury were popping. Other jurymen were leaning over him, staring at the print. Then another hitched himself toward the group, and as he took in the significance of what he saw, lost control of himself.

"Why, that's a pitcher of Carey Backus!" he cried, before the gavel had a chance to rap for order. "Carey Backus, and he's got a six-gun in his hand pointin' at—good God, he's shootin' at Uncle Foster Ballard! And Foster Ballard's done dead!"

Then the gavel fell smartly, and "Order in the court room!" the bailiff bawled.

Justine Davant swayed in her seat, and everything went black before her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNRAVELING MYSTERIES.

THE four witnesses from Ball Bar Ranch, Lambert Abbie, who was a free man again, and Benjamin Camp, alighted from the automobile stage at Earlybird. In a short time the cow-punchers were in their saddles, and Justine and Ben were once more enthroned on the jumpy seat of the buckboard. They clattered out of town and onto the broad bosom of the desert, headed for the distant mountains and Ball Bar Ranch.

The shaggy bays galloped furiously in an effort to pass the saddlers, and Justine was kept busy holding them in. But she liked it, and there was a glow of triumph in her cheeks.

"You must explain everything to me now, Ben," she said finally, when the mustangs had settled down to a steady jog. "I'm completely up in the air."

"We have my old friend, Professor Raymond Emory, to thank for the victory," Ben Camp told her. "You see, I had believed for some time that the bones found in that cave near Bodkin's Basin were not your uncle's, but I didn't want to raise false hopes, so I held my tongue. Uncle Foster is a rather slight, wizened little man; and when I took careful note of those bones I was positive they couldn't be his. So, while Gerald Coons was away telling you and the others what had been discovered, I lopped off a branch of chaparral to the exact length of one of the tibias. Measuring the branch, later, I wrote to Ray about it, informing him that your uncle's height was about five feet three. He said that unless your uncle was shockingly deformed, that tibia could not possibly be a part of his skeleton. The man who had owned that tibia, he wrote, must have been over six feet in stature.

"Bones, you see, are Ray Emory's hobby—reconstructing bodies from a few fossil bones. The man is simply wonderful as a paleontologist. And as a reasoner, too. When I had told him all that had happened up in the mountains, he laid before me a marvelous hypothetical deduction that was absolutely convincing.

"He went at it like this: 'I'm convinced that the lost Spanish treasure is the nucleus of the entire mystery. In the first place, Mr. Ballard wasn't murdered. At least, that wasn't his skeleton that you found. That man had met death recently, as proved by your description of the bones. Perhaps Mr. Ballard stumbled upon it, and decided to use it in his own little scheme. This took place before his strange funeral, of course. The funeral was merely a lead, born of his odd brain, to induce you people to hunt for him, and to expect to find him dead, as soon as he disappeared.

"'Now, as to the absence of the skull: Mr. Ballard is an old man, and nothing about a man's skeleton shows his age as do the teeth, or is so easily identified. Ballard was afraid to leave the skull with the other bones, because the teeth would not correspond with his own. I'm positive it was a plant: Bones, Ballard's torn clothing, his six-shooter, the mutilated boot, the full purse, the pocket knife, the neckerchief.'"

BEN smiled at Justine's excitement, and then proceeded:

"'Now, why?' Ray went on to me. 'Mr. Ballard had no apparent reason for deceiving his friends and relatives at Ball Bar Ranch. But it is self-evident that he wanted to make *somebody* think he was dead. Now who could that be, and why? Let us examine the subsequent proceedings—and we find two people acting strangely: Giles Rebble and his cousin Carey Backus, of Hazy Valley. But why? To answer this question, we must look for another odd happening; and we at once settle upon your finding of the rusty cannon ball on the rubble slide.

"'The mystery has now shifted to Faraway and vicinity. There, Giles Rebble and his cousin are spying upon you and Miss Davant. You have found a cannon ball, which points to the Spanish treasure. Rebble is greatly interested in the legs of your camera tripod, the top of which is hidden. Why do these protruding legs pique his curiosity? Because he does not know what is hidden at the upper end of them by the pack-bag.

"'We are assuming, you must remember, that the nucleus of the mystery is the Spanish treasure. Now, if Mr. Ballard had been hunting for this treasure, and Rebble and his cousin had reason to believe he was on the eve of finding it, we have a motive for their spying in the neighborhood of Faraway, to take it away from him when he gets it. For we have deduced that the treasure is hidden in that locality by reason of your finding the cannon ball there. Assuming this, how does this fit in with Rebble's interest in the tripod?'

"I had to give that up," Ben Camp told the attentive girl. "And then the old boy laughed at me. 'It's perfectly obvious,' he said. 'Rebble imagined that the pack-bag that covered the upper portion of your tripod concealed a surveyor's instrument. In short, he believed that you, being a stranger and a man of education, were a surveyor that Ballard had employed to help him locate the treasure trove.

"'If we concede this point, we may proceed by leaps and bounds to a logical conclusion: Ballard had discovered something at Faraway which led him to believe that he was hot on the trail of the old Spanish cache. But Rebble and his cousin had discovered the secret, and were stealthily watching him, so that they could rush in at the finish and either claim half of the find, or kill Ballard and appropriate the

whole of it. Ballard knew that they were onto him, so, chancing to find the coyote-picked skeleton of a man somewhere in the mountains, he devised the novel plan of making the cousins, as well as everybody else thereabout, believe that he had been killed. Then, when everybody in the neighborhood had accepted his death and burial as a fact, he could nose out the hiding place of the treasure without interruption from the Hazy Valley men.

"'But you, Benjamin Camp, threw a monkey wrench into his well-oiled machinery. When you showed up at Faraway the cousins believed that you had been hired by Ballard to run lines with a surveyor's instrument in an effort to locate the cache. So they did not give up their spying, as Ballard had hoped they would do, but kept their eyes on you, thinking that, even though Ballard had been killed, you were carrying on the quest at the instigation of his niece. And Miss Davant's coming to see you so often, and being with you in the hills under, what seemed to them, strange circumstances, only served to strengthen this assumption.

"'So,' Ray concluded, 'Mr. Ballard is not dead, but is hiding somewhere in the mountains and carrying on his search despite the novel goings on about him. It was perhaps he, and not the Hazy Valley pair, who made the stupid effort to frighten you out of Faraway Cabin. Such acts are more characteristic of him, as you have described him and his unique funeral, than they are of Rebble and Backus. With this in mind, Ben, go back into the mountains and look for clews. I'll not be surprised if you find something to prove Foster Ballard, not Lambert Abbie, is the slayer of Carey Backus."

BEN paused a moment, regretting that he had ever been unwilling to help free Abbie.

"So that's why I went back to Faraway. I had not much more than entered the cabin when I found something that convinced me the professor's reasoning was sound."

Ben Camp then took from his pocket the Spanish gold doubloon, and, for the first time, showed it to Justine, explaining how and where he had found it.

"My belief is," he told her, "that your uncle had found a part of the treasure even before he discovered the skeleton of the unknown man and made preparations for his strange funeral. He hid the coins that he had found in Faraway Cabin. With a hammer and a chisel, perhaps, he hollowed out the blue clay pedestal on which Mohammed is perched. He deposited the coins in the cavity, and plastered up the opening with fresh blue clay, taken from the creek bed. It soon hardened, and then perhaps he plastered thin clay over the entire rear part of the pedestal to hide his work, swept up the leavings and threw them in the creek, and went on hunting for more gold.

"I suspect that Rebble and Backus were pressing him rather close just then, and he dared not transport the money to headquarters for fear of an attack. And this accounts, naturally enough, for his efforts to frighten me out of the cabin. He feared, perhaps, that the repeated heating up of the old stove would crack the new clay, and expose his hiding place."

"But how did he work his skull, and the mysterious opening of the door?" Justine asked.

"Ray Emory had a theory concerning that, too," laughed Ben. "He contends that your uncle, spry little man that he is, climbed one of the pines close to the cabin, crawled out on a limb, and used a long pole, with a piece of rope at the other end of it, to operate the skull and to lift the latch of the cabin door. I must confess that I never once thought to investigate in the tree-tops. I didn't think there were any limbs overhanging the cabin that were large enough to support Rebble's

weight. But your uncle doesn't weigh much more than a good-sized boy, and could accomplish it easily."

Justine Davant remained silent for a long time, turning these matters over and over in her mind.

"I THINK," said Ben Camp presently, "that, on the night of the killing, your uncle was walking cautiously along the rubble slide trail, making use of it so long as you and I had so kindly reconstructed it. Carey Backus was stealthily following him. Your uncle turned, saw him through the night, and either challenged him or opened fire on him. This accounts for the first lone shot that was heard. It was fired just before Uncle Foster came to the trip-wire that I had strung across the trail. Perhaps he then started to run. However that may be, a gun battle ensued. Your uncle, backing up as he fired, struck the trip-wire. The magnesium charge was exploded, and the exposure made. But, with both men shooting, they would not notice the noise of the explosion when the magnesium charge went off.

"After the shooting, Carey Backus, mortally wounded, crawled along the trail and started down the hill, where Sheriff Finney found him dying. Just why he denounced Bert Abbie as his murderer will never be known. But perhaps, hating Abbie as he did, his wandering mind settled on him rather than on your uncle—particularly if he believed Uncle Foster to be dead. And Backus may have seen Bert in the vicinity the day before, and the picture of him was in his subconscious mind. By the way, did Bert confide to you what he was doing at Faraway?"

Justine looked down. "Yes," she answered. "I'm very much afraid that he went there to commit the act of which he was afterward accused."

Ben Camp nodded understandingly.

"It seems that we have jumped from the frying pan into the fire," said Justine moodily. "Now Uncle Foster, if he is found, will be accused of the murder of Carey Backus."

"Not a chance in the world," Ben Camp assured her. "The exposed plate proves conclusively that your uncle was firing in self-defense. Powder smoke hangs over both his revolver and the one in Backus's hand. They are aiming deliberately at each other. That old camera never made an exposure more nearly perfect, Justine. Wait till I've made another print for you to study. It would be next to impossible to get a jury that would find Uncle Foster guilty. And I fully expect to find a trail of blood between the camera stand and the chaparral when I get time to go into the matter."

"You've been simply wonderful, Ben," she told him in a low voice.

"No, Professor Emory gets all the praise," he laughed, and looked off unseeingly toward the mountains, ever growing larger as the mustangs, heads down, leaped on and on.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TREASURE.

"DO you think it was Uncle Foster who entered the cabin while you were away and examined the cannon ball?" Justine asked at last.

"It was either he or one of the cousins. That depends on whether the cousins know anything about the cannon ball."

Aunt Aradne received them with equanimity. She scarcely seemed to realize what had been happening.

The girl and Ben seated themselves on the veranda to rest a little after the long, jolty ride. They were deep in conversation when a shadow appeared before the steps, and next moment a figure was slowly climbing them. There came a dull, metallic thud as the figure lowered something heavy from its shoulders to the porch floor. Then came a queer, cracked chuckle that brought Justine leaping from her chair.

But before she could voice her amazement there came sounds and words from the doorway.

"*Tk-tk-tk!*" It was Aunt Aradne clicking her tongue against the roof of her mouth in her customary expression of disapproval.

"*Tk-tk-tk!*" it came again. "So you're home for th' day, are you, Foster Ballard? It's about time! Here I ain't seen you since yesterday mornin'. Spent last night at Cannibal I'll bet, carousin'. Wash your face and hands at once, because supper is almost ready!"

The weird old lady shuffled toward the kitchen, and by this time Justine had found her voice.

"Uncle Foster!" she almost screamed. "Is it really you? I—I'm almost afraid to touch you!"

"Heh-heh-heh!" the old man chuckled. "'Fraid to tech me, are yeh? Yeh needn't be, Justine. I'm alive and well. And richer than I ever expected to be. Got sev'r'l sacks containin' old Spanish gold pieces. Funny lookin' money, but she's good! I reckon it 'll amount to a hundred thousan' dollars. You folks all bein' away, and Giles Rebble and Carey Backus, too, give me my chanst, and I been sneakin' her in in lots that I could handle and cachin' her near th' house."

"BUT, Uncle Foster! Carey Backus is dead!"

"I reckoned he would be," returned the old man lightly. "I sure pumped enough lead into 'im to kill an elephant. Sneak after me in th' night and plunk slugs at my back, will he! I got a flesh wound that's hurtin' me right smart this minute. But I reckon I c'n outshoot any man in Hazy Valley, night or day, drunk or sober. Let 'em try it agin if they ain't convinced!"

There was a long pause. Then said Justine unhesitatingly: "Uncle Foster, why did you play that awful joke on us? It was cruel."

"Fer sev'r'l reasons," replied the old man, seating himself on the top step. "One was to fool the Hazy Valley boys. They knew I was about to find that old money, and they hounded me scand'lous. Then I wanted to test out Bert Abbie. I'd seen he was settin' his cap at you, and I didn't know whether I could trust you with 'im or not. Thought not. Has he been tryin' to hogtie yeh since th' readin' o' my will, Justine? Does he think he owns yeh?"

"He—he's been different, Uncle Foster."

"Ha! I suspicioned it. I showed 'im up, then. Jest what I aimed to do."

"But your will, uncle! Suppose you hadn't reappeared, and I had married Bert!"

"They's another will," said the old man craftily. "It's dated later than th 'one Jedge Whitmore read at my funeral. He's got it. I told 'im to spring it if you and Bert decided to hook up fer life. It gives th' ranch to you, Justine, without conditions. I may be crazy, like most o' th' Ballards were, but I'm foxy, by gosh!"

His finding of the skeleton of an unknown man in the hills had given birth to this outlandish plan for the funeral and his subsequent disappearance. "I jest hankered to know how folks would act at my funeral," he explained plaintively. "And I must say I enjoyed her immense, Justine."

He went on to confirm Ben's theories about his disappearance.

UNCLE FOSTER, hidden in the chaparral, had watched the finding of the bones, and had then hiked to Faraway to resume the quest. The treasure, he stated, was hidden at the top of the rubble slide. The rubble had slid away from the mouth of an opening up there, exposing a cave. His finding of a cannon ball had led him to search in that locality. But he had dropped the cannon ball when, shortly after picking it up, he had seen Giles Rebble looking at him through a tele-

scope from across the valley; it had rolled down the slide, and, as Justine and Ben knew, had been stopped by the old trail. But Uncle Foster had not been able to find it again until he saw it in Faraway Cabin.

The remaining portion of his story bore out the findings of Professor Raymond Emory with surprising accuracy.

"I saw Pat Finney sev'r'l times," he finished, "and I guessed he was huntin' fer th' man whose skeleton I used in my little show."

And when the sheriff arrived at Ball Bar Ranch a few days later, he admitted that this was so. A prospector had been missing for some days, and his relatives in Los Angeles had become worried about him and had offered a reward for information concerning him. The locality where he was prospecting was known to them, and they had enlisted Sheriff Finney's aid.

The missing man was known to have been affected with heart trouble, and the sheriff was positive that it was this man's skeleton that Uncle Foster had found.

"I meant to surprise yeh all," pleaded Uncle Foster, as Aunt Aradne came again and tongue-lashed him because he had not obeyed her and made himself presentable for supper.

"You certainly did," Justine murmured. "Don't worry about that."

"A sackful o' them old Spanish gold pieces 'll make a nice weddin' present, Justine," he told her, rising briskly. "That is, if yeh're of a mind to marry Bert Abbie, after all."

"I am not of a mind to marry him, Uncle Foster," said the girl. "I never wanted to marry him, under any circumstances. But I didn't want to see a man whom I believed to be innocent sent to the pen or hanged. You've taught me loyalty, Uncle Foster, and I stick by my own. Bert Abbie is a Ball Bar man—has been since he was a boy—and I would have gone the limit to defend him."

She seemed to be speaking to the amazed Ben more than to her uncle, for as yet her uncle hadn't been told of Abbie's trial for the killing of Carey Backus. Ben Camp heard her with a leaping heart and the stunning realization that what he had considered lost was his to struggle for all over again.

Uncle Foster, taking his heavy load on his back, had gone inside, chuckling at his own cleverness.

Justine and Ben stood facing each other in the night.

"Then—then there's still a chance for me, Justine?" Ben asked.

She was a long time answering. At last:

"You've never told me that you wanted a chance, Ben."

He took two steps and stood close to her. "Justine!"

"Yes, Ben?"

"I—I love you."

Another pause; then she murmured:

"I've been waiting for you to say it for a good many days."

There floated out from the kitchen a petulant voice:

"Justine Davant, come this minute and wash yer face and hands fer supper! I declare, yeh're as bad as yer Uncle Foster! Over there at Cannibal all last night, drinkin' and carousin'—"

The voice trailed off until words were not distinguishable. An odd pair, Foster and Aradne!

Ben Camp kissed his girl of the mountains again and again, with his heart racing wildly and the hot blood pounding through his veins triumphantly.

"And to-morrow," she whispered, as they moved along the veranda with arms entwined, "we'll go after Old Ephraim with a vengeance. It seems to me, Ben dear, Old Ephraim is the one who is indirectly responsible for the solution of all our problems."

"Old Ephraim," said Ben. "God bless him!"

THE END.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

SAYS AN OLD-TIMER

A NEWCOMER to ARGOSY in this issue, but an old-timer at the tale-spinning game, is E. E. Harriman, author of "The Devil Horse." A life packed full of adventure has been his, so we asked him to tell you a bit of the experience on which his stories are based. Says he:

Howdy, boys. Room for an old-timer beside your fire?

The big boss tells me I gotta spread my hand and show what I hold before he cashes my chips. Well, here is one ace that means pioneering in the big, hardwood timber belt of Minnesota from June 2, 1862, to December 1, 1881. That is backed up by a pair of sixes marked Expert with rifle and six-gun at fifteen years of age. Then there is another ace called hard riding son-of-a-gun, who understood a hoss and could handle him a shade better than most. The last card in the hand is forty-two years in the far West, where cowboys and cattlemen have made me welcome in camp and bunk house and have complimented me on my riding, roping and shooting.

Just by way of good measure and solid backing of this hand I stack my chips this way and bet the lot; lumber camp experiences, deputy sheriff tests of courage against gunmen—not single men, but as high as five at one time, guarding a man against a mob alone when a shotgun and an old navy Colt .48 caliber sent more than a dozen squattering over the open country in mad haste, having to defend myself against a heavyweight pug who attacked because dared to do it by some drunken rowdies, going to the ocean bottom to catch a woman being carried out to deep water by the undertow, rescuing two from burning buildings when the fire ruined my clothing. Numerous other similar experiences and the greatest of all adventures, leaving business to begin writing at an age when most men retire. But then my friends say I *am nothing but a kid* and will never grow up, so what the heck do I care? My best fun still is forking a cayuse and shooting—if you except writing for you.

E. E. HARRIMAN.

HEADINGS, NOT COVERS

ALTHOUGH we have drawn attention to this point several times before, many readers still seem to understand that we are offering cover originals or proofs for ten Your Choice Coupons. This is not so. These cover paintings remain the property of the artists—who are generally willing to sell them at a reasonable figure, should you want one.

What we offer is an original pen and ink drawing or an enlarged reproduction of one of the illustrations used at the beginning of each story—a story heading.

Answering another question frequently asked: you are free to secure more than one of these drawings—we offer one for each ten coupons from different issues of the magazine.

CERTAINLY there must be many numismatists among ARGOSY readers. Perhaps one of them can furnish the information Mr. Morrison desires:

New York, N. Y.

I am a regular reader of your wonderful magazine, and while glancing through the "Voice of the People," or Argonotes, I wondered, seeing that you have so many readers who are engaged in so many different professions, if there isn't one who could tell me the exact value of an 1830 United States half dollar, with a liberty head on one side and an eagle grasping three arrows in his claws on the other, with *"E Pluribus Unum"* above his head.

R. O. MORRISON,
339 West 100th Street.

ARGOSY to music—the modern way of reading, according to this fan:

Long Island City, N. Y.

I have only read the ARGOSY for about five months, but it did not take me more than a week to ascertain the fine qualities of your publication. Should you decide to raise the price of the ARGOSY to a half dollar I would gladly pay, for, in my estimation, that is its true value. Your variety of stories are very spicy and carefully selected.

I have a novel manner of enjoying your yarns with the help of my radio. Here is an example:

While reading Ray Cummings's splendid story called "A Brand New World," I tuned

in some Oriental music, which lent an eerie atmosphere, suitable for the occasion. I felt myself floating into the "new world" and marveled at the different sights, the queer people, their fantastic abodes, and the manner in which they flitted by as they saw me approach. And those enormous insects with their hungry looks made me shiver and made me wish that I had never strayed so far. My fears were soon quieted, for I recognized *Professor Vanderstuyft* and his party, of whom I had read so much lately. The professor was explaining many of the weird surroundings when suddenly everything was obliterated. The music had stopped, and I read, "To be continued next week." What an exhilarating experience!

Give me more yarns like that, and I am yours forever. IRVING HALPERN.

MANY of ARGOSY's firmest friends are the magazine agents and newsdealers. Here is one from far-off Saskatchewan:

Sintcheta, Saskatchewan.

I have long been an interested reader of your stories. We are agents for magazines and you should see how those magazines sell.

My favorite author is Seltzer; get another story by him soon. I also like MacIsaac and *Gillian Hazeltine* stories.

There are many outstanding points about this magazine; first, you have a great variety of authors. Also your stories are of different types. I like variety.

Best luck to ARGOSY!

H. B. CARSON.

ASIDE from a very few complaints the historical stories we have published during the past few months seem to have met an enthusiastic reception.

Elmhurst, L. I.

I first started to read the ARGOSY when I had to spell word for word, only it was under a different name. I can truthfully say I have never missed an edition since I was able to earn my weekly dime.

Having read the "Readers' Column" regularly and hearing the different criticisms, I wish to state that the only way to improve the ARGOSY is to make it larger and, if necessary, to charge more for it. I know that regardless of the price you will still have the same following, if not more.

In the last month or so I don't think I have ever read more interesting stories than "War Lord of Many Swordsmen," "He Rules Who Can," and "The Sword of Vengeance."

The public in general are getting tired of the same every-day sort of story and welcome these ancient brands of real men and historically beautiful women tales.

Viking history and ancient Hun raids of old Greek and Roman history are very satisfying to the ARGOSY fans, as in my home alone there are eleven of them, which I think is proof enough for any one.

Long life and prosperity to ARGOSY and the office force that it takes to make it the best on the stand! RICHARD TOD MURPHY.

FREQUENTLY we hear of ARGOSY fans who "found" the magazine during the World War. It is nice to know that it was able to bring cheer in those trying days to hospitals such as Mr. Platt tells of:

Memphis, Tenn.

I have been a reader of ARGOSY for four years, having first "found" it when I was in base hospital at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. I was there on account of a crack up in a plane. I was in the Twelfth Observation Squad, United States Aviation Service, and stayed there for about four months. I enjoyed it so much then that I haven't missed a copy since.

I have absolutely no fault to find with ARGOSY, unless that it might come out about three times a week, but of course that is impossible, but anyway, keep up the good work.

F. A. PLATT.

WE have a letter for Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor, of California, which we shall be glad to forward if she will supply us with her complete address.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

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because.....

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2-9

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by A. T. LOCKE

This is really the story of a wandering, happy-go-lucky cowpuncher, Wanderin' Willie Watson—whose wanderings lead him smack into a murder, into a struggle for a ranch, and into one of the best Western action tales we have seen in a long time.

It starts in the ISSUE OF FEBRUARY 16th

THE CARDINAL'S CURSE

A Complete Novelette

by J. ALLAN DUNN

With bold strokes and vivid colors Dunn has painted, in this story, a realistic picture of the life of the old buccaneers. Tough, hard, cruel, blood-thirsty, living by the sword, and dying by the sword, they were a strange and fascinating crowd. The novelette is one of J. Allan Dunn's best.

HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN—by DON WATERS

A real feature short story is this—one which will appeal to every railroader because of its excellent color, and grip every reader with its intense humanness.

COMING!	***COMING!***
Feb. 23—THE BLOOD OF MORGAN—by Lieut. John Hopper	
March 2—THE SEA GIRL—by Ray Cummings	
March 9—ASOKA'S ALIBI—by Talbot Mundy	
March 23—A SEMI-DUAL NOVEL—by Giesy and Smith	

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2423 My Angel (Angela Mia)
Believe It Or Not

4227 Climbing Up Golden Stairs
Lindy Lou

2426 Jeannine I Dream of Lilac Time
Come Back to Romany

2398 Ramona
Valley of Memory

4174 Casey Jones
Waltz Me Around Again Willie

2392 Laugh Clown Laugh
I Wanna Sail Away

4131 Wreck of the Old 97
Wreck of the Titanic

4170 Gypsy's Warning
Don't You Remember

4135 Rovin' Gambler
Little Log Cabin in Lane

2407 Girl of My Dreams
Dear Old Pal of Yesterday

4133 Jesse James
Butcher Boy

2386 My Ohio Home
Alice of the Pines

2381 Ford Has Made a Lady Out of Lizzie
Clancy's Wooden Wedding

2366 My Blue Heaven
Back of Every Cloud

4141 I Wish I Was Single Again
Want to Find Love

4160 Sweet Hawaiian Kisses
Blue Hawaiian Moon

4118 May I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight
When I Saw Sweet Nellie Home

2369 Among My Souvenirs
We Were Sweethearts

4117 Where River Shannon Flows
A Rose From Ireland

4171 Red Wing
Waters of Minnetonka

Popular Songs

4119 Hand Me Down My Walking Cane
Captain Jinks

2323 Get Away Old Man
Well I Swan

8101 Roll 'Em Girls
Save It for a Rainy Day

4038 Sleep Baby Sleep (Yodel)
Roll On Silvery Moon

4090 In Baggage Coach Ahead
Old Apple Tree

4086 Floyd Collins' Fate
Pickwick Club Tragedy

2338 Lindy Lindy How I'd Like to Be You
No, No Positively No

2344 Me and My Shadow
Sweet Hawaiian Kisses

4122 When I'm Gone You'll Soon Forget
Father, Dear Father Come Home

2272 Rudolph Valentino
Little Rosewood Casket

4173 Boston Burglar
Cowboy's Lament

Hawaiian

4156 La Golondrina
Dreamy Moon

4023 My Old Kentucky Home
O Sole Mio

4084 Aloha Land
Honolulu Bay

4009 Palakiho Blues
One Two Three Four

Sacred Songs

4146 Silent Night
Christmas Chimes

4075 Church in Wildwood
Voice of Chimes

4046 Nearer My God to Thee
Lord Is My Shepherd

4069 When Roll Is Called Up Yonder
Throw Out the Life Line

4091 Old Rugged Cross
Beyond the Clouds

Comedy

4002 Flanagan's 2nd Hand Car
Hi and Si and Line Fence

4004 Flanagan in Restaurant
Flanagan's Married Life

4168 Jail Birds
Wedding Bells

4211 Andy Goes A'Hunting
Andy Gets Learnin'

Popular Dances

All with vocal chorus and all fox trots except where otherwise marked.

1541 My Angel (Angela Mia), Waltz
Coming Thru the Rye

7028 Varsity Drag
Sure Enough Blues

7029 Mississippi Mud Blues
I'm a One Man Gal

1540 Old Man Sunshine
Sidewalks of New York

1510 Ramona, Waltz
If I Didn't Love You

1463 My Blue Heaven
Best Gal of All

1497 After My Laughter Came Tears
Back to Connemara

1505 My Ohio Home
Like My Daddy's Gal

1508 My Melancholy Baby
Down by the Sea

Instrumental

4193 Whistler and His Dog
Powder Puff

4189 Drowsy Waters
Herd Girl's Dream

4162 Blue Danube Waltz
Skaters Waltz

4190 Sidewalks of New York
O'Leahy's Lullaby

4016 Irish Jigs and Reels, No. 1
Irish Jigs and Reels, No 2

4138 By Waters of Minnetonka
Over the Waves

4068 Arkansas Traveler
Turkey in the Straw

4061 Listen to Mocking Bird
Song Bird (Both Whistling)

4161 Dixie Favorites (Banjo Solo)
Medley of Southern Airs

4217 Irish Washerwoman
Mrs. McLeod's Reel

4218 Merry Widow Waltz
Lullaby from Erminie

Blues

7023 John Henry Blues
St. Louis Blues

7025 Yellow Dog Blues
Hard Time Blues

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